

Dog Agility Basics

For complete details and links use http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_agility
Obstacles are pictured and explained below.

Dog agility is a dog sport in which a dog handler directs a dog through an obstacle course, in a race for both time and accuracy. Dogs run official competition courses off-leash with no food or toys as incentives. The dog handler can not touch the dog or the obstacles. Handler controls are limited to voice, movement, and various body signals, requiring exceptional training of the dog and coordination by the handler.

In competition, the handler must assess the course, decide on handling strategies, and direct the dog through the course, with precision and speed equally important. Many strategies exist to compensate for the inherent difference in human and dog speeds and the strengths and weaknesses of the various dogs and handlers.

Fairness among dogs

Although each organization has its own rules, all divide dogs into groups, by dogs that are close to each other in size, measured in height at the peak of their withers (shoulders), and experience for purposes of calculating winners. This means that there will be winners in each group, for each class (or game) over the course of a trial. Smaller dogs get more time to run a course.

Training

Dogs can begin training for agility at any age; HOWEVER, use caution when training dogs under a year old so as to not harm their developing joints. All puppies and dogs should start training on smaller (or lowered in height) agility equipment and training aids (such as ladders and wobbling boards) to teach careful footing which will aid in injury prevention.

Great effort should be taken to see that a dog is always safe, and has a good experience in training for agility, so that they do not fear the obstacles, and instead perform them willingly and with enthusiasm.

Training: introducing to equipment

Introducing a new dog to the agility obstacles varies in response. Each individual dog learns at his own pace; confident dogs may charge over equipment with little encouragement, while more timid dogs may take weeks to overcome their hesitations with much encouragement. Both scenarios present their own challenges; dogs may be overconfident and sloppy to the point where they have a serious accident, so self control must be taught. Timid dogs need extra support to boost their confidence. Given the right encouragement, a timid dog can gain confidence through learning the sport itself.

Training: the size of the dog matters

The size of the dog can also have an effect on training obstacles, particularly with the chute, in which smaller dogs are prone to getting trapped and tangled inside. Great effort is taken to see that a dog is always safe and has a good experience in training for agility so that they do not fear the obstacles, and instead perform them willingly and with enthusiasm.

Training: challenging obstacles

The teeter-totter (or see-saw) and the weave poles are typically the most challenging obstacles to teach to any dog. Many dogs are wary of the see-saw's movement, and the weave poles involve a behavior that does not occur naturally to the dog. Contact obstacles in general are challenging to train in a manner that ensures that the dog touches the contact zone without sacrificing speed. Whether for competition or recreation, the most important skill for an agility team to learn is how to work together quickly, efficiently, and safely. Dogs vary greatly in their speed and accuracy of completing a course, as well as in their preferences for obstacles; therefore, the handler must adjust their handling style to suit and support the dog.

Training techniques for each piece of equipment vary

For example, the techniques for training the weave poles include using offset poles that gradually move more in line with each other; using poles that tilt outward from the base and gradually become upright; using wires or gates around the poles forcing the dog into the desired path; putting a hand in the dog's collar and guiding the dog through while leading with an incentive; teaching the dog to run full speed between two poles and gradually increasing the angle of approach and

number of poles; et cetera.

Obstacles

The regulations of different organizations specify somewhat different rules and dimensions for the construction of obstacles. However, the basic form of most obstacles is the same wherever they are used.

Contact Obstacles

A-frame

Two broad ramps, usually about 3 feet wide by 8/9 feet long, hinged together and raised so that the hinged connection form an A shape. Some organizations allow the top of the A-frame to be narrower than the bottom.



Dogwalk

Three planks, connected at the ends. The centre plank is raised above the ground, so that the two end planks form ramps leading up to and down from the center plank. This obstacle has contact zones. Most sanctioning organizations require slats on the dogwalk ramps.



Teeter-totter (or seesaw)

A plank pivoting on a fulcrum, much like a child's seesaw. It is constructed slightly off-balance so that the same end always returns to the ground. Unlike the other contact obstacles, the teeter-totter does not have slats. The balance point and the weight of the plank must be such that even a tiny dog, such as a Chihuahua, can cause the high end of the teeter-totter to descend to the ground within a reasonable amount of time, specified by the sanctioning organization's rules (usually about 2 seconds).



Tunnel Obstacles

Vinyl tube is 10 to 20 feet long and about 2 feet in diameter, through which the dog runs. The tunnel is constructed of flexible vinyl and wire, such that it can be configured in a straight line, or in a variety of curves.



Collapsed tunnel (or chute or cloth tunnel) -- A barrel-like cylinder with a tube of fabric attached around one end. The fabric extends about 8 to 12 feet and lies closed until the dog runs into the open end of the chute and pushes his way out through the fabric tube.



Other Tunnels. UKC Agility allows two additional tunnel types, the crawl tunnel and the hoop tunnel, that are not found in other agility organizations.

Jump Obstacles

Jumps are adjusted in height so that small dogs may compete against similar-sized dogs.

Jump (or hurdle)

Two uprights supporting a horizontal bar over which the dog jumps. The height is adjusted for dogs of different heights. The uprights can be simple stanchions or can have wings of various shapes, sizes, and colors.



Double and triple jump (or spread jump)

Two uprights supporting two or three horizontal bars spread forward or back from each other. The double can have parallel or ascending horizontal bars; the triple always has ascending bars. The spread between the horizontal bars is sometimes adjusted based on the height of the dog.



Panel jump -- Instead of horizontal bars, the jump is a solid panel from the ground up to the jump height, constructed of several short panels that can be removed to adjust the height for different dog heights.

Broad jump (or long jump) -- A set of four or five slightly raised platforms that form a broad area over which the dog must jump without setting their feet on any of the platforms. The length of the jump is adjusted for the dog's height.

Tire jump

A shape roughly the size of a tire (18 inches to 24 inches inside diameter), suspended in a frame. The dog must jump through the opening of the "tire"; like other jumps, the height is adjusted for dogs of different sizes. The tire is usually wrapped with tape both for visibility and to cover any openings or uneven places in which the dog could catch.



Other hurdles. UKC agility allows a variety of hurdles not found in other agility organizations: bush hurdle, high hurdle, log hurdle, picket

fence hurdle, rail fence hurdle, long hurdle, window hurdle, and water hurdle.

Miscellaneous Obstacles

Table (or pause table). An elevated square platform about 3-foot-by-3-foot square onto which the dog must jump and pause, either sitting or in a down position, for a designated period of time which is counted out by the judge, usually about 5 seconds. The height ranges from about 8 to 30 inches depending on the dog's height and sponsoring organization.



Pause box -- A variation on the pause table. The pause box is a square marked off on the ground, usually with plastic pipe or construction tape, where the dog must perform the "pause" behavior (in either a sit or a down) just as he would on the elevated table.

Weave poles

A series of 5 to 12 upright poles, each about 3 feet tall and spaced about 24 inches apart (spacing for The dog must always enter with the first pole to his left, and must not skip poles. For many dogs, weave poles are one of the most difficult obstacles to master.



Other obstacles. UKC agility allows the following obstacles not found in other agility organizations: swing plank, sway bridge, and platform jump. NADAC also uses a hoop obstacle. A Hoopers course consists entirely of hoops, but hoops may be used in other courses as well.