



Agility –

A Beginners Guide to Agility

An AKC – American Kennel Club Publication

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Running a dog in an agility trial is the ultimate game for you and your dog and is one of the most exciting canine sports for spectators. In an agility trial, a dog demonstrates its agile nature and versatility by following cues from the handler through a timed obstacle course of jumps, tunnels, weave poles and other objects. It's an activity that strengthens the bond between dog and handler and provides fun and exercise for both, which might explain why it's so enjoyable to watch and has become the fastest growing dog sport in the U.S.!

Am I Eligible?

To be eligible to compete in agility trials, a dog must be:

- Registered with the American Kennel Club or listed with the AKC Indefinite Listing Privilege (ILP) program, which allows unregistered dogs of registered breeds to compete in AKC Performance and Companion Events
- One year of age or older (Spayed or neutered dogs are eligible to compete).

The Role of the Judge

Agility Judges are responsible for the proper setting of the agility courses at the trials they judge. All courses are different for every trial and they must meet certain guideline standards, established by the AKC, to ensure safety and consistency throughout the country.

Judges meet with the exhibitors prior to competition at each trial to summarize the class rules. During this "briefing," the judge also announces the expected time for dogs to complete the course, called the Standard Course Time. Dogs that exceed the expected Standard Course Time receive time faults.

The judge is on the course during the exhibition of the dog to determine any errors, or "faults," the handler or dog may commit. The judge then signals those faults to a "scribe," who records all signals from the judge. The faults are recorded on the dog's score sheet to determine qualifying scores.

At the end of each class, the judge checks the scribe sheets and then awards first through fourth place and gives a ribbon to each dog receiving an award.

How an Agility Trial Works

Once the judge has set up the course and determined the sequence of obstacles, handlers are allowed a "walk through," which is done as a group, without the dogs. Handlers follow the numbers set at each obstacle to become familiar with the course. Most handlers walk the course as many times as they can in the time allotted, to plan their handling strategy. Exhibitors may even gather in a small groups to discuss potential challenges on the course and how best to handle them.

The handler – and dog – team runs the course individually, off-leash. The "timer" tells the handler when he or she may begin, starting a stopwatch as soon as any part of the dog crosses the start line and stops the clock when any part of the dog crosses the finish line. As each dog runs, the judge indicates the faults, if any, that the dog commits. These faults are recorded by a scribe on a score sheet for that individual dog. The dog's time is also placed on the scribe sheet. This information is then given to a scorekeeper, who calculates the qualifying performances and top placements of each team.

Two Types of Classes

There are two types of classes offered at an agility trial: Standard and Jumpers with Weaves. The Standard class has contact obstacles, which have yellow "contact zones" at each end. Contact obstacles include A-frame, dog walk and seesaw. The dog must place a least one paw in the contact zone in order not to receive a fault. This encourages safety in training and in running the course. Standard class also has a variety of jumps, weave poles, pause table, tunnels and a closed chute. The Jumpers with Weaves class does not have contact obstacles or a pause table to slow the team's forward momentum. This is a very fast course requiring instant decisions by the handler and close attention from the dog.

Levels of Competition

There are three different levels of competition in agility:

NOVICE – for the dog that is just starting in agility. There are 13 to 15 obstacles on this course. The focus of the Novice class is on performing the obstacles with minimal handling technique.

OPEN – for the dog that has completed the Novice level. There are 16 to 18 obstacles on this course. The focus of the open class is on more difficult obstacle course performance with more handling skill required.

EXCELLENT – for the dog that has completed the open level. There are 18 – 20 obstacles on this course. The focus of the Excellent A & B class is to provide the opportunity for dogs and handlers to demonstrate their superior skills in moving quickly and efficiently with close communication and teamwork through challenging agility courses. The Excellent B level is the class where handler-dog teams can earn the title, Master Agility Champion (MACH). Those faults to a “scribe,” who records all signals from the judge. The faults are recorded on the dog’s score sheet to determine qualifying scores. At the end of each class, the judge checks the scribe sheets and then awards first through fourth place and gives a ribbon to each dog receiving an award.

How Faults are Given

Agility is a time and fault sport where the qualifying requirements are more challenging as the competition class levels get higher. There are two types of faults: time and penalty. Time faults are given for every second a dog goes over the Standard Course Time. (Novice=1 point, Open = 2 points, Excellent = 3 points)

Below are examples of Penalty Faults that a judge may assess a handler and dog:

- Taking an obstacle out of sequence
- Missing a contact zone
- Displacing a bar or panel on a jump
- Jumping off the pause table before the judge is through counting
- Running around or refusing the next obstacle
- Exceeding the amount of time set by the judge for running the course
- Touching either the dog or any obstacle by the handler while running the course
- Outside assistance may be penalized
- Handler failure to control the dog may be penalized

A perfect score in any class at any level is 100.

Jump Heights

The classes are divided by jump heights in order to make the competition equal between the different size of dogs.

8” Class – dogs up to 10” at the shoulder

20” Class – dogs over 18” and up to 22”

12” Class – dogs over 10” and up to 14”

24” Class – dogs over 22” at the shoulder

16” Class – dogs over 14” and up to 18”

A dog may jump in a jump height class higher than his/her shoulder measurement, but never lower.

PREFERRED CLASS – This class affords an opportunity for a greater variety of dogs, and their handlers, to participate in the sport of agility. Handlers have the option to enter the Preferred classes with modified standards of lower jump heights and more generous course times.

4” Class – for 8-inch jumping dogs

16” Class – for 20-inch jumping dogs

8” Class – for 12-inch jumping dogs

20” Class – for 24-inch jumping dogs

12” Class – for 16-inch jumping dogs

Obstacles

- Dog Walk
- A-Frame
- Seesaw
- Pause Table
- Weave Poles –
- Open Tunnel
- Closed Tunnel
- Bar Jump
- Double Bar Jump
- Panel Jump
- Tire Jump
- Broad Jump
- Triple Bar Jump
- One Bar Jump