

## **Your First Agility Trial**

You have entered your first agility trial. Your first trial can be very confusing. Hopefully this guide will help answer many of your questions, give you helpful tips, explain trial procedures and explain the differences between the four organizations that offer agility trials in our area. If you are not sure if you are ready for competition please see our documents titled “Are You Ready to Compete?” and “How do I sign up for a competition?”



### **Before your trial**

Things to bring to a trial: (This is also at the very end of this guide in a checklist form to make copies and use for each trial if you desire.)



- Your dog
- Directions
- Premium copy and confirmation information
- Judging schedule
- Permanent height card (this comes after a minimum number of measurements)
- Food and drinks, unless you plan on buying them there
- Water and lots of treats for your dog. It's better to bring water from home because that's what your dog knows.
- Any dog meds your dog may need
- Dog toys, blanket
- Squirt bottle or other means to cool down your dog if trial is outside (some locations have kiddie pools available, this is usually listed in the premium, but check because sometimes this is not accurate).
- Crate or exercise pen for your dog, if they are allowed (check the premium)
- Ground cover for the crate, if you wish
- A chair for yourself
- Hat if outside
- Sunblock if outside
- Cash or credit cards (there are sometimes vendors at the trials)
- Water-free hand cleaner
- Toilet paper (just in case)
- Shade tent/canopy if the trial is outside
- Clean up bags
- An easily removed leash
- A collar without tags (for AKC trials, NADAC you must run without any collar)
- Video or still camera

- Tote bags
- Paper and pencil to copy down the course map
- Clipboard
- Reading materials (the day can get long between runs)
- Anything else that will make the day comfortable for you and your dog



Tip: Talk to others who have attended trials before – they are great sources for how to get through a trial in comfort for you and your dog.



Tip: If you belong to a local obedience/training school, check with others that may be going to the same trial. It's a lot more fun to attend a trial, especially your first one, when you have fellow dog friends there for moral support.



Tip: Don't leave packing equipment until the morning of the trial because there is a lot to do and you don't want to be tired before leaving. Plus, you often have to be at a venue very early in the morning (7 am sometimes).



Tip: Check your premium for measuring, general briefing, and check in times to figure out when you need to arrive. Plan for extra time for set up your tent and/or kennel.



## At the trial site

Arrive early enough to get set up, get a shady spot (make sure it will last all day!), walk your dog and relax a while before your run. Many people get nervous before a run, this is a good time to take care of your dog and yourself, relax, visit with friends, watch other dogs and handlers on the courses.

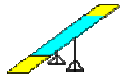


Tip: Find out if the club will allow set-up the night before and take advantage of it if you are running the first day.

Measuring your dog: Your dog may have to be measured. Allow enough time to check in and get measured.

Check in with the trial secretary (check in usually starts one hour before the first trial). For AKC and USDAA, if you did not receive an armband/label in the mail, this is where you will pick it up - you cannot run without out this.

If your dog does not need to be measured (usually only if you are jumping the maximum height) checking in may be as simple as checking your name off the board for the Novice runs, but it is always a good idea to check in with the trial secretary.

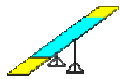


The height of a dog is the measurement of a perpendicular line from a flat surface on the ground to the top of the dog's withers (highest point of the dog's shoulders). The dog's legs should be directly underneath and the dog should not be leaning forward or backward. The dog's head should be in a natural state and not lowered toward the ground.

You may be given a trial catalog or you will need to review the trial sheets to learn which ring you are running in for your trial, confirm the time and the running order (small to large or vice versa). This can change from the premium so be sure to double check.



Tip: If your dog is on the borderline of sizes, it might be good to practice at the higher jump heights, just in case you get moved up a height.



There should be course maps available to look at, which will show the arrangement of the obstacles on the field for your run. Sometimes these are available as handouts, if not you are allowed to copy the course on paper, or take a picture of them



Tip: Be aware that the judge can make a last minute change to a course if needed due to equipment failures, course conditions or hazards.



## **Before you run**

Now that you've got your 'waiting room' set up, you've checked-in and gotten measured, what do you do? Before it is time for your run, the course has to be set. Usually the course is set for all levels with minor changes in between to adjust for the difficulty level. This is still a good time to stay relaxed, exercise your dog, and just get used to the trial area.

There will be a 'warm-up' jump set up somewhere to the side (if a NADAC trial, there are often a short set of weave poles set up ). It is a very good idea to practice on this equipment.



Tip: Don't over warm-up, your dog will be too tired to perform effectively on the course. This is for warm-up and practice only, not for training. Most importantly, don't be harsh with your dog – this should always be fun for your dog.



Tip: Observe advanced and elite teams running. This is a great way to learn from those further along than you. Just remember good ring etiquette – stay away from the staging areas, entrances and exits to the ring and never try to help from the sidelines. Avoid distracting the dogs with treats, toys, or clickers and keep your dog (and children) quiet and controlled.

Be sure to potty your dog often before your run, because if it eliminates on the field, you are eliminated (asked to leave).



## Show etiquette

Agility is a spectator sport – set good examples for dogs and handlers.

- Clean up after your dog
- Keep control of your dog at all times
- Don't crowd the ring entrances or exits. There are usually canopies or taped/roped off areas at the ring entrances – these are for handlers and dogs 'on deck'.
- Keep your distance from the ring gating
- Don't try to help the competitors from the sidelines – they could be disqualified
- Don't bug the scorekeepers – they are the most visible people at a trial, also some of the busiest.



## What about collars

- AKC – your dog is allowed to wear a flat buckle or rolled leather collar only. No tags attached. No name tags, no rabies tags, no decorative tags. No collars with the dog's name printed on it. No 'gentle leaders', electronic, prong or pinch collars, or even fake ones are allowed anywhere at an AKC trial site.
- NADAC – no collar of any type is allowed at all on the dog while it is running the course.
- USDAA – no collar of any type is allowed at all on the dog while it is running the course.
- CPE - no collar of any type is allowed at all on the dog while it is running the course.



Tip: Purchase a flat buckle collar for AKC trials and put it on your dog as soon as you arrive at the trial, and make sure to remove the regular collar.



**VERY IMPORTANT – PAY ATTENTION TO THE COLLAR RULES, YOU WILL BE DISQUALIFIED IF YOU FAIL TO FOLLOW THE RULES, EVEN IF YOU HAD THE MOST BEAUTIFUL, PERFECT RUN IN THE WORLD.**



## Walking the course

Once the course is set, you will be allowed to walk the course to plan your strategy (no treats are allowed on the course during your walk through or during your run. You will have a limited amount of time to walk the course, usually 10 minutes or less. Your dog is not usually allowed on the course before your run.



Tip: Remember the tote bag in the checklist of things to bring? Take out of your pockets anything that jangles or makes noise, cell phones, wallets, okay – everything – and put them in your tote bag. Remove any jangling jewelry. You could be disqualified for objects in your pockets, especially if they make noise. No fanny packs or other type of waist bag are allowed as they are often used for treats and could be considered a training aid.



Tip: Walk the course once or twice to get a sense of the order and arrangement of the obstacles. Then walk it as your dog would run the course to get a ‘dog’s-eye view’ of the course. Trainers are allowed to walk the course with you, but no one else.

Although this is becoming rare, at some trials you are allowed to take your dog out on the course, on lead, to practice the contact obstacles only, and only once for what is called obstacle familiarization. No treats are allowed on the field at this time. This is usually allowed on the first day of the trials if at all.



## Judge’s briefing

Before your Novice trials begin, there will be a ‘briefing’ by the judge. Your dog is not allowed at the briefing so make sure it is penned or kenneled. The briefing will include a reminder of some of the rules, the ‘table count and whether a sit or down’ for an AKC course, and a reminder of the location of the start and finish lines.



**VERY IMPORTANT** – The start and finish lines are very important to note.

The time starts the second your dog crosses the start line, whether you are ready or not, and the time will not stop until your dog crosses the finish line, no matter how perfect your run. If electronic timing is used, as soon as the dog ‘trips’ the timer your run starts and it ends when your dog ‘trips’ the timer after the last obstacle. If you have questions on timing, ask the judge during the briefing.

The judge will also tell you how soon the first dog will be on the line, and when she/he wants the next dog to be ready for their turn. If you miss this information, ask the Gate Steward – you don’t want to miss your turn.



**Tip:** Observe others running before you in your trial if you are not running in the first height category. This will allow you to see where they are having trouble on the course. You may decide to change your strategy. Remember ring etiquette.



## At the gate

**Gate Stewards** – they are your friend, be nice to them! They are usually standing near the entry gate, with a large poster board near them. You will check-in at the entry gate (this is a second check in for the actual trial), it may be as simple as checking your name off on a list. Check in with the Gate Steward as early as possible, it is important for the Gate Steward to know you are here and are planning to run your dog.

The running order that the Gate Steward has will be the actual running order. Gate Stewards will move dogs around to accommodate ring conflicts or same class conflicts and allows for any last minute cancellations.

The Gate Steward will call your name when your turn is coming, and will tell you when it is time to move onto the field. Make sure that you have removed all treats, have the right collar or no collar on your dog.



**Tip:** Stay close by as your turn approaches (about 5-6 dogs ahead of your turn), and stay well within hearing distance of the Gate Steward. Be aware that dogs ahead of you may not be present, which means you’ll go sooner. Be ready. When the team before you enters the ring, you are ‘on deck’ and coming up next. Go out to the field when they ask you.



**Warning:** One of the biggest mistakes new handlers make is not being at the start line when it is their turn. It will really slow the whole trial down for everyone. There is no obligation by the judge, gate steward or club to allow you to run later if you missed your turn. In USDAA if you cause an excessive delay at the start line, or in entering or exiting the ring, you could, at the judge's discretion, be faulted or eliminated.

There will be a 'leash runner' who will take your dog's lead to the finish line.

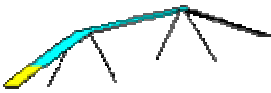


**Tip:** Look for where the leash runner puts your dog's lead at the finish line before you begin your run – during the time you are waiting for your group to run is always a good idea.

When you enter the ring, set up your dog, take off their leash, **look at the timer**, who will tell you when everything is ready for you to start (they will often say 'go when ready'). If the timer blows a whistle shortly after you start, there was probably a stopwatch problem: praise your dog, because you get a second chance. You will merely start over.



**Tip:** If you leave your dog at the start line and lead out, turn backwards and watch your dog as you move away. If your dog breaks and crosses the start line, your time has started, so get moving.



Remember – this is for fun, your dog is happy to be running the course and so should you – whatever happens. Let your dog enjoy the day, the more fun you have the more chance you have of being successful. But don't relax too much – you and your dog will need to focus on the project at hand during the run.



## After your run



**Tip:** Save the praise – be careful not to prematurely praise your dog – wait until you've cleared the finish timer and left the ring. Often praising your dog at the last obstacle can cause your dog to lose focus, turn toward you and fault.

Make sure to get your dog some water and cool down after the run if outside.

After you have run, you usually can get your results from the secretary's table. Some trials wait until the entire group has run before posting results. Sometimes results are posted in a 3-ring binder.

Results will show whether you have a "Q" (your dog qualified) or "NQ" (non-qualifying). All "Faults" should be recorded (errors on the course).



**Tip:** Do not ask the scorekeepers why you got any faults; they were not able to watch your run – they watch the judge. Ask your friends who did watch.

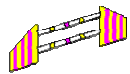
If you did get a "Q", then when all the runs for your class are done, you will get a ribbon, maybe two ribbons, if your score was good enough to be in the top four or five placements (For AKC). For NADAC, the top four dogs in each division always get placements, whether they qualified or not. The results of the entire class will also be posted shortly after the class is finished.

If you did get a "Q", CONGRATULATIONS! You have your first "Leg" towards your first title. Depending on the venue you entered, you will need to get a few more of these legs in order to get the Novice title.

There may be an opportunity to talk to the judge between class set-ups. Judges are amazing and may even remember your run and be able to make some suggestions.



**Tip:** Keep track of your dog's progress toward titles – it's fun and shows you how far you have progressed and what you need to complete. Things to note (remember that paper and pencil and clipboard?): length of the course, your time, your faults or point deductions, your placement, whether you qualified, number of dogs in the class and number of dogs that qualified. There is software available if you want to get really detailed about keeping track, just search on the Internet.



Remember agility is about fun for you and your dog. Don't take it so seriously that you lose sight of the original purpose of having a fun experience with your dog. Always make having fun your top priority.



## Final tips






As you run more agility trials, you will find that your dog performs better under certain conditions than it runs in other conditions. As a novice, this will be part of your learning process, pay attention to your dog's temperament, performance and emotions at each trial. Things to think about:



- Does your dog perform better when you leave it quiet and alone in the crate before running or when you keep it with you as you visit and watch other dogs compete?
- Does your dog perform better when you play with it before you compete or when you do some obedience?
- Does exercise tire your dog out or get it primed to run?
- Do toys excite your dog or cause your dog to lose focus?
- Does your dog need calming or 'jazzing' up before entering the ring?
- Does it run better knowing a toy or a treat awaits the exit from the ring?
- The conditions of the day – hot, cold, sunny, cloudy, misting.
- Does your dog perform better if you are crated a long way from the ring or closer to the ring?

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Just what is the judge doing with his/her arms during a run? Most of the venues use the same set of signals for the judge to communicate to the scorekeeper. If you're not sure, ask during the judges briefing (but you're going to be so busy running your dog, you won't even see the signals). Shown below are the AKC signals:

AKC Judge's Signal	Scribe Sheet
	R – Refusal/Run-out
	W – Wrong Course
	F – Failure to Perform
	T – Table Fault
	E - Excused

Sometimes a Table Fault is a "T" made with the hands.

### Agility Trial Checklist:

#### All trials:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Directions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Premium copy and confirmation information
- \_\_\_\_\_ Judging schedule
- \_\_\_\_\_ Permanent height card (this comes after a minimum number of measurements)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Food and drinks, unless you plan on buying them there
- \_\_\_\_\_ Water and lots of treats for your dog. It's better to bring water from home because that's what your dog knows.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Any dog meds your dog may need
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dog toys, blanket
- \_\_\_\_\_ Crate or exercise pen for your dog, if they are allowed (check the premium)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A chair for yourself
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cash or credit cards (there are sometimes vendors at the trials)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Water-free hand cleaner
- \_\_\_\_\_ Toilet paper (just in case)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clean up bags
- \_\_\_\_\_ An easily removed leash
- \_\_\_\_\_ A collar without tags (for AKC trials, NADAC you must run without any collar)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Video or still camera
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tote bags
- \_\_\_\_\_ Paper and pencil to copy down the course map
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clipboard
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reading materials (the day can get long between runs)

#### Outdoor trials:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Squirt bottle or other means to cool down your dog if trial is outside (some locations have kiddie pools available, this is usually listed in the premium, but check because sometimes this is not accurate).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cloth to wet down for cooling yourself and/or dog
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ground cover for the crate, if you wish
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hat
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sunblock
- \_\_\_\_\_ Shade tent/canopy if the trial is outside
- \_\_\_\_\_ Umbrella (for extra shade or in case of rain)

#### Optional Items:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Jacket or Rain Poncho in case of rain or cold
- \_\_\_\_\_ Duct Tape for repair
- \_\_\_\_\_ Portable Fan
- \_\_\_\_\_ First Aid Kit for yourself and your dog