

**Introduction to Agility Week 1
Student Notes**

Supplies Students Should Have

1. Buckle collar with nothing hanging from it. No choke or prong collars.
2. Six foot lead.
3. Soft moist treats (lots, cut up very tiny). Not kibble type. Sliced cheese, hot dogs, chicken or pre packaged moist treats. Vary the kind of treats. Water for dog and handler.
4. Tug type toy. Food pouch toy- Tug N Treat. (May need to make a sock with a scrunchy closure for dogs that won't tug. Fill the sock up with food, like a hot dog or dry cat food.)
5. Target lid.
6. Clicker.
7. Tab (like a short leash) that is four to six inches long. (Not needed until near the end of 6 weeks.)
8. Paper and pen to take notes. A clipboard is handy to write on and keep your papers together.
9. Owner/handler needs a good pair of sneakers that have traction or a pair of soccer type shoe.
10. Crate

Important Things to Know

*Keep field clean. Exercise your dogs before class so they don't have accidents on the field. If they do, clean it up immediately. Don't let male dogs urinate on the equipment. Please potty your dog outside of the training field so that it stays clean. Poop bags are available at the waste station located just inside the field gate.

*Homework is very important if you want you and your dog to succeed. Practice for 5 minutes several times a day. Do not drill. Keep it fun.

*Stay focused on your dog at all times while here at training unless in down or crated

*Don't feed your dog for *at least* 3-4 hours before class and one to two hours after class. Do not give your dog his meal. This is to prevent a condition that can be fatal in dogs called bloat. The second reason is that we want the dog to be motivated by the food rewards. A dog that is hungry is much more eager to work for the treats.

*Keep your dog on lead. Give other dogs their space. We don't want any dogs or owners injured.

*Don't let your dog use any of the equipment without the instructor's permission. This is for your dog's safety.

*Call your instructor if you are not coming to class. We will have class unless you hear from the instructor. If it is raining we may have to cancel class.

Learning

Learning is stressful; follow your praise with play between exercises to relieve your dog's tension. Every dog is different. Your dog may learn an obstacle quickly and another may need more time. Some dogs are easily bored by repetition others want to repeat again and again. You have to find out what your dog is like and again, don't let them get bored or overtired. Three to five repetitions is enough. Quit when dog is happy and wanting more.

Tugging

Tugging is very important for agility. It relieves stress and animates your dog. It will also give them more speed. You need to be in charge of the tugging game. It starts and ends when you say so, not the dog. Have a toy he really likes and is interactive. You want to keep these toys just for agility. Don't let him have them by himself or with another dog. Vary the toys also. Be only as rough as your dog will handle. Once the dog lets go of the toy, praise and put the toy away or reward with another tug game. If the dog doesn't tug, you must create the interest in the tugging. Use a Tug 'N Treat or create your own tug toy out of a sock, put dry cat food in it or a hot dog in it and close it with a hair scrunchy, or you can purchase food pouch toys. Show this toy to your dog and play with it yourself and act like it is the best thing in the world, but don't let them actually have it. Put it up on the top of the refrigerator so they can see it but can't get it. Do this for a few days, until the dog is crazy for it. Then go past the toy and ask if they want to tug, but don't take it out. After awhile you will let the dog grab the other end and play with it. Don't ask the dog to drop the toy in the beginning but pry it out of his mouth or trick him into dropping it and then you grab it. Let the dog get a taste of the insides of the toy. The owner must hold it open and let the dog go for it for a couple of seconds. When the dog will play at home you should move the location to outside, then down the street, to the park, etc. When the dog will play in a lot of places, bring it to agility practice and use it as a motivator. Don't throw the toy as a reward. You must hold the other end and make it interactive. Vary the treats inside the toy and wash it periodically. Please ask for additional handouts on teaching your dog to tug.

Corrections and Rewards

Dogs and handlers make mistakes; that is how we learn. Maintain a positive attitude. Don't scold your dog, just repeat exercise but don't allow them to make the same mistake again. When they do it correctly, praise, reward, and give them a jackpot (larger quantity of reward). If you make a mistake, give your dog a cookie by asking him to do something simple. It's a handler screw up cookie. If you get mad at yourself the dog will sense it and shut down. Always quit training before your dog gets tired. End your training sessions on a successful note even if you have to go back a step to get success. We will use food and toys as reward. Vary the rewards. Toy drive is very important.

We often get so caught up in learning a new handling move that we forget to acknowledge the dog's efforts during the process. It isn't uncommon to withhold the dog's reward until the human member of the team is successful with the exercise being attempted, making your dog's reinforcement dependent on your ability to handle. Each time you try an exercise, reward your dog for the effort he is making. If you must stop part way through, give your dog a "second-chance cookie." This gives you a second chance when your handling doesn't go as planned and ensures your dog is rewarded each time he attempts a sequence, regardless of your level of competency as a handler. You don't want to reward an off-course, but you can call the dog back and ask him for a simple behavior (like a hand touch) that he can accomplish successfully.

To accelerate training, consider what your dog is doing when you deliver his reward. For example, if you are trying to improve your dog's performance on the pause table or on a contact obstacle, be sure to deliver the reward for the job while the dog is still on the table or on the contact. Too many trainers praise or click the dogs; performance and then let the dog come to them to get the reward. Deliver the reward while he is in the position you are trying to train.

Health and Weight

Your dog should be healthy and in good physical condition and should not have any physical ailments that can dampen training or their agility career further on. Maintaining proper weight on the dog is very important. An overweight dog will not be able to perform at his best and can even injure himself.

Stretching

Dogs, just like human athletes, must warm up before any physical activity. With a treat in hand, you will get your dog to bend to the right and to the left. The dog's head must reach his hindquarters in order to have an effective stretch. Once the dog is comfortable with this, the owner will get the dog to do a complete spin around, clockwise and counterclockwise. Remember to stretch both sides evenly. Another stretching exercise is making the dog do a bow, leaving the hindquarters up, or have dog jump up on your chest and stretch.

Clicker Training

Use food rewards that excite your dog. Click your clicker as soon as the dog does the correct behavior and reward your dog immediately. We want them to associate a click with a reward. The clicker actually works to replace the importance of food in your dog's mind. The click means the dog has done what you wanted and you will stop and reward them. Later you can replace the food reward with a tug game. This will prepare the dog to receive different kinds of rewards. Many books on clicker training are out there. You can use your voice like a click and then reward also. Example: Say "Yes!" then reward. However, the clicker works the best and is the most precise. Place ten treats in your hand. When the dog looks at you, click and treat. You should not have more than 3 seconds between the click and the treat. Do this until the ten treats are gone.

Targeting to a plastic lid (see handout)

This is useful for teaching your dog the contacts on the contact obstacles, and it is very helpful for teaching sendouts and distance work.

The Sit Stay and Release Command

Give the dog a command to sit. Just say sit and don't say stay. The dog should remain sitting until you give him the release word or you give him another command. Start to feed the sit, continue to feed the sit with tiny pieces of treats. If the dog should break, just gently put him back in the sit and continue to feed him. Give the dog a release word, like "OK" (free, break, release, are other examples of release words). This will be the release word you use all of the time. You must be consistent with this word. Do not move your body in any way when you release the dog from his sit. Just "ok" should do it. If the dog does not release on the word ok, use a piece of food in front of him and release him to it. Cover the food with your foot if he gets it before the ok word. Gradually take one step away from the dog, if he stays go back in and feed him. Try to take a few more steps away, always returning to feed the sit. Then use the release word ok. This will lead to strong lead-outs. You can later release the dog to a toy instead of food. Just watch your

body on the release word, No movement on your part, just the work ok. The dog should charge out of the sit with the ok spoken in a normal tone of voice.

Side and With Me Commands

We need to call our dogs to both sides in agility. For the heel side you can use "With Me" and for the off side (right side) you can use "Side". Have the dog on your left side and feed the dog in heel position as you walk in a circle with the dog. Say with me as you continue to walk and feed the dog on your left side. Gradually you will pick up the pace and add speed to your circle work. Do the same as you circle with the dog on your right side.

Sphinx Down

This is also called a toaster down, because the dog pops up out of the down. This is used on the table. We want the handler to hold a treat and a clicker & hold the dog by the collar so he can't back up. He will bring the treat to the dogs face and then gently guide it down between the dogs' front feet, close to the ground under his chest. This will make the dog's head bow while he's trying to get the treat, his front legs will fold and finally his back end will go down. Click and treat when the dog goes down. When the dog understands this and is performing it well you can add the word table. Have them do this down on different surfaces. Later we will introduce the table and the dog will be asked to perform this behavior.

Ladder Work

This is to prepare your dog for the dog walk. It makes him aware of where his back legs are. He will be more sure-footed and confident on that narrow plank if he masters the ladder work. Just click and treat the dog for putting one foot in the ladder and then two feet etc. until you get his whole body in the ladder and moving forward. Reward the dog in the ladder with food treats. Try not to lure the dog but to shape the behavior. Never force your dog. Keep the leash loose at all times.

Respond to Name (See handout)

Work on your dog responding to his or her name. This is very important in agility, as you need a quick response on the course.

Fun to Do at Home: Backyard Dogwalk ("travel board")

Go to your local lumberyard and buy yourself a 2" x 12" board that is 12' long (or if you don't have a lot of room at your house get an 8' long plank). Get a pressure-treated board if you don't want it to warp. A treated board is a bit more expensive, but worthwhile in the long run.

Prop the board up on two cinder blocks. Make sure it's nice and sturdy with little or no wobble. This is called a travel board. Now you're ready to begin an "at home" dogwalk training program that will put you a step ahead of the competition.

For now you should use a lead in your training. At one end of the board, encourage your dog to get up on the board. In the beginning click and treat any interest, then one paw, then two on the board, etc. Once he understands that he is supposed to get on the board and walk its length, give your dog a *Walk!* or *Climb!* Command to get on. Walk briskly with the dog to the other end of the board and give him a favorite food treat. Release the dog off the board with a quiet *Okay*. When he gets good at this you can ask him to turn around in the middle of the board. This helps with hind end awareness and balance.

NOTE: Do not give your dog a treat after he leaves the board. This is rewarding the jumping off, not the walking on the board. The treat should always be given while he's actually on the board! Also, do not use a ball or toy motivator when doing dogwalk training. The dog may perceive toys as a reward for getting off the board before you release him. That's not what you want to do in the early stages of training.

*Be sure to always work your dog on all exercises from both sides (your left and right side).

Additional Handouts

Teaching Targeting

Respond to Name