CANINE AGILITY

Project Guide

4-H Alberta

www.4h.ab.ca

Alberta Government

The 4-H Motto

"Learn to Do by Doing"

The 4-H Pledge

I pledge

My **Head** to clearer thinking,
My **Heart** to greater loyalty,
My **Hands** to larger service,
My **Health** to better living,
For my club, my community, and my country.

The 4-H Grace
(Tune of Auld Lang Syne)

We thank thee, Lord, for blessings great

on this, our own fair land.

Teach us to serve thee joyfully,

with head, heart, health and hand.

Acknowledgements

Resources

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Design and Layout

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WHAT IS CANINE AGILITY?

Agility is a fun and exciting sport for dog and handler alike. It combines training, teamwork and fitness. It is a fast-paced sport in which a dog and handler work as a team to complete the obstacle course with the best time, and with the most accuracy.

Each agility course features a number of tunnels, jumps, weave poles and contact equipment. The handler must know how each piece of equipment works in order to direct their dog through safely and quickly. Training and practice sessions allow the dog to understand what is expected of them as they approach a piece of equipment, but it is up to the handler to teach them how to use it safely and accurately.

Objectives

In this project you will learn about the canine skeletal system, basic obedience expectations before starting agility, safety, agility equipment and commands and how to prepare for an agility trial. In the back of this book you will find a terminology guide and a sample marking sheet.

Many people find agility to be a fun activity to do with their dog because it allows for bonding, obedience training, socializing and exercise. This 4-H Canine Agility Project is intended to serve as a continuation of the 4-H Canine Project. The training suggestions contained in this project are generic and not intended to conflict with your current trainer's advice.

If your dog is less than one year of age, is a large breed dog, is overweight or has a medical history of injury or skeletal/joint problems – consult with your veterinarian before beginning agility training. Remember, you and your dog's health and safety should be your number one concern.

The three most common organizations that feature agility trials in Alberta are:

- The Canadian Kennel Club (for purebred registered dogs only) - CKC
- The Agility Association of Canada (all dogs) - AAC
- The North American Dog Agility Council (all dogs) - NADAC

This project book will cover most of the equipment used in these three organizations; however, it will more closely follow NADAC's guidelines.

Alberta 4-H members wishing to compete in an agility trial should familiarize themselves with the organization's rules for which they are competing.

THE CANINE SKELETON: BONES, JOINTS, GROWTH AND MOVEMENT
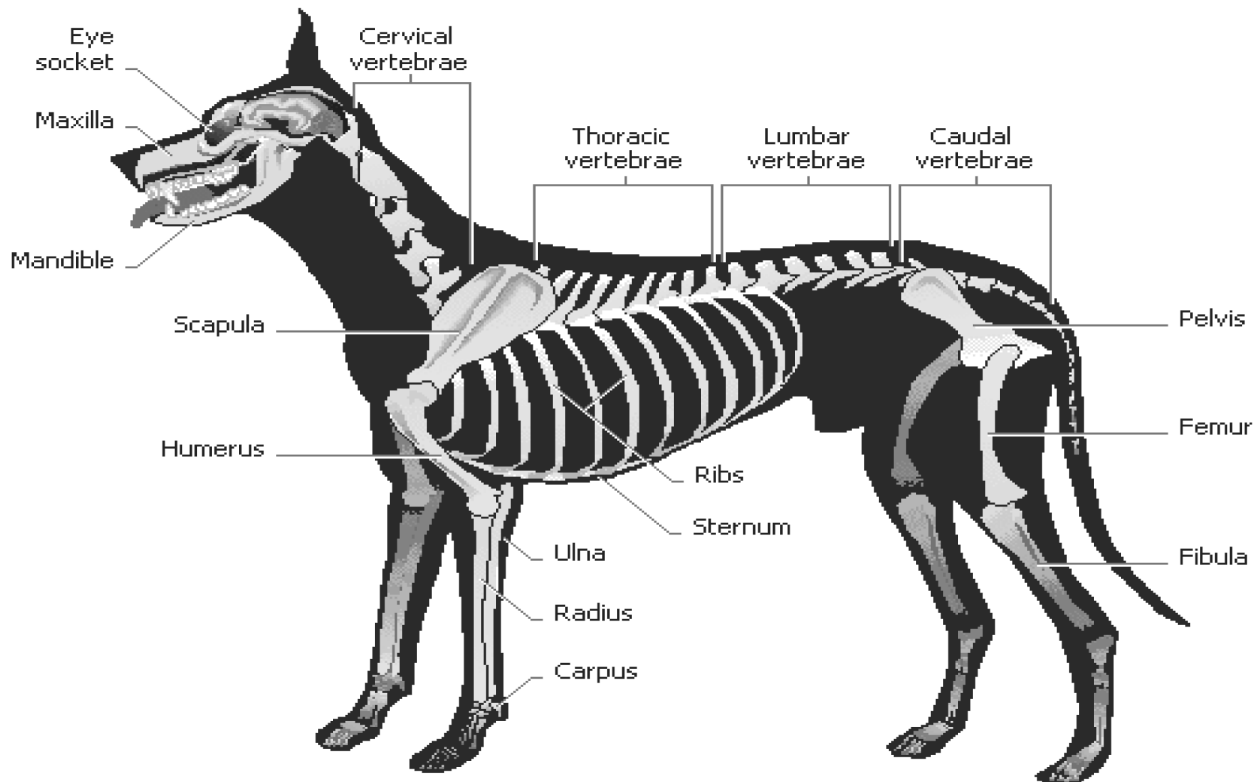
Bones

As you can see from the above diagram, a dog has many bones and joints. There are approximately 319 bones in a dog's skeleton. Bone sizes and shapes vary between mammals, but all mammals share the same basic body plan. If you compared a human skeleton to a dog skeleton, you would see many of the same bones but they would be different sizes and some would be sitting at different angles.

A skeleton is a body's frame. In addition to some other functions, a skeleton gives an organism structure, protects vital organs and allows for movement through muscle attachment. A dog's bones, joints, cartilage, muscles, ligaments and tendons are known as its "musculoskeletal system".

Joints

A concern all dog agility handlers should have is for their dog's joints. Joints are formed where bone ends meet. Joints can be thought of as the body's hinges.

Generally speaking, the muscles of the body contract and relax, which results in moving the bones of the skeleton. The ends of the bones are covered with smooth cartilage. If there were no protection, the bones would grate against each other!

Bone Growth

Bones grow until they reach their full adult size and then they maintain themselves. Some large breeds of dogs continue growing until they are around two years old.

Even though growth is occurring in all of the bones, the easiest place to measure it is in the legs. The bones in the extremities are known as 'long bones' and include the humerus, radius, ulna, femur, fibula and tibia.

Long bones don't grow from the very end or middle. Growth takes place at the epiphyseal growth plates. On the diagram to the right, the growth plates would be roughly where the epiphysis meets with the diaphysis.
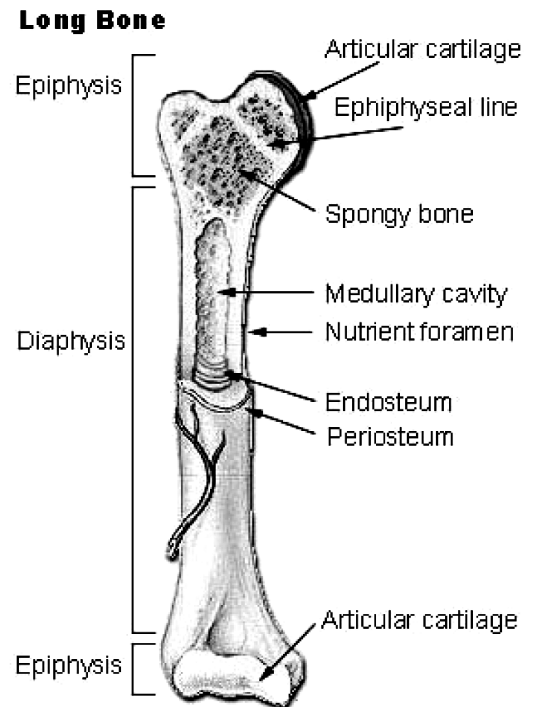
Since dog agility has jumping components, it is medically recommended that handlers wait until the dogs have finished growing, and their growth plates are no longer at risk of being damaged.

Healthy Movement

A healthy musculoskeletal system helps a dog move freely and without pain. This is especially important in sports where jumping, stretching, crouching, climbing, walking, running and turning are essential. Good nutrition, regular exercise and safe activities will help to keep your dog moving well.

Dogs that are in pain may tend to favour the sore spot, sleep more and have problems sitting or laying and then standing up again from those positions. Some dogs may hesitate to do the activities that cause them pain.

It is important to watch your dog while they are playing or are on the agility course to ensure they are moving the way you've known them to in the past.

Long Bone

Epiphysis

Articular cartilage

Ephiphyseal line

Spongy bone

Medullary cavity

Nutrient foramen

Diaphysis

Endosteum

Periosteum

Articular cartilage

Epiphysis

OBEDIENCE TRAINING AND THE CANINE GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROGRAM

If you have successfully completed obedience training through the 4-H Canine Project or obedience lessons, then chances are your dog already has some of the skills that will make agility training a bit easier.

Dogs that know how to come, sit and lay down may conquer some of the obstacles faster.

Other skills from obedience training that will help dogs in learning agility is remaining calm in social situations, meeting other dogs in a friendly fashion, as well as remaining focused on the task at hand when various distractions are present.

Canine Good Neighbour Program

If your dog hasn't already completed the Canine Good Neighbour Program, you may wish to explore this before beginning agility training. It is a program organized and nationally recognized by the Canadian Kennel Club.

A dog that has completed the Canine Good Neighbour Program can be counted on to present good manners at home, in public places and in the presence of other dogs.

The training program accepts both purebred and mixed-breed dogs and is fun, rewarding and useful. The test is non-competitive and allows the dog and handler to demonstrate confidence and control in 12 steps.

Dogs are evaluated on their ability to perform basic exercises, as well as their ability to demonstrate good manners in everyday situations.

The Canine Good Neighbour test includes the following:

- Accepting a friendly stranger talking to the handler;
- Politely accepting being pet by the friendly stranger;
- Allowing someone to examine their feet and ears;
- Briefly allowing someone to brush them;
- Walking politely on a loose leash;
- Walking politely on a loose leash through a crowd;
- Sit down on command and stay in place on a 6-metre line;
- Come when called on a 3-metre line;
- Calm down after a 10-second play session;
- Present polite behaviour in the presence of another dog;
- Show confidence around visual and auditory distractions;
- Successfully being left alone with someone for 3 minutes, with the owner out of sight;
- Waiting for the handler to allow them through a door or gate.

EXERCISE SAFETY IN DOGS

Just as you prepare yourself for exercise, it is important to make sure your dog is ready too. As mentioned before, make sure you have checked with your veterinarian before starting agility training, especially if your dog is a large breed dog, less than one year of age, overweight or has been injured in the past, including broken bones or joint problems.

A great time to discuss your dog's health is during their yearly check-up. Let the veterinarian or animal health technologist know that you intend to start agility training with your dog in case they would like to note it in your dog's medical file.

A good practice to get into is checking your dog's paws, legs and body for anything that looks unusual before and after your agility sessions. To make sure nothing is missed, create a map of your dog in your mind and follow it each time. Consider starting with your dog's face, then progressing down their back to their tail.

Feel the areas as you visually inspect for things like bumps, foreign objects stuck to the fur, blood, rashes and external parasites. Tell your dog to lie down, and carefully roll them over to one side as you inspect their legs and paws.

Remember to be careful if you know your dog is unsure about having their paws touched.

Once your inspection is successfully completed you can begin your warm-up routine. Your agility trainer may be able to demonstrate ways you can help your dog safely stretch. Many people start by walking their dog on a leash at a slow pace, then increasing the speed over five to ten minutes until they have reached a fast walk. Also consider using some basic obedience commands with your warm-up: sitting, laying down, turning to the left and right and circling items can help your dog stretch as well.

Always allow your dog access to water while exercising and take your dog for a bathroom break before entering onto an agility course. Your dog will be eliminated from the run if they urinate or defecate on the course and will be unable to complete that run. As with any occasion, carry a few plastic bags in your pocket in case you need to pick up after your dog.

After your agility session, take your dog for a short leisurely walk as your 'cool down' activity.

AGILITY EQUIPMENT

Contact Equipment

An obstacle that requires a dog to be off of the ground, with the exception of an agility jump, is called "contact equipment". These obstacles are in the same group because of the contrasting colour painted on the ends. This is a feature to ensure that all dogs mount and dismount the obstacle in a safe, controlled fashion. Dogs are expected to make contact with the contact zone with at least one foot. Dogs that do not do this will lose points for that obstacle.

A-Frame

This piece is made up of two platforms usually 3 to 4 feet wide, by 8 to 9 feet long. The two pieces are hinged and safety chained together to ensure the A-frame does not slip while a dog is on it. Some are made to be adjustable to be between 5 to 6 feet in height at the peak. The surface should be non-slip.

How it is used: The dog must climb up one side of the A-frame and down the other, ensuring that the contact zone is touched on the downside with at least one foot. The AAC requires contact on the upside as well.

Dog Walk

This piece is made of three hinged together 12 foot planks that are 12 inches wide and are thick enough to support the weight of the dogs using it. The planks should be covered in a non-slip surface, including the contact zone. For experienced dogs, the center plank is raised to 4 feet off of the ground. For dogs that are just learning, a dog walk that is adjustable in height can help keep them safe while they learn the equipment.

How it is used: The dog must climb up one side of the dog walk, cross the center section and descend the ramp ensuring the contact zone is touched on the downside with at least one foot. The AAC and CKC require contact on the upside as well.

Teeter Totter (or seesaw)

This piece is made of one 12 foot plank, with a non-slip surface that pivots on a support. Care should be taken to select a pivot point that eliminates the chance of pinching parts of the dog or the handler. Also taken into consideration should be selecting a plank that will support the weight of the dogs using it, but will also allow smaller dogs to trigger the pivot point safely, causing the high end of the teeter totter to descend to the ground (drop approximately 3 second when a 3 pound weight is placed 12 inches from the end of the board).

It is constructed off-balance so that the same 'entry' end returns to the ground once the dog has dismounted. Contact zones are painted on either end of the plank.

How it is used: The dog must climb up the plank, cause it to pivot and wait for the end of the plank to reach the ground, under control, before exiting the equipment. As with other contact equipment, the contact zones must be touched with at least one foot on the downside when dismounting the teeter totter. The AAC and CKC require contact on the upside as well.
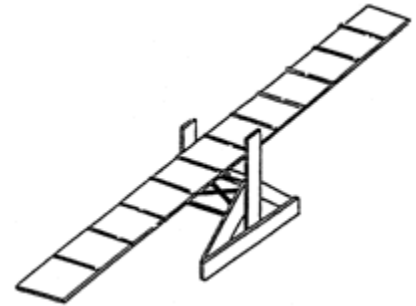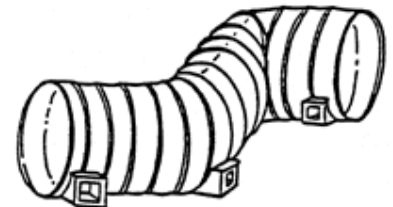
Tunnels

Rigid Tunnel

This piece is a 10 to 20 foot long tube that is about 2 feet in diameter and is usually made out of thick polyester or other synthetic cloth-like materials. Wire is spiraled the length of the tube to ensure it holds its shape. Weights are used to hold the tunnel ends in place on the course.

How it is used: The dog enters the tunnel at the end specified by the judge and exits out the other end. Beginning dogs usually start with a straight tunnel, but as their confidence increases, a curve can be created.

Collapsed Tunnel or Chute

This piece is a sturdy, barrel-like cylinder with a tube of fabric firmly attached to it. The fabric is usually about 8 to 12 feet long and open at either end so the dog exits the chute by pushing its way out of the fabric tube.

How it is used: The dog enters the entrance section and exits via the fabric chute. It is important to place this obstacle far enough away from other obstacles so the dog doesn't run into anything upon exiting.
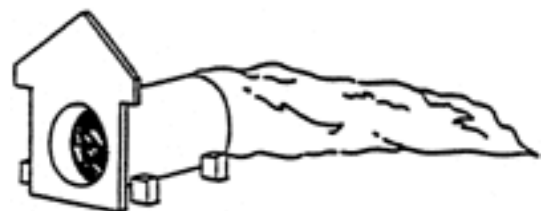
Jumps

There are many different styles of jumps, but the main point in all of them is the jump height, measured at the highest point of the jump.

Your dog's jump height depends on its size. All 4-H agility jumps are set 4" under the NADAC regular class jump height.

Refer to the end of this book to determine your dog's jump height.

Winged and Non Winged Jumps – This jump is usually made out of two upright bars supporting a horizontal bar for the dog to jump over. Since all sizes of dogs participate in agility, it is important to ensure your jumps are adjustable. The horizontal bar should just 'rest' on the upright bars, and not be fastened snuggly.

> How it's used: The dog must jump over the top bar of the hurdle in the direction as indicated by the judge, without knocking any part of the jump down.
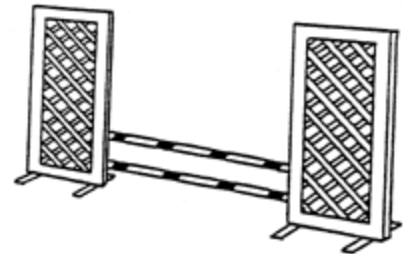
Panel Jump – Similar to the winged jump, this jump is a solid panel, usually formed by shorter panels being placed closely together, from the ground to the required jump height. Panels are simply removed or added to create the required height. As with the winged jump, the panels should be mounted in such a way that they are not fastened snuggly to the upright bars, but rather 'resting'. Thick, heavy panels are not necessary for this jump, and the dogs' safety should be taken into consideration in case they knock the panel off while jumping.

> How it's used: The dog must jump over the top panel in the direction as indicated by the judge, without knocking any part of the jump down.
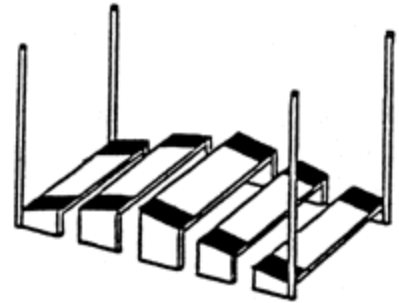
Broad Jump – This jump features about 4 or 5 panels or bars increasing in height (like stairs) over the length of the jump. The jump height is measured at the highest bar in the series. The length is adjusted according to the dog's size.

> How it's used: The dog must jump from the lower to the higher height without knocking down any of the bars in the sequence.
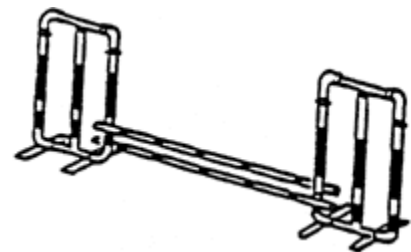
Double Bar Jump – Consists of 2 parallel bars positioned at the jump heights specified for the bar jump. This jump may be built as a special jump or from 2 single bar jumps.

> How it's used: The dog must jump over two bars in the direction as indicated by the judge, without knocking any part of the jump down.

Ascending Spread Jump

This jump features 2 - 6 poles positioned parallel and set so that each pole is 4" higher than the previous pole. (i.e.; first pole is 4" second is 8" and so on to the dog's jump height). If the dog is to jump 4" total, the first pole will be placed on the ground 4" in front of the back pole.

How it is used: The dog must jump over all of the poles in the jump in the direction as indicated by the judge, without knocking any part of the jump down.

Tire Jump

This jump is made out of circular tubing usually 3" to 8" in diameter (weeping tile works well) in a sturdy frame that does not allow the tire to swing or twist. The tire's opening is usually 24" and the tire may be wrapped with tape for greater visibility. The jump height is measured from the ground, to the bottom of the tire's opening. NADAC requires that the tire be a breakaway tire.

How it is used: The dog must jump through the tire's opening, in a safe manner, in the direction as specified by the judge.
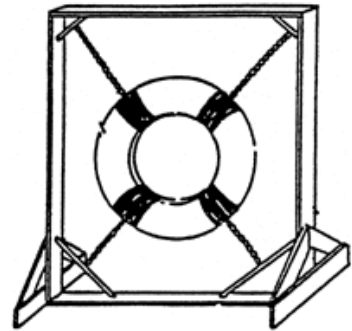
Miscellaneous

These equipment pieces may require the most practice, as they are dissimilar from obstacles in the other three categories.

Pause Table – An elevated platform about 3' by 3' square that the dog must jump onto and hold a 5 second pause, either by sitting or laying down. The height varies by competition, and sometimes (with AAC) a "Pause Box" is used. This is a square area marked on the ground taking the place of a Pause Table. The dog is still expected to sit, or lay down, for 5 seconds.

How it's used: The dog must pause on the table (or in the box), in the ordered position and hold it for the judge's count of 5 seconds. The judge will decide before the competition if all competitors will use either a 'sit' or a 'down'.
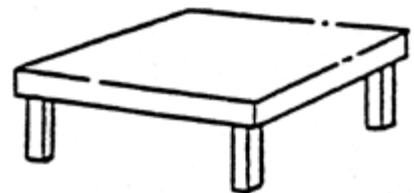
Weave Poles – This piece is a series of upright poles, each around 3' tall and spaced about 20" apart, attached to a solid, flat base. Sets of poles vary between 6 and 12 poles. This is one of the hardest obstacles for a dog to achieve.

How it's used: The dog must enter the weave poles by passing between pole #1 and pole #2 from right to left. The first pole must pass the dog's left shoulder. The dog then passes from left to right through pole #2 and pole #3. This pattern is followed until the weave pattern is complete. If at any time the sequence is broken, or a pole is skipped, the dog must start the poles from the beginning.
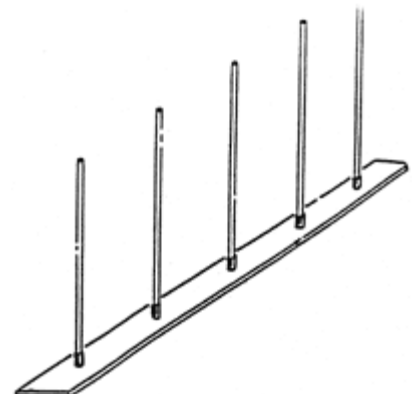
TRAINING, REWARDS AND BASIC AGILITY COMMANDS

Dogs have the ability to learn new words associated with items and actions. Chances are your dog already understands words like *ball*, *Kong*, *cookie* or *treat* to represent favourite items. Obedience commands like *sit*, *down* and *stay* indicate to your dog that you expect an action.

Training

Starting agility training means introducing new words into your dog's vocabulary and then immediately rewarding them when they complete the obstacle correctly and safely.

Only positive reinforcement training will be suggested in this manual. This means that each time your dog does what you want them to do, they will be rewarded immediately with something pleasant – keen praise and a <u>small</u> food treat. If your dog does not complete the obstacle as desired, no treat will be issued and you will either attempt the obstacle again, or take a short break.

Not all agility training will take place on the course or with obstacles. There are some commands that should be worked on daily. These may include: *easy*, *here, target* and *tight*. Your agility trainer can teach you how to instruct these to your dog, and you may also find some great instructions on the Internet.

Target is a command that will send your dog to a small white "target plate" where they will receive a reward for going over all of the obstacles in their path to get to the target. *Easy* is important as you teach your dog how to use the contact zones, or to slow them down on high equipment. The *here* command will draw your dog towards you and *tight* will tell your dog to turn very sharp around an obstacle. One example would be your dog coming out of a tunnel and needing to make a 180-degree turn to go into another tunnel.

Equipment: Dog & Handler

To begin training you will need to have the right equipment for your dog. A well-fitted nylon or leather collar is acceptable for training. Short 'tab' leashes are helpful because they don't hang down as low. In advanced competitions, collars and leashes are not permitted on the dogs while they are on the course.

Chain collars, pinch collars and chain leashes should not be used as they could get stuck on the equipment.

As a handler, you should wear proper footwear. In a competition, appropriate clothing, such as your 4-H uniform, is expected.

For you and your dog's safety, do not use agility equipment when you are alone. This is especially important for beginner and intermediate dogs and handlers. Have another person act as a spotter on equipment that requires your dog to be off of the ground.

Rewards

While you train your dog on the agility course, small food treats or toys may be used with praise. Since you don't want your dog to have to chew the treat for very long or take in excess calories, break soft treats into 'pinch size' bits.

Targeting allows you to reward your dog without actually providing the reward from your hand. In agility you want your dog to focus straight ahead and not on you for treats. If your dog is taught to only take the treats from the target plates instead of from your hand, they will very quickly learn to cover all the obstacles in their way to get to the target.

When teaching your dog to target you will put a white target plate with a small treat at the end of an obstacle. When your dog does that obstacle they get the treat off the target plate. You then add another obstacle behind the first one and so on. Soon you dog will be covering many obstacles to get to the "loaded" target plate.

Basic Agility Commands: Verbal Commands, General Instruction and Hand Gestures

For each piece of equipment you will need to decide on a word that you can remember and use each time you practice agility with your dog. Some obstacles are similar, such as the various jumps, and only need to be identified by 'jump' or 'over'.

Once your dog is ready, start to combine obstacles to create mini-courses, working up from one obstacle, to two and three in a row!

Verbal Commands

Many people begin by introducing their leashed dog to an obstacle under great control and at slow speeds. Without using the obstacle's command word, they encourage their dog to complete the obstacle successfully first.

For example, to introduce a dog to the tunnel, a helper may hold the leashed dog at the entrance to the tunnel while the handler goes to the exit and calls the dog to "come" through the tunnel. Once the dog is interested in entering the tunnel, the helper should let go of the dog's leash.

Sometimes the handler must crawl into the tunnel a ways so their dog can see them. Never pull your dog through an obstacle against its will. This will create a negative experience and make training harder.

Once the dog completes the tunnel, the handler should immediately reward the dog with a small food treat from the target plate while saying "good tunnel!" The idea is that the dog will have a pleasant experience and be willing to repeat the action. The next time the tunnel is approached, the "tunnel" command can be used.

On page 12 is a chart of suggested verbal commands to use for each piece of equipment.

Obstacle	Verbal Command (Pick One)	Equipment Type
A-Frame	"climb", "frame", "scramble", "wall"	Contact
Dog Walk	"plank", "ramp", "scramble"	Contact
Teeter-Totter	"teeter", "see-saw"	Contact
Hurdle	"over"	Jump
Panel Jump	"over"	Jump
Broad Jump	"over"	Jump
Double Bar Jump	"over"	Jump
Spread Jump	"over"	Jump
Tire Jump	"tire"	Jump
Pause Table	"table", "jump", "up"	Miscellaneous
Weave Poles	"weave"	Miscellaneous
Rigid Tunnel	"tunnel"	Tunnel
Collapsed or Chute Tunnel	"chute" or "tunnel"	Tunnel

General Instruction: Contact Obstacles, Jumps, Tunnels and Miscellaneous

Contact Equipment

Contact equipment requires the handler to pay close attention to their dog as they mount and dismount the obstacle. Some trainers may have alternate ways to teach dogs to use contact zones.

Starting with a piece like a lowered **A-Frame**, keep your dog on a short leash and under control as they climb, starting at the up-side contact zone and slowly descending towards the down-side contact zone. Once your dog has reached the contact zone at the bottom, have them 'pause' there. Using the word "bottom", praise saying "good bottom!" after they have held the bottom command for 5 seconds. Allow them to proceed to the target plate that has been loaded with a treat and placed 2' to 3' from the end of the obstacle. Never encourage or reward your dog for jumping off of the A-Frame at any point except at the downside contact zone.

Teaching your dog how to use the **Dog Walk** is similar to the A-Frame, but since it is much more narrow it is important that your dog be under control as they learn on a low Dog Walk. Some dogs start out with the Dog Walk practically on the ground. It is important that you not let your dog exit off of the Dog Walk at any other point except the contact zones. Having a spotter walk on the opposite side can help ensure your dog stays on the Dog Walk. Once your dog has reached the contact zone at the bottom, have them 'pause' there. Using the word "bottom", praise saying "good bottom!" after they have held the bottom command for 5 seconds. Allow them to proceed to the target plate that has been loaded with a treat and placed 2' to 3' from the end of the obstacle.

The **Teeter-totter** is potentially the most dangerous piece of equipment and training should be taken seriously for it. Dogs must learn to find the pivot point on the teeter-totter's plank, which means the point along the plank that causes the end that is in the air to start to drop towards the ground. Great care should be taken for dogs to get used to the obstacle moving under their feet. Low teeter-totters or tippy boards should be used before moving to

full-sized equipment. Never allow your dog to jump off of the equipment until the opposite end has reached the ground and your dog may safely proceed to the contact zone. When your dog has started up the teeter tell them "easy, tip it". This will slow your dog down and prepare them for the tip of the board. Once your dog has reached the contact zone at the bottom, have them 'pause' there. Using the word "bottom", praise saying "good bottom!" after they have held the bottom command for 5 seconds. Allow them to proceed to the target plate that has been loaded with a treat and placed 2' to 3' from the end of the obstacle.

Jumps

Since the **Winged and Non-Winged Jumps**, **Panel Jump, Spread Jump, Double Bar Jump** and **Broad Jump** are similar, many people opt to use one single command word such as "over" as they use hand gestures to indicate which jump they intend the dog to complete.

As with other equipment, start with the jump low to the ground, but high enough that the dog can see that it will need to physically jump, and not just run across it. As you approach the jump for the first time, wait until your dog has crossed it before praising "good over!" and issuing a treat from the target plate placed on the ground approximately 10' in front of the jump. Once your dog has built confidence, try raising the jump slowly until you are near your dog's jump height. Teaching a dog to use a jump may involve the handler jumping over the jump as well. This may be done a few times, but then the handler should give the jump command from beside the jump.

Ensure when you are teaching the Broad Jump that your dog comes straight to the end of the jump and does not attempt to exit it along the sides.

The **Tire Jump**, while in the jump obstacle family, is viewed differently by dogs because they must pass through the obstacle instead of simply over it. The Tire Jump's jump height is measured from the ground to the bottom of the tire's opening. Start by lowering this obstacle to the ground so the dog may step up and through it. Once your dog has come through, praise with "good tire!" and provide a treat front the target plate that has been placed on the ground approximately 10' in front of the jump. Once your dog understands you wish for them to come through the tire, raise the jump slowly until you are near your dog's jump height. Be careful that your dog doesn't attempt to jump between the tire and the frame, or go under the tire, as they could get tangled on the support wires.

Tunnels

Tunnels can be initially scary for dogs to learn, but once they have conquered them it's hard to stop them from entering on their own!

The **Rigid Tunnel** should be the first tunnel attempted and laid straight so the dog can see light at the other end. As mentioned in the training example, a helper can be used to hold your leashed dog while you go to the exit end of the tunnel. Call your dog to "come" through. If your dog is unsure after a few calls, try crawling into the exit end of the tunnel until you can see your dog's face. Call them to "come" once again. Sometimes the tunnel may need to be squished up so it is very short in length, but the extra fabric could make the tunnel's opening appear smaller. Encourage your dog to come through the tunnel, but never pull them through. Once they have completed the tunnel, praise with "good tunnel!" and allow them to take a treat from the target plate that has been placed approximately 4' in front of the tunnel exit. Practice many times until your dog is confident in the straight tunnel, only after then can slight curves can be introduced until it is a 'U' shape.

The **Collapsed** or **Chute Tunnel** is easier for a dog to learn once it has conquered the curved rigid tunnel, as the chute involves your dog pushing its way through the fabric until it reaches the end. To start, the fabric should be held open and a helper can hold your leashed dog at the entrance while you peak inside the fabric calling your dog to "come". This tunnel should look identical to your dog and most will proceed through immediately to see you and receive their treat. Once they have come through, praise with "Good chute!" and allow them to take a treat from the target plate that has been placed approximately 4' in front of the chute exit. Some handlers use the word "tunnel" for both obstacles, and that is fine.

Miscellaneous

If your dog easily understands basic obedience commands then the **Pause Table** should be fairly simple for your dog to learn. Starting with a low table, encourage your dog to climb on to the table and assume a 'sit' position. Count backwards slowly from 5, once your dog is sitting. At the end of your 5-second count say "Good table!" and give your dog its food treat. Some dogs may require their release word to come out of a 'sit', but once they are done their 5-seconds they are free to go. Practice both sitting and lying down on the pause table, as judges may request either be done.

The **Weave Poles** will involve a lot of practice. Start with a short set of weave poles, usually 6 in total. Lead your dog through the poles starting with the first pole passing your dog's <u>left</u> shoulder. This is important and should be practiced this way each time. Your dog will go between pole #1 and pole #2 with pole #1 on your dog's <u>left</u>. Then, lead your dog to go between pole #2 and pole #3 with pole #2 on your dog's right shoulder.

The 'L' in the box indicates where your dog's left shoulder will be. Walk along side of your dog basically pushing them away from you at one pole set, take a step forward and have your hand ready to receive them around the next pole set. You may find it easier to walk down the right-hand side of the pole line to start with, pushing your dog away as they go through pole #1 and #2, but ready with your hand to receive your dog between pole #2 and #3. Once your dog starts to do the weave pattern, praise with "good weave!" and offer a treat.

Continue this pattern until you have completed the set. Offer big praise to your dog for completing the weave pattern, as this can be a frustrating obstacle for both dog and handler.

Some trainers will 'V' the poles out in an alternating fashion so the dog can see the next step while others provide a wire course outline so the dog can only follow that path. Some weave poles are fenced in with a barrier so the dog may only enter at pole #1 and exit at pole #6.

Hand commands

Once your dog is confident with equipment you will need to start to step back and gradually let your dog have more control over their actions. Ideally you will work towards a point of having your dog listen to your commands guiding them from one obstacle to the next.

Be prepared to work your dog from both your right and left sides. Your dog will follow the direction of that your body is traveling so it is important that your shoulders are always pointed in the direction you want your dog to go.

It may be helpful to run with your arm extended straight out on the side you wish their dog to run. This may assist in keeping your dog away from you while at the same time guide him on course.

PREPARING FOR AN AGILITY TRIAL

In a judged standard competition, each dog is required to run the same agility course. It is up to you, the handler, to know which obstacles need to be completed in the correct order. The course will be numbered and you will have an opportunity to walk the course without your dog. Use this time to figure out the best way to run your dog while on course: where you want to be and where your dog needs to be to cover the course in the cleanest, fastest time possible. The course will also be posted for the exhibitors to see. Remember, your dog will be competing against other dogs for the best time while safely and completely finishing the course.
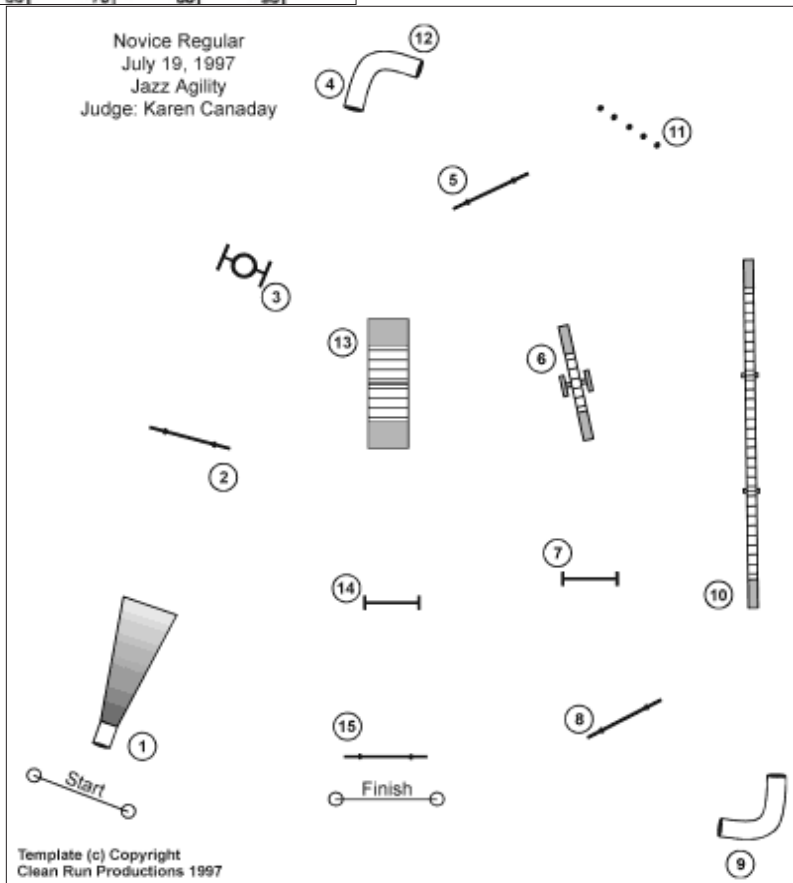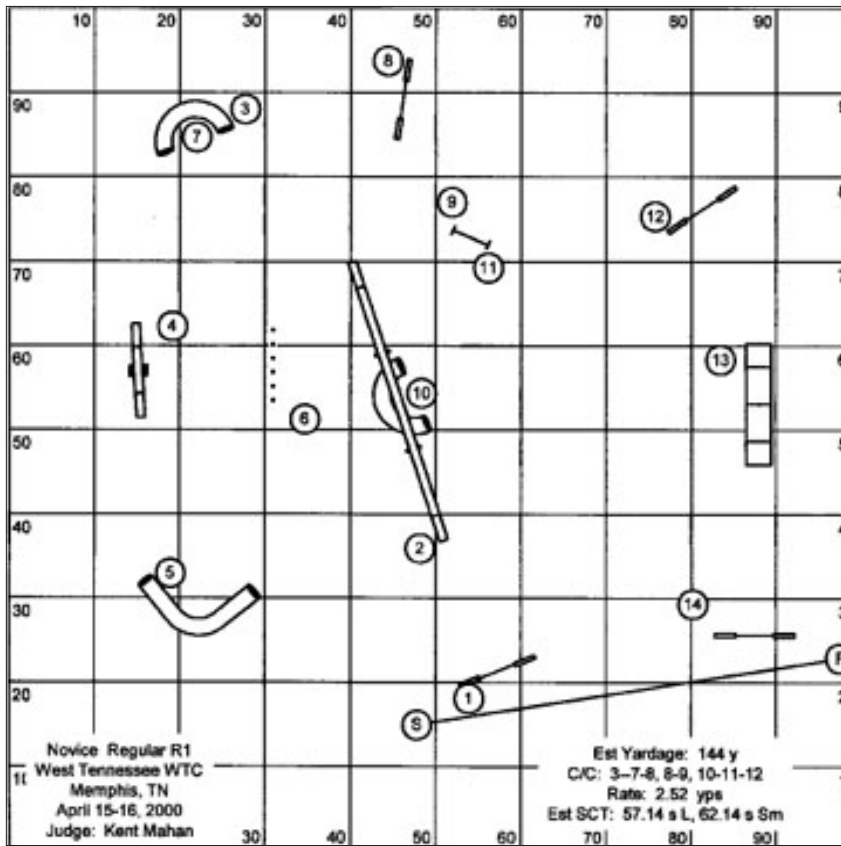
In 4-H competitions, for level 1 and 2 handlers, the equipment will be clearly numbered and set up in the order your dog needs to complete the obstacles in. You will be allowed to have a short tab leash on your dog, and a spotter for contact equipment. As you prepare for the competition you should try to practice only handling your dog by its short leash and working towards rewarding your dog after it has completed a series of obstacles. Treats and toys are not allowed on the course while you are competing but once you cross the finish line and are out of the course area you may give your dog lots of praise, love and treats!

Level 3 handlers are expected to have instructed their dog successfully through levels 1 and 2, and will no longer need a leash for their dog. Equipment will be set to the height that NADAC uses for their junior handler category. It is up to the handler to review the course requirements in order to successfully guide their dog through. All courses in level 3 will be numbered in the ordered that the obstacles are to be taken and the course will be posted for exhibitors to review in advance.

Next are some samples of competition agility course maps. Note the position of the number in the circle. Handlers are expected to complete the obstacles in that order, as well have the dogs enter the equipment from the side the number is located on. Often obstacles are used more than once, but not all of the equipment on the course may be required.

Each course map clearly outlines the start and finish line.

Agility Course Maps (sample)

Novice Regular R1
West Tennessee WTC
Memphis, TN
April 15-16, 2000
Judge: Kent Mahan

Est Yardage: 144 y
C/C: 3–7-8, 8-9, 10-11-12
Rate: 2.52 yps
Est SCT: 57.14 s L, 62.14 s Sm

Novice Regular
July 19, 1997
Jazz Agility
Judge: Karen Canaday

Start

Finish

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ASSESSMENT TOOLS

LEVEL 1

❐ Recall the approximate number of bones that make up a dog's skeleton and two functions of a skeleton.

❐ List the equipment you need for you and your dog, and why.

❐ Attend an agility trial as a spectator. If there are none in your area, try to find one on T.V. or the Internet (YouTube).

❐ Explain some of the benefits of doing agility with your dog.

❐ (If available) Mandatory obstacles mastered will include: A-Frame, rigid tunnel, winged jump, non-winged jump, panel jump, broad jump, pause table, dog walk at half height and a low teeter-totter.

❐ Complete an agility course of 6 to 8 obstacles consecutively.

_____   _____

Evaluator's Signature   Date

LEVEL 2

❐ Explain how a long bone increases in length and why dogs that are still growing should not participate in the jumping obstacles in agility.

❐ Explain the importance of 'warming up' and 'cooling down' after exercise.

❐ Provide 3 signs to watch for that may indicate your dog is in pain.

❐ Develop an agility course for a level 1 handler.

❐ Trace an agility course map from start to finish, hitting all of the obstacles in their correct order.

❐ (If available) Mandatory obstacles mastered will include all from level 1 and also: Dog walk, teeter-totter, chute tunnel, tire jump and 1 set of 6 weave poles used once.

❐ Complete an agility course of 8 to 10 obstacles consecutively.

_____   _____

Evaluator's Signature   Date

LEVEL 3

❐ Explain the anatomical similarities and differences between a dog's elbow joint and its stifle. Be able to identify structures on a simple diagram.

❐ Develop an agility course for a level 1 and level 2 handler.

❐ Demonstrate a pre-agility dog check including what you are looking for as you check over your dog.

❐ Explain how to safely instruct an inexperienced dog and handler to use contact equipment.

❐ (If available) Mandatory obstacles mastered will include all from levels 1 and 2 and also: one set of 6 weave poles used twice.

❐ An agility course of 10 to 14 obstacles completed consecutively.

_____   _____

Evaluator's Signature   Date

AGILITY TRIAL JUMP HEIGHTS

Jump heights are measured at the dog's shoulder. All dogs competing in 4-H competitions will jump at the heights according to the following chart unless it is a breed that is unable to safely jump at the determined height. In the following breeds the judge will determine the safest jump height: Chinese Pug, English Bull Dog, Cairn Terrier, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Clumber Spaniel, French Bull Dog, Scottish Terrier, West Highland White Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Corgi, Dachshund or similar mixed breed dogs.

Dog Shoulder Height Measurement	NADAC Standard Jump Heights	4-H & NADAC Junior Handler Jump Heights
11" (27.6 cm) and under	8" (20.3 cm)	4" (10.2 cm)
Over 11" (27.6 cm) up to and including 14" (35.6 cm)	12" (30.5 cm)	8" (20.3 cm)
Over 14" (35.6 cm) up to and including 18" (45.7 cm)	16" (40.6 cm)	12" (30.5 cm)
Over 18" (45.7 cm) up to and including 20" (50.8 cm)	20" (50.8 cm)	16" (40.6 cm)
Over 20" (55.9 cm)	20" (50.8 cm) in the 20"+ division	16" (40.6 cm)

AGILITY MARKING GUIDE

Alberta 4-H Dog Agility Score Sheet

Handler's Name or Number:

Class: Level 1 _____ Level 2 _____ Level 3 _____

Dog Height: _____ Jump Height (circle) 4″ 8″ 12″ 16″

Dog's Time

_____ : _____. _____   _____ seconds

Standard Faults	Min	Total	Major Faults	Min	Total
Handler on/over equipment	5		Missed contact zone	10	
Handler touched obstacle	5		Completed an obstacle not on the course	20	
Deliberately handled dog	5		Off course (taking an obstacle out of order or backwards)	20	
Knocked jump down	5		Failure to complete an obstacle correctly before moving on to next obstacle	20	
			Unsafe dismount from Teeter-Totter	20	
			Obstacle Omitted	20	
			Outside Help/Interference	20	
Seconds over course time			**Ribbon Placing**		
Total Course Faults			0-30 fault points	1st place	
			31-50 fault points	2nd place	
			51 or more fault points	3rd place	
			Disqualified	No ribbon	

AGILITY TERMINOLOGY

Contact Equipment – Obstacles with contrast zones painted on each end for safety considerations. Equipment includes the Teeter-Totter, Dog Walk & A-frame. Dogs must have at least one paw in the contact zone to avoid point deductions.

Course – The agility obstacles set up safely for a dog's use.

Handler – The person, on the course, directing the dog through the obstacles.

Handling – The handler deliberately touches the dog or equipment.

Knocked or Dropped Bar – Displacing a bar (or panel) when going over a jump.

Missed Contact – When the dog fails to place a foot in the contact zone while performing a contact obstacle. This is sometimes referred to as a 'fly off' because of dogs leaping from the obstacle above the contact zone.

Musculoskeletal System – All of the muscles and bones, including joints, cartilage, ligaments and tendons in a body that allow for movement.

Non-Slip Surface – The surface of a contact obstacle that provides good traction for dogs without being so rough as to damage the dog's foot pads.

Off Course – Dog takes the wrong obstacle on a course in which the obstacles are numbered.

Refusal – The dog makes an approach towards the correct obstacle, but then turns away or hesitates significantly before attempting the obstacle.

Run Out – The dog does not directly approach the next obstacle, instead runs past it.

Time Fault – Going over the maximum time allotted by the judge to complete a course.

Weave Pole Fault – The dog must enter the first pole to their left and proceed through the weaves without skipping any. Skipping poles or weaving back when attempting to correct for the missed poles will be faulted.