

A Beginner's Guide to  
**Agility**



AMERICAN  
KENNEL CLUB™



## A Beginner's Guide to Agility

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## The World of Agility

**R**unning 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.!

Agility trials are one of the many types of American Kennel Club events in which AKC-registered dogs can compete. These events, which draw nearly two million entries annually, include conformation dog shows, agility trials, obedience trials, field tests, lure coursing, hunting tests, herding tests, tracking, and coonhound and earthdog events.

## Types of Agility Trials

**All-breed agility trials** offer competitions for more than 150 breeds and varieties of dogs recognized by the AKC. This is the most common type of trial offered.

**Specialty trials** are restricted to dogs of a specific breed or to varieties of one breed. For example, the Flat-Coated Retriever Club of America Specialty is for Flat-Coated Retrievers only, but the Poodle Club of America's specialty agility trial could include the three varieties of the Poodle: Standard, Miniature, and Toy.

## 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 registerable 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

**A**gility 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).

## 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.

<b>Novice</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>1 point</b>
<b>Open</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>2 points</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>3 points</b>

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
- 12" Class** – dogs over 10" and up to 14" at the shoulder
- 16" Class** – dogs over 14" and up to 18" at the shoulder
- 20" Class** – dogs over 18" and up to 22" at the shoulder
- 24" Class** – dogs over 22" at the shoulder

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
- 8" Class** – for 12-inch jumping dogs
- 12" Class** – for 16-inch jumping dogs
- 16" Class** – for 20-inch jumping dogs
- 20" Class** – for 24-inch jumping dogs

## Obstacles

- Dog Walk
- A-Frame
- Seesaw
- Pause Table
- Weave Poles –  
6 in Novice and up to  
12 in Open/Excellent
- Open Tunnel
- Closed Tunnel
- Bar Jump
- Double Bar Jump
- Panel Jump
- Tire Jump
- Broad Jump
- Triple Bar Jump
- One Bar Jump

Award placement rosettes or ribbons are the same in all levels of classes.

- First Place – Blue**  
**Second Place – Red**  
**Third Place – Yellow**  
**Fourth Place – White**

All dogs that have received a qualifying score in their class receive a green ribbon to indicate that they have earned a “leg,” or qualifying score, toward their title. The titles awarded are as follows:

Novice Agility or Novice Jumpers with Weaves	<b>NA or NAJ</b>
Open Agility or Open Jumpers with Weaves	<b>OA or OAJ</b>
Excellent A Agility or Excellent A Jumpers with Weaves	<b>AX or AXJ</b>
Excellent B Agility or Excellent B Jumpers with Weaves	<b>MX or MXJ</b>
Excellent B would also produce the title Master Agility Champion	<b>MACH</b>

*Requirements are 20 Double Qualifying Scores and 750 speed points*

Novice Agility Preferred or Novice Jumpers with Weaves Preferred

**NAP/NJP**

Open Agility Preferred or Open Jumpers with Weaves Preferred

**OAP or OJP**

Excellent A Agility Preferred or Excellent Jumpers with Weaves Preferred

**AXP or AJP**

Excellent B Agility Preferred or Excellent Jumpers with Weaves Preferred

**MBP or MBJ**

## How Do I Get Started in Agility?

The best way to start is to join a local dog-training club. A list of clubs is available at [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org) or by calling AKC Customer Service at (919) 233-9767.

Local clubs frequently offer training classes for the agility ring and for obedience competition as well. Even if agility competition is not your ultimate goal, the relationship that training forms between you and your dog will be very rewarding. Local clubs also have “fun matches,” where you and your dog can test your skills in the agility ring.

Training and handling your dog in the agility ring is an exceptional and enjoyable experience. From your first attempted obstacle to the finished product of 20 obstacles performed with speed, you and your dog will develop a bond. While training classes offer the best hands-on way to practice for the ring, watching exhibitors at licensed trials will gain you expertise in the agility ring.



You're on your way! Agility brings many hours of enjoyment and bonding between you and your dog. You will make many friends in the sport, and enjoy your dog and your new hobby for many years to come.

## Tips for the First-Time Exhibitor

- Make sure your dog is registered with the AKC
- Be sure your dog is current on all inoculations
- Learn from an experienced trainer in order to compete competently and safely in agility
- Join a local agility club in your area
- Become familiar with the AKC regulations for agility trials – available on the AKC website
- Attend agility trials and become familiar with the ring procedure
- Don't be afraid to ask questions of the experienced exhibitors
- Attend agility classes with your dog
- Visit the AKC website at [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org) to find a club in your area

## Tips for the First-Time Spectator

- However tempting, do not pet a dog without asking for permission first
- Many agility trials have vendors and an information booth with helpful information for the general public
- Bring a chair and arrive early, agility often starts very early in the morning
- If you have not yet purchased your dog, speak to exhibitors about their breed to gain knowledge of the best dog for your family
- If you bring a baby stroller to an agility trial, be careful that you do not run over any dog's tails, and that your child does not grab or poke the dogs it can reach. Avoid having them near ring entrances or exits, as agility dogs are running at full speed and may not be able to stop quickly. Some crowd-ed trials forbid baby strollers.



## Agility Terms

**Course Design** – Judge has previously designed the course that is run by the dog and handler. Each class has a different course design.

**Standard Course Time** – Judge measures the course with a surveyor's wheel and determines the Standard Course Time that will be allotted for the particular course set up for the class. The yardage of the course is determined by the measuring wheel and then configured to the allotted time for the level of the class and the height of the dogs running in the class.

**Dog's Path** – Judge will measure what they perceive as the typical dog's path used while performing the obstacles. A 12-inch dog's path is used for the 8-inch, 12-inch and 16-inch jump height divisions and the 20-inch typical dogs path is used for the 20-inch and 24-inch jump height class.

**Walk Through** – Time for the exhibitors, as a group, to walk the course and plan their strategy. During the walk through exhibitors determine such things as when to speed up or slow down, on which side of the handler should the dog be, when should the dog be sent ahead and where on the course can they save time.

**Judges Briefing** – Judge will meet with exhibitors and give them the Standard Course Time and any necessary information for that class before they run their dogs.

**Warm-up Jump** – Jump provided outside the ring for the handlers to practice on before they run their dog in order to warm up the dog’s muscles and prevent injury.

**Approach Angles** – Judges design their course so the approach to obstacles is specific to each class. Novice has mild angles. Open has moderate angles, and Excellent has angles and approaches that are the most difficult.

**Faults** – Penalties assessed by the judge when a dog or handler does not perform the obstacle correctly.

**Refusals/Runouts** – Type of fault given when the dog refuses to take the obstacle as they approach it or they run past the obstacle instead of performing it.

**Wrong Course** – Type of fault given when the dog does not take the next obstacle in correct sequence.

**Table Faults** – A dog must not leave the table before the judge has counted to five seconds.

**Handling Terms** – “Cross in front,” “cross behind,” and “blind cross,” refer to the handler’s position to the dog that is running the course.

## Information About Agility Trials

The AKC offers a wide variety of resources to assist everyone, whether you are new to the sport or want to know how to set up your own agility trial. Contact AKC Customer Service at 919-233-9767 or email [OrderDesk@akc.org](mailto:OrderDesk@akc.org) to inquire about the following resources:

**“Getting Started in Obedience, Agility, Tracking and CGC”** – Informative brochure which outlines the basics of getting started in AKC Companion Events, including agility

**AKC Agility Trial Manual** – Designed to assist clubs in understanding the requirements, the paperwork, the personnel, and the many details that must be handled correctly for a successful agility trial

**“Jump into Agility” Video** – “Jump into Agility” breaks down the essentials of what it takes to successfully navigate every aspect of the agility course. Whether you are simply looking to have fun with your dog, or you aspire to compete with the World Championship Team, “Jump into Agility” will help you get on course!

## Regulations for Agility Trials

A comprehensive booklet listing the regulations for AKC-sanctioned agility trials at which titles are earned.



## The AKC Website

The AKC website, [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org), contains a wealth of information about the world of purebred dogs, including information on breeds, AKC registration, canine legislation and public health issues.

View a complete listing of AKC-sanctioned agility trials by accessing Dog Events/ Companion Events/ Agility. On the agility page, select the event search link. You can select a timeframe, competition type, and your home state or several surrounding states. The Events Calendar is compiled by day and date, and has the club name and location of the trial. Entry forms for agility trials may be downloaded from the AKC website.

A *Premium List*, the official announcement of a club's event, can be obtained from the trial secretary.

For additional information contact:

**American Kennel Club  
5580 Centerview Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27606-3390  
919-233-9767**



Visit our website at [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)