

WHAT I NEED FROM YOUR CLUB

TO JUDGE YOUR SCENT WORK TRIAL

Based on AKC Scent Work | Regulations Amended August 2025



PRE-TRIAL COMMUNICATION

Between trial chair and judge

Judging Contract

Signed and returned with agreed terms, fees, and travel

Premium List Review

Draft for review before publishing — verify classes, levels, and order

Entry Count

Share final count after entries close so judge can plan the days

Travel & Lodging

Confirm arrangements, directions to venue, and any reimbursement details

Judging Schedule

Proposed schedule with time blocks per element and breaks

Venue Details

Photos or descriptions of search areas — 60 days before the trial

Equipment Inventory

Confirm what the club provides vs. what the judge should bring

Emergency Contacts

Trial chair and committee phone numbers for day-of coordination

FACILITY REQUIREMENTS

Verified 60 days before the trial with photos +/- videos



Interior Spaces

100 –1,000 sq ft depending on level. Naturally furnished/populated indoor space –e.g., offices, classrooms, garages, warehouses, barns. Must have 4 solid walls and a ceiling.



Exterior Areas

200 – 2,000 sq ft outdoor spaces with clear boundaries. Must have natural plants, objects, or structures.



Buried Area

Flat surface for sand and water tub placement. 150–500 sq ft. Can be indoor or outdoor. Ideally have tables to store cold tubs (to minimize bending/lifting with heavy tubs).



Container Area

250 – 800 sq ft open space. Indoor or outdoor. Smooth, level surface preferred. Must accommodate up to 20 containers with at least 24" spacing.

Also needed: Staging area (i.e., “hot room” separate from search areas, not visible)

INTERIOR ELEMENT

	Novice	Advanced	Excellent	Master
Area Size	100–200 sq ft	200–400 sq ft	2 areas (400–800 sq ft)	3 areas (600–1,000 sq ft)
# of Hides	1 (Known)	2 (Known)	3 (Known)	0–3/area; 2–6/class (Unknown)
Max Height	2 ft (Accessible)	3 ft (Accessible)	4 ft (1 inaccessible)	5 ft (All may be inaccessible)
Time Limit	1–3 min	1–3 min	1–3 min/area	1–3 min/area (No 30-sec warning)
Distractions	None	1 Non-food	2 (Non-food, food, auditory, or visual)	3 (Non-food, food, auditory, visual, human)
Blank Areas	None	None	None	Max 1

Required: Alert only (Novice) → Alerts + Finish (Advanced/Excellent/Master)

EXTERIOR ELEMENT

	Novice	Advanced	Excellent	Master
Area Size	200–400 sq ft	400–800 sq ft	800–1,500 sq ft	1,500–2,000 sq ft
# of Hides	1 (Known)	2 (Known)	3 (Known)	1–4 (Unknown)
Max Height	24" (Accessible)	36" (Accessible)	48" (1 inaccessible)	60" (All may be inaccessible)
Time Limit	2–4 min	2–4 min	3–5 min	3–5 min (No 30-sec warning)
Distractions	None	1 Non-food	2 (Non-food, food, auditory, or visual)	3 (Non-food, food, auditory, visual, human)

Key Considerations: Clear boundary markings required (stanchions, tape, cones). Search area must have natural features — plants, benches, vehicles, or structures. Judge needs to walk the area before trial day if possible.

CONTAINER ELEMENT

	Novice	Advanced	Excellent	Master
Area Size	250–400 sq ft	400–600 sq ft	600–800 sq ft	600–800 sq ft
# of Containers	10	15	20	20
# of Hides	1 (Known)	2 (Known)	3 (Known)	1–3 (Unknown)
Container Type	Identical cardboard boxes	Various size & type	Various size & type	Various size & type
Arrangement	2 rows of 5	3 rows of 5, circle, or U	4 rows of 5, circle, or U	4 rows of 5, circle, or U
Min Spacing	24"	24"	24"	24"

Time limits: Novice 2 min | Advanced 2 min | Excellent 3 min | Master 4 min (no 30-sec warning)

BURIED ELEMENT

	Novice	Advanced	Excellent	Master
Area Size	150–200 sq ft	200–400 sq ft	300–400 sq ft	400–500 sq ft
# of Hides	1 (Known)	2 (Known)	3 (Known)	1–4 (Unknown)
# of Containers	6 (Sand)	8 (Water)	12 (6 sand, 6 water)	16 (8 sand, 8 water)
Arrangement	2 rows of 3	Any	Any	Any
Time Limit	2 min	3 min	4 min	5 min (No warning)
Min Spacing	36"	36"	36"	36"

2025 Changes: Sand depth reduced to 2–3" (min 1" above vessel). Vessel diameter now 1–2". Water hides: drop scented cotton swab to bottom — no more aquarium tubing/suction cups. All tubs must have cotton swabs for consistency.

HANDLER DISCRIMINATION

How It Works

The handler provides a scented article. The dog must locate the handler's scent among the articles with other human scents.

The steward places the hide — not the judge.

Novice: Handler supplies a sock or glove in a ziplock bag. Need 1 4-fold container (not mailers) for each dog entered, not reused.

Advanced - Master: Handler supplies cotton ball or swab. Containers may be reused between handlers.

Novice

Container search (n=10) | 1 handler item & 1 judge item | 2 min

Advanced

Interior search | 1 handler item & 1 judge item | 2 – 5 min

Excellent

Exterior search | 1 handler item, 1 judge item, 1 steward item | 3 - 6 min

Master

2 different elements | 3 handler items, 1 judge item, 1 steward item | 2 – 3 min/area

TARGET ODORS BY LEVEL

NOVICE

Birch

ADVANCED

Birch
Anise

EXCELLENT

Birch
Anise
Clove

MASTER

Birch
Anise
Clove,
Cypress

ODOR HANDLING

Store odors in sealed glass jars. Handle scented cotton swabs with tweezers and powder-free, nitrile gloves — never touch cotton swabs with bare hands.. Prepare scented swabs at least 24hr before the trial. Place hides at least 10 minutes before running the Demo Dog.

PERSONNEL & VOLUNTEERS

Trial Secretary

Processes entries, prepares catalogs and armbands, manages class transfers, compiles results for AKC submission within 7 days

Judge's Steward(s)

Assists judge in setup and cleanup, helps with flow of competitors into and out of the search area, places the hides in HD

Gate Steward

Manages the running order at the staging area, calls handlers, ensures smooth flow between search areas

Trial Chairperson

Oversees all logistics, leads the Event Committee, handles misconduct issues, ensures safety and emergency plan

Timer / Scorekeeper

Operates stop-watch or other timing device and must be available to time for all dogs in a given class

Demo Dog

Works the search before competition begins to verify that odor is available for each hide and that there are no extraneous odors present

EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

Club Typically Provides

- Containers (e.g., boxes, bins, bookbags)
- Sand and water tubs with metal grate lids that latch
- Play sand and tea balls for sand tubs
- Boundary markers and start cones
- Timing device / stopwatch
- Score sheets and clipboards
- Powder-free, nitrile gloves
- Extra cotton balls and gloves for HD
- Blue painter's tape
- Demo Dogs

Judge Typically Provides

- Cotton swabs scented with birch, anise, clove, and cypress (not combo scented)
- Unscented cotton swabs for Buried and HD
- Scent vessels
- Tweezers for odor handling
- Sealed glass jars or smell proof PET/foil bags for transporting scented swabs
- Clipboard and pens
- Distractions
- Demo Dog

TYPICAL DAY-BEFORE-TRIAL LOGISTICS

Club Members / Volunteers

- Unload supplies
- Set up Container and Buried search areas
- Fill buried tubs
- Setup score room
- Set up check-in and hospitality areas

Judges

- Walk all search areas and verify dimensions, surfaces, safety hazards
- Consider hide placement options
- Set boundary markers and start cones, if possible
- Run Demo Dog on cold containers and buried tubs to ensure they are odor-free
- Create maps for Detective searches

TYPICAL DAY-OF-TRIAL LOGISTICS

1 Judge arrives early to set odor

2 Judge runs Demo Dog to ensure odor is available, ensure no unwanted odor is present, determine yes zone, and set time limit

3 Judge announces time limits and other parameters at the Handler's Briefing

4 Judge runs each dog, records time and faults, notes # hides found, scores run as Q or NQ

5 Judge review catalog of results against each scoresheet

6 Judge sets up search areas for the next day of trial

LET'S RUN A GREAT TRIAL

Clear communication before the trial makes everything run smoother on the day. Please send me venue photos, entry counts, and any questions early.

AKC Scent Work Department

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Premium Lists: scentworkPL@akc.org | Results: eresults@akc.org

