How to Video Your Dog Agility

By Christy Gammage
Practice Makes Pawfect

Videoing your dog's agility run is great for many reasons and situations. One popular reason is when you are competing and want to show friends and family your successes. Alternatively, you want support from your coach or friends on your less-than-successful runs. Another obvious reason to video is if you are participating in any sort of video-based competition like NADAC's video runs, USDAA's @Home program or the IDAL or AKC Leagues as we covered in a previous article. The best reason, however, is to analyze what you and your dog are doing during training.

You don't need expensive equipment to get good videos. Most everyone has a mobile phone that is more than capable. Your setup can be as simple as propping your phone up against something, pressing record and going out to practice. A better solution is if a friend or family member can be your videographer. Here are some hints, tips and tricks to make your videoing easier and more useful.

First – video in horizontal mode if possible. You and your dog will be covering a good bit a ground and it is much easier to keep you both in frame with more horizontal space.

Holding it up – if you can't always talk a friend into being your videographer, something will have to hold the phone. Again, it can be as simple as books or blocks to lean the camera against or sandwich in between. With these simpler solutions the challenge can be height and angle, so consider buying a very simple tripod. They range in price from $5 and up. The flexible ones, with a chain of ball joints for the legs, can be wrapped around things like an unused jump standard. If you have a regular tripod for a 'real' camera, there are phone holding attachments available.

Framing and placement – if your phone is stationary, check the limits of what is in the frame while in video mode (it's often different than camera mode). You may have to compromise between getting the extents of the exercise or zoom out enough to get both near/far/left/right action. Is there a better placement to get the 'important' parts of the exercise? If the video will be uploaded to an organization, check their requirements for what must be captured in the frame (like contact zones and all the jump bars). If videoing for your own review, where should the camera be placed to show your handling line and dog's path?

Start & stop – let's face it, there is a lot of down time when doing agility practice. You could just leave the video running all the time and use a video editor to cut out the down time. But that's work effort, battery life, and device space you might not have. So, get your exercise laid out and dog warmed up. Turn on the camera as y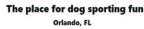ou go to the 'start line'. Run the sequence, reward the dog, then go turn off the video. Give your dog something to do (crate, down, go sniff, etc) or a long-lasting reward while you watch the video. Watching it immediately lets you compare what you felt happened vs. what you see on the video. Make your plans and set up for the next repetition. If submitting the video to an organization, they will have rules on what must be included in the start and end of the video (like dog must start and end on leash). Don't let a good run be wasted because you forgot to capture a startup or ending requirement.

If you do have a personal videographer, much of the above still applies, but here are some additional tips for them. On a 100'x100' field, the zoom level needed when the dog is near will mean the person and dog are tiny at the far end of the field. Practice using the zoom feature and use it as needed, but sparingly. Know if the handler wants themselves to be in the frame or are they just interested in the dog. (Most handlers want to see themselves to determine how/where they sent the dog off course or how a dropped bar was caused.) Remember that video also records audio, so watch your comments while videoing as they are now part of history.

Automated videography – there are products you can buy that promise to track your movement and handle zoom levels. Pivo and Pixem are examples. Pivo is an application and phone holder that uses your phone's image processing capability to evaluate which way to turn the phone and its zoom level. Pixem uses a wearable tracker and 3 beacons placed around the ring. I've tried Pivo with some success, but you need to be reasonably close (+10% of the frame) and can't get 'lost' behind the big equipment. They seem to be focusing on the human and horse market now, but had a dog setting last I used it. Pivo costs in the low hundreds and Pixem is over a thousand dollars. There may be other products available as well.

Post-processing – once you've captured your video there are all kinds of applications that let you edit, add text, sound, and graphics to turn your video into cinematic art. You can upload to a video hosting platform like your own YouTube channel or Vimeo for sharing, storing, or more editing. So, put on your director's hat, have fun and Better Practice!