

Getting Started in Dog Agility

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Dog agility looks like fun. You've seen it on TV. You think your dog would be great at it. You may be asking "How do I get started?"

It helps to have some basic skills before tackling agility. Without those you can still do agility; but there will be more skills to develop simultaneously. Ideally your dog should come running when you call them, regardless of what else is going on. A "Sit" or "Down" and a "Stay" are useful at the start line of the agility course. Your dog should be comfortable walking on a leash around other dogs and people. They don't have to be friendly to everyone, but at least not aggressive or overly stressed in public situations.

What else can help your dog learn agility? Tricks! The tricks can be useful in



warm-ups and help the dog focus when faced with distractions. The biggest benefit of tricks is that it helps you learn how to train and helps your dog learn how to learn.

Since you probably don't have an agility course in your back yard, finding a local

instructor makes progress much easier. In Florida you can start with this website: <http://FloridaAgility.com>. Its section on Training lists (and maps) agility instructors and facilities by geographic region. There may be facilities not listed, but it is a good place to start.

Another way to find an instructor is to go to a local competition, watch the competitors and talk to people. See who has students there and

how they interact. Ask people you admire about their instructor.

Now that you have some leads, reach out to the instructors. Maybe take a private lesson with them first, even if you are interested in a group class. The instructor

will get to know you and you will get a feel for how the instructor teaches before committing for a longer period. Look for someone who emphasizes positive training and rewarding the dog.

What if you can't find an instructor nearby? Don't despair. There are abundant online classes now. You might have to make or buy some equipment, but you can still learn agility. Start by looking for a class that talks about "foundation" skills. This is where any new dog (puppy or adult) should start. Your dog will learn body awareness, how to be comfortable walking on narrow planks and things that wobble, the value of going over jumps and into tunnels. You will be learning basic handling skills, where to stand & move, and how to reward to get the most out of your practice sessions.

Master these foundation skills and you are on the path to agility success.

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