

Beyond the Basics in Dog Agility

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PracticeMakesPawfect.com

So how long does it take to learn agility? As the Zen masters ask: how long is a piece of rope? It depends. Every person and dog start from a different place and learn at a different rate. Decide on your goals. If your goal is to get some exercise and have fun with your dog, then it doesn't matter how long it takes; just enjoy the process. If you want to compete (and do well), then expect to spend a year or more building skills.

You may have seen high level agility competitions on TV with the dogs flying around the course. Those handlers make it look effortless as they direct their dog to the correct obstacle. As in most things, there are a lot of steps to get to that level. Luckily, competitions have separate classes based on skill levels. Beginner courses are shorter and more straightforward. You earn your

way to more difficult levels by completing courses successfully (called getting a "qualifying" run).

Major skills you and your dog must master include:

- * jumping from various angles and speeds
- * going over the A-Frame, Dog Walk, and Teeter-totter safely and quickly
- * weaving through the poles accurately
- * directing your dog from a distance to the correct obstacle
- * dealing with the busy competition environment
- * learning to memorize a course and plan your "run"

The better prepared you are, the better the outcome. Let's say your dog does great in class and great at home with some obstacles



you have. Now, try taking it on the road by setting up some obstacles in a park. Go to a competition (called a Trial) without your dog to see how it all works. Another great introduction to competition is entering your dog in local "Fun Runs" or Matches. Next, take your dog to a trial, but don't enter (if the organizers allow it). Bring what you

would need if you were actually entering: a kennel, treats, toys, shade, water, etc. How does your dog handle the atmosphere? Take the time to watch the classes, or better yet, volunteer to work. Agility trials depend on volunteers to run smoothly. You will learn a lot about how an agility trial runs and how your dog will do.

If you are confident that you and your dog can easily do all the things in the beginner class even with all the distractions of a trial, then you are ready to compete, do well and have fun!

When and where are the trials? Check the Calendar section at <http://FloridaAgility.com> or go to each of the different organizations' website.

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