

Ways to Learn Dog Agility

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There are many things you do with your dog that might lead you into agility. You might have an obedience background, love hiking with your dog, or have taught them some fun tricks. You may want to expand the activities you do with your constant companion. You may have enjoyed some basic classes and want to do more with your dog. Or you would like to enrich your pup's life (and maybe your own). All of these are great "pre-agility" starting points.

So how can you learn agility? Roughly there are 3 ways: self-taught, in-person instruction, and online courses. Self-taught is the toughest way to go. Many people get started by reading books, online articles,

watching videos and playing around with home-made obstacles. The main benefits: it fits your schedule and budget and you can start at any time. The drawbacks? Good equipment can be pricey. But mainly, having a well-thought out program of what to introduce, how and when is important when

learning anything new. You would have to be very self disciplined to correctly put the building blocks of training in place by following a program outlined in a book. Most people want to skip ahead to the 'fun' stuff and fail to put in the foundational work necessary to keep your dog safe, happy and confident. You will

probably make elemental mistakes and not even know it. This will cost you subsequent time and effort or, worse, deter you from continuing agility at all.

In-person instruction is a great option if there is an instructor within reasonable driving distance. You can find some at <http://FloridaAgility.com> or by asking around at competitions. Why take in-person classes? First, an instructor should have

a program in place that will introduce skills and concepts in a structured manner. Second, you get immediate feedback to keep you from going down the wrong path, scaring your dog or getting frustrated. Third, a weekly class keeps you on track and provides some external incentive to progress. Your instructor can act as a mentor and guide for when you have less focused queries.

The next question: private lessons or group classes? Either can work and it may depend on your pocketbook and social preferences (of both you and your dog). If you are in an agility rich area, you may have your choice of instructors. Ask to watch a



training session or take a private lesson to evaluate an instructor before signing up for a longer series. Group classes are commonly how people start in agility. Benefits include seeing how other teams handle the exercises and having some down time for you to process what the instructor has said. Many people enjoy the social aspect of group classes. General obstacles to in-person lessons: No instructors within driving distance. An appropriate class may not be starting in the near future. You might not like the instructor. Your dog may not like the environment. Don't be afraid to shop around to find the best fit.

Online courses are popular and plentiful in today's world. Well-known names appropriate for people starting out: Susan Garrett, Fenzi Academy, Agility University, Bad Dog Agility, Clean Run, One Mind Dogs, and others not listed here. Some online courses are more real-time, with start/end dates and homework to be handed in. Others are 'on demand' and can be started at any time. Most are designed to be completed in a set number of weeks with

access to content extending some time beyond that.

Often there are different pricing levels for different participation levels; think 'working spot' vs. 'auditor'. With a 'working spot' you can send in videos of yourself and get feedback. A benefit of online courses is that they can be accessed from anywhere with an Internet connection. You are getting proven, experienced instructors. Each course usually has a specific target subject. HINT: look for "Foundation" courses. Drawbacks are similar to the self-taught option. Online courses can be piecemeal

so you would be assembling your own learning program. There is no immediate feedback, so you may struggle to implement any feedback days later. You must be self-disciplined to participate and complete the course since there is typically no accountability or peer pressure.

So which option is best? Chances are you will be using all 3 at some point in your journey. If available, start with in-person instruction. Getting the fundamentals correct by having immediate feedback is a big plus. Self-study and reading can always improve understanding. As you progress, maybe take some online courses to get a different perspective or dive in on a problem area. We live in a world full of learning options; go learn agility.



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