

# Your Agility Training Journey: Human Foundations

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This month we cover the human side of foundation work, namely training concepts. Agility isn't a sport where you send your dog off to be trained, then you take them back for competition. Your instructor should be coaching you on the concepts that will make you a better trainer for your dog.

Rewards are key in teaching behaviors. Knowing what type of reward to give when and where will speed training along. Rewarding with the wrong thing or at the wrong time or in the wrong location can actually hinder progress. But when in doubt, reward the dog anyway.

Another big concept is breaking down the training into very small steps. Why? Making each step very small (and therefore very easy) allows you to reward your dog for being right. Plentiful rewards equals a

happy and engaged dog, eager to learn more. Hard tasks and getting rewarded only if and when they finally figure it out can rapidly demotivate a dog. Trying to do agility with an unmotivated dog is very frustrating. Gradually increasing the difficulty allows the dog to learn solidly and quickly without making mistakes, keeping everyone happy.

So how do you break a task into small steps? You can work on small individual pieces or start with a very easy version of the whole behavior. One example for jumping: Start by walking the dog over a bar on the ground, then walk them past a jump wing, then between 2 jump wings, then put the bar on the ground between the jump wings and walk them over it. Each time they get a treat for doing something very simple. That only takes only a couple of minutes, but now you have a dog happy

to interact with the jump. Now you could start raising the bar by a couple of inches and walking (then running) with them over the bar as you gradually raise it; again, rewarding each time. OR instead of adding height, work on other jump skills. Leave the bar on the ground and call them over the bar, then send them to a reward on the other side, then work on angled approaches, then recall/send through 2 "jumps" in a row. With no height, you can do this with a puppy. When they get old enough to jump, a lot of the training is already done.

Once a behavior is trained, then you start working on adding the 3 Ds: duration, distance and distractions. Example: now that your dog will sit and stay, can you walk away from them (time & distance) with another dog barking (distraction)? This is your start line stay. Again, use small steps, only increasing the difficulty incrementally



on one of the Ds at a time.

Spending the time to have good solid foundations means you will progress much faster and won't have to go back and shore up crumbling basics later on.

**Challenge for Today**  
**Cognition Test for Dog Lovers**



**A B C D puppies**  
**M N O puppies**  
**O S A R puppies**  
**C M P N ?**

**Answer:**  
**Able, see the puppies?**  
**Them are no puppies.**  
**Oh yes they are puppies.**  
**See 'em piddlin'?**

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