

Agility Table Manners

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Practice Makes Pawfect

As your mother always said, it is important to have good table manners. The first "contact" obstacle that most dogs learn in agility is the Pause Table (or some may think Paws Table). It is a contact obstacle because the dog's paws must touch the contact zone which is the top of the table. Historically in competition, the dog was to jump on the table without hesitation, assume a sit or a down and stay there for 5 seconds (hence the "pause" in the name). Some organizations do not use the table at all. Other organizations currently do not require any particular position. In CPE there is no 5 second requirement because it is used to stop the clock in games classes. UKC uses a box on the ground instead of a table. Regardless, having table manners is an important life skill.

Easy, you think. The dog just has to hop up on a table. From speed. And stay there. In an exciting and distracting environment. Possibly with the handler at a distance. OK, now we know what we need to train.

Does your dog know how to go to a mat or a bed? That is a good start. Being able to

send your dog to a marked spot with you 5-10' away on the couch is useful in daily life. Most people train this by rewarding the dog heavily when they are on their mat or bed, then adding the command. Check online for step-by-step training of a "place" or "go to mat" command. The caution here is that the dog should stay there until you release them. In normal life we often forget the release and eventually the dog will release themselves.

A table by definition has some height to it. It shouldn't be any higher than the dog's official jump height, but landing on top is a different jumping effort, so some practice is needed. You can start on a lower height table, but the dogs figure that part out pretty quickly. The height is actually very useful for training the duration. When using a mat or bed, the definition of "on" is somewhat fuzzy. With a table it is pretty obvious to you and the dog when they are not on the table. You don't need an official table to practice and you can use about any safe object that the dog can jump onto; chair, bench, sturdy box, really any sort of



Table sturdiness is especially important for the big dogs

platform. Doing this out in public and in more exciting environments is a great way to practice.

Now you have the dog going to the table, jumping on and staying there until you release them. Let's add in speed. This changes the jumping effort and possibly the landing effort. With the newer rubberized equipment, traction is pretty good. However a really fast dog that doesn't check themselves can still go sliding across the table and fall off the other side. An agility dog needs to learn how to decelerate and collect their body for quick turns after jumping and adjusting their stride to get to a jump properly. This same skill is needed when coming into the table. You can help the dog learn to adjust their stride by setting

up a single jump then a line of jumps or a straight tunnel to the table, gradually adding more distance and speed. For very fast dogs, training an immediate lie down on the table will help keep their center of gravity low and helps avoid overshooting or sliding off.

Pause tables are 36" square. A ~3" vertical edge around the perimeter lets the dog see the height they need to jump. The height depends on your dog's height. An example from AKC: 8 inches for the 4 and 8 inch jump height, 12-inches for the dogs in the 12 inch jump height, and 16 inches for the 16 inch jump heights and 20 inches for the 20-inch division. In most organizations the dog's jump height is around or below the height of the top of their shoulders/back.

Official agility tables are pricey, but this is an obstacle you can certainly DIY. There are other dog specific platforms you can use if you already own them. Handy people can take a piece of plywood, add a 2x4 frame underneath and supporting legs. FORMUFIT has detailed plans using PVC as the base. For smaller dogs you can re-purpose a kids tables or the IKEA "Lack" end table, etc. Paint the top with sand mixed in for traction or glue a yoga mat on top. Just make sure it is strong and stable enough to support your dog hitting it and has enough traction they won't slide off. Sturdiness is especially important for the big dogs.

Now take your dog out and put them on a pedestal.



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