

Who Needs to Practice?

By Christy Gammage
Practice Makes Pawfect

Anyone who starts an activity eventually realizes that to enjoy that activity you need to improve. Dog agility is no exception. Then the question becomes: How? What steps should I take and in what order? Where can I get feedback and am I'm doing this right? Frequently the first step is to find an instructor that has been successful in performing and teaching the skills that you want to learn. They will layout a program, teach you the skills and provide input on how to improve. While you will see progress with a once a week or periodic lesson, rapid improvement always involves practice. Your instructor may give you specific homework or may just expect you to repeat what was done in the lesson. In either case, it is up to you to follow through on your own. If you are doing the self-taught route then the practice is the learning.



Practicing well is a skill in itself. It involves planning, scheduling, executing, and analyzing. During practice you aren't going to have someone telling you when, where and what to do. Developing good practice skills takes practice. (See a theme here?)

Planning: How do you decide what to work on? If your instructor hasn't told you something specific, then you should start with your most fundamental problem. Is your dog ignoring you? Won't stay or won't come? While not sexy skills, these are the foundation of having both a dog you like to live with and a good agility run. You can work on these skills anywhere (and should everywhere). A dog that listens to you in an exciting environment will focus on you when you need them to take that tricky sequence of jumps.

Need to work on more complex skills? Break them down into their components and practice those separately. You don't

need any 'real' equipment to work on many skills if you break them down and plan exercises using household or natural objects.

Scheduling: The micro skills we've been talking about can be practiced in small sessions throughout the day or at every feeding time. Incorporating them into your daily life is a great way to solidify them. Dog won't stay at the start line? Make them sit and wait while opening any door before you let them through. If they get up before you release them, just smoothly close the door until they sit again. Need to work on left/right turns? Use some of their dinner kibble on your evening walk.

Eventually you will want to work on skills in a 'real' setting. Say you've rented an agility facility for an hour. How can you make the most of your time and money? Before arriving make a plan of what you will be working on. Your dog's contact performance or short sequences that were challenging in class or at your last trial are good options for this setting. However, if the new environment is a challenge for your dog, then work on well known things until your dog becomes more confident. Renting a facility with a friend is a great way to cut the price, take breaks to avoid overworking your dog and generally have a more enjoyable time.

Executing and Analyzing: These two things are intertwined because as you work with your dog you should constantly be



analyzing how it went. Was it too easy or too hard? Should you add complexity or break the skill down into smaller pieces so the dog understands. Be prepared to throw your lovely plan out the window if the dog demonstrates it needs more basic work on something else. Even if you don't address an issue right now, make a note of it and plan some exercises to work on it later.

All skills, big and small, require practice. Work the small and foundational skills into your everyday life. To make the most of your time on agility equipment have a plan for practicing the more complex skills. Dog and instructor will tell you if your practice is moving you towards your goals. Listen to their feedback and always make it fun for your dog. Happy Practicing!

Main Street
MSI Insurance
Agency INC.

Competitive Quotes On:

- Horse Mortality
- Equine Liability
- Automobile
- Homeowners
- Recreational Vehicles
- Business Insurance

352-463-1136

3260 W Patton Ave., P.O. Box 289 Bell Florida 32619
352-463-7634 fax

mainstreetagency.com

Licensed to sell insurance in NY, NJ, TX, PA, CA & FL



Hours:
M-F 8-6 S 8-5
Closed Sunday

941-371-6591
Fax:
941-378-9754



STOCKYARD
Feed & Western Wear



Specializing in Purina Feeds



We carry feed, ranch supplies, hardware,
western wear, home & garden and pet supplies

Stockyard84@verizon.net

1010 Cattlemen Road, Sarasota, Florida 34232



The place for dog sporting fun
Orlando, FL

Agility Field Rentals
Trials and Seminars
Fun Runs
Structured Practice



Christy Gammage
agility@gammage.org
PracticeMakesPawfect.com



Get Spotted...

ADVERTISE!

Horsepny@tampabay.rr.com