

# Cross Over to the Agility Side

By Christy Gammage,  
Practice Makes Pawfect

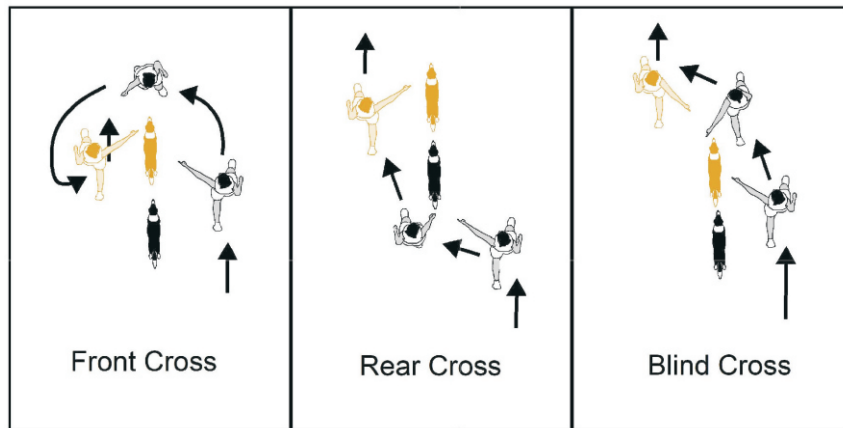
Dog agility courses are usually 15-20+ obstacles arranged in a winding path within a ~100'x100' ring. There are loops, curves and twists along with straight line runs. Sometimes the dog will be on your left, sometimes on the right.

Why do you need to be on both sides of the dog? Why can't you just run the course with the dog on one side of you? Mainly because agility is a speed competition and dogs can usually run faster than their handlers. (Especially when the handler is a mature person of questionable athletic ability.) To get the best time the dog needs to go as fast as possible over/through the obstacles. The handler can, and should, take shortcuts between the obstacles to get ahead of the dog to show them where they are going next. If the course path is looping back and forth, you and the dog will be changing sides.

How you and the dog switch sides is called a "cross" in agility. As well as using crosses to shorten the handler's path, they also are used to turn the dog. Dog's tend to curve towards their handler as they run the course. A well placed cross can show the dog that the next obstacle is the one the handler is moving towards, not the obstacle right in front of the dog.

## There are 3 basic types of crosses.

The Front Cross is where you are ahead of the dog and switch sides while facing the dog. The Rear Cross is where you step behind the dog as they are running forward.



In a Blind Cross you move across the front of the dog's path but both of you are facing forward so you will lose sight of the dog as you go across his path. Variations of these crosses may have other specific names but first you need to learn these basic crosses. Video is much better at showing the dynamic nature of these different crosses and an online search will turn up plenty of examples at speed and with turns in different directions. Here are some written descriptions to help you learn the movements. (While you don't use a leash in agility, it is useful to represent which hand is closest to the dog.)

To understand a Front Cross, abbreviated as FC, imagine you are heading North with the dog on your left and the leash in your left hand. Your goal is to have the dog on your right side. While walking forward, step in front of your dog facing them,

passing the leash to your right hand in front of your body. Continue to turn your body all the way around in a counter clockwise movement (from facing North, across in front of the dog facing West, South, East and finally North again). You might want to try it with the dog sitting still first to get the footwork down.

For a Rear Cross (RC) again start with your dog on your left side walking North. In this cross you send the dog ahead of you, step behind them passing the leash from left hand to right hand and catch up to the dog who is now on your right side (still walking North).

A Blind Cross (BC) is performed by moving ahead of the dog, stepping to the left across his path while still facing North and passing the leash from left hand to right hand behind your back. Both you and the dog stay facing North, similar to the rear

cross. As you cross ahead of the dog, you can't see him for a split second, hence the name Blind.

## When is one type of cross better than the others?

Each has advantages and disadvantages, but first, you have to train your dog to understand each one so you have options to choose from. The Front Cross is what most people start with. You always have eyes on your dog and can use it to make some pretty sharp turns. In our Front Cross example you could stop rotating 3/4 of the way when you are facing East and start walking for a 90 degree right turn to the East. However, FCs can be hard on the handler's knees.

The decision may be made depending on where you are in relation to your dog. If you are behind them, then a Rear Cross is your only option. With a slow dog, you may never be behind to do a Rear Cross. In a Blind Cross there is the chance you might 'lose' your dog when you take your eyes off them and have to reconnect with them over your other shoulder. But BCs support the dog's forward motion (speed) better than the others. They each have trade-offs.

A great exercise is to run a curvy sequence or figure-8 of obstacles with all FCs. Then try it again with all RCs, then try with all BCs. You will get to practice all of them and easily see where one type of cross works better. Bottom line - you need them all in your handling skills toolkit to get the best out of your dog in every scenario.

*Happy Practicing!*

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