

One Jump, Multiple Cues



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Practice Makes Pawfect**

Looking at a jump, you may think the dog just runs at the jump, leaps into the air and subsequently lands and runs off. Well, yes. But there are a multitude of variations to all those parts. Angle, speed, bend before and after the jump,

moving parallel from the handler at a distance, coming toward the handler, sending away from the handler, even going around and taking the jump from the backside coming back towards you. We've talked about training for many of these in previous articles.

But how does the dog know what they are supposed to do as they approach the jump? That's your job. Once you have the dog going to the obstacle you directed them to, now you need to add more information than 'take that jump'. The dog needs that additional information as soon as possible so they can adjust their stride, the jump angle, their focus to the next obstacle, and more. You are their navigator. Just like us, they don't want to hear "Turn NOW!" as the side street passes us by. They want to hear "Right turn coming up ahead. In X feet, use the right 2 lanes. Right turn here." so they can slow down and put their blinker on.

We do this through all sorts of cues.

One of the primary things a dog responds to is your position relative to them and how you are moving. Are you running flat out? Are you hanging back? Are you running

then coming to a screeching halt? Those will influence if your dog is also running in extension or collection. You want extension if the next obstacle is going forward on the dog's path. You want collection if the dog will need to turn immediately or the obstacle is better performed with collection.

Are you pulling away? Is your path converging with theirs for a rear cross? These are turning cues; towards and away from you. The direction your arms, chest and feet point also cues the dog which direction is now and/or which direction is next. Dogs who commit early to taking the obstacle can handle getting clues about where they are going next. Less experienced dogs can be confused or pull off a jump if they get too many 'pre-cues' about the following obstacle.

In addition to all our physical cues, we need verbal cues. We've covered:

* "Go On" (keep running in extension, more or less straight ahead, regardless of where the handler is)

* "Out" (dog should continue to parallel your path but moving further away from you)

* "Right"/"Left" or "Switch"/"Back"+"Come" (right/left relative to the dog, switch/back both mean turn away from the handler)

Here are some more verbal cues that are very useful to let the dog know earlier and in greater detail what is coming up:



* A cue to just shorten stride and proceed in a more collected stride. Example cue word: "Check" (as in check your stride).

* A cue to take the jump and wrap around the wing 180 degrees and go back in the direction they came from. Example cue words: "Wrap", "Dig", "Cik/Cap" or "Zig"/"Zag" (for left and right wraps), "Around".

* A cue to go around to the backside of the jump and take the jump coming back in the direction they came from. Example words: "Push", "Back", "Around"

Sending your dog to a jump with "Go On" is totally different than sending them to the jump with a "Wrap" or a "Push". The earlier the dog gets that cue, the earlier and better they can adjust angle and speed.

As you see, the same word can be used for different movements by different handlers. The word you use for a cue is your decision. You must teach your dog what behavior you want when you use your chosen word. I use "Back" as a cue for my dog to step backwards. Therefore, I would never use "Back" to also mean turn away from me or go to the backside of a jump. Pick verbals that make sense to you.

All these physical and verbal cues are the language you develop with your dog. They have their own physical and verbal language as well. That head turn towards the off-course obstacle should be countered with earlier, specific information from you. The barking at you on course is them asking questions they need the answers to. The richer the communication, the better you can respond to each other. And remember, it is all a language of love. Happy Practicing.

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