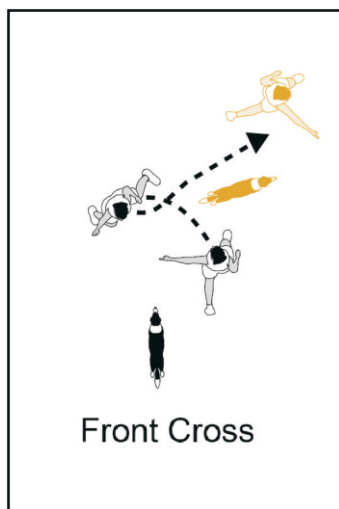


Agility Criss-Cross

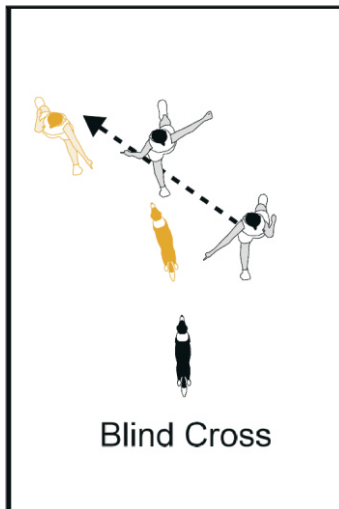
By Christy Gammage
Practice Makes Pawfect

Dog agility courses are arranged in a looping path. To run it efficiently, sometimes the dog will be on your left, sometimes on the right. How you and the dog switch sides is called a 'cross' in agility because you cross paths. Let's dive deeper into the mechanics and subtleties of switching sides.

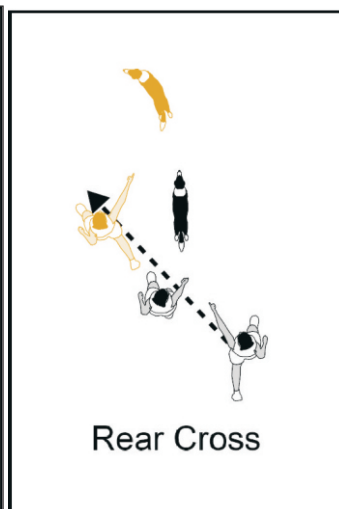
There are 3 basic types of crosses. The Front Cross is where you are ahead of the dog and turn to face the dog as you switch sides. The Rear Cross is where you step behind the dog as they are running forward. In a Blind Cross you move across the front of the dog's path but both of you are facing forward so you



Front Cross



Blind Cross



Rear Cross

will lose sight of the dog as you go across his path.

Where you are in relation to the dog may force you to use a particular cross. You can't Front or Blind Cross if you are behind the dog. But which cross should you strive to use, when and why?

A Front Cross is the strongest turning cue for the dog. In its most basic form, you are essentially blocking the dog's path and redirecting them in a different direction. Because you turn towards the dog, you can keep a clear connection with the dog. There is no chance of you losing sight of the dog or them losing sight of you. A Front Cross is also good for signaling collection to the dog to make that sharp turn. A good Front Cross involves 3-4 (large) steps. For the first step, use your dog-side foot to slow your forward motion. As you continue to move forward, the second step you begin rotating toward the dog and start redirecting your motion. The third step may be even more rotation to the new direction. The fourth step is used to power off in the new direction. The amount of rotation determines how sharp the turn. Because the handler's path involves rotating 90-180 degrees, it can be hard on the handler's joints.

Blind Crosses are also performed when the handler is ahead of the dog. As the handler runs forward, their face, shoulders and dog-side hand should be turned/reaching back towards the dog. Just before the handler crosses over the dog's future path, they change the side that they are looking back over their shoulder and visually connect with the dog on the new side. Because the handler continues to run forward across the dog's path, a Blind Cross does not have the collecting action of a Front Cross. Done well, it

can encourage the dog to run faster to catch up. The angle of the handler path across the dog's path and the handler's subsequent path determines the dog's degree of turn. Blind Crosses are not usually the best choice for any really sharp turns.

If you have a very fast dog, you better learn to steer from the rear. A Rear Cross should also communicate a turn for the dog. Dogs tend to curve their path towards the handler. If the handler crosses behind the dog, the dog should naturally turn their head towards the handler on the new side and start curving that direction. If you are crossing behind the dog before the dog takes off for an obstacle, the dog should expect to turn for the next obstacle as they land. If the turn needs to be further past the obstacle along the dog's path, you can also cross behind the dog after they complete the obstacle, essentially cueing a turn on the flat. Similar to the Blind Cross, the angle and subsequent path of the handler is used to steer the dog the appropriate amount.

When planning your handler path around a course, each change of sides should be evaluated for which cross would work best. In general, Front crosses are more controlling, can eliminate off-course obstacles, but may slow the dog down. They have more challenging footwork than the other two crosses where you continue to run forward, just across the dog's path. Blind crosses work well for when you want to encourage speed, you need a minor change of direction, and off-course obstacles aren't a danger. You need to train Rear crosses (even with slower dogs) for situations when you want to send the dogs ahead and turn them away from your previous arc to continue back the

direction you came from.

When the handler is ahead of the dog, they have the most direct influence on the dog's path. Even with very fast dogs, you can get ahead of them with lead-outs and sending your dog out laterally or ahead for independent obstacle performance while you go to where your dog will most need your direction.

Many handlers will default to one type of cross the majority of time, based on their history. I challenge you to take a

sequence and try the crosses with which you are least comfortable. Mastering all three types of crosses will keep your toolbox of skills as full as possible.

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