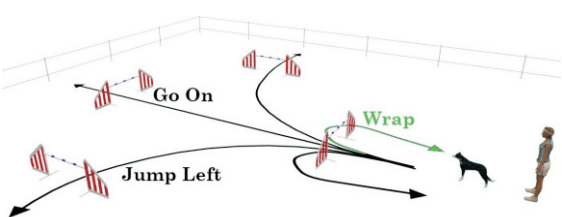


It's a Wrap in Agility

By Christy Gammage, Practice Makes Pawfect



There are many ways for a dog to take a jump; from running full speed over jumps in a straight line to collecting up for a 180+ degree turn upon landing. That tight turn after a jump is called a wrap in dog agility. And for a dog to wrap well, they require training.

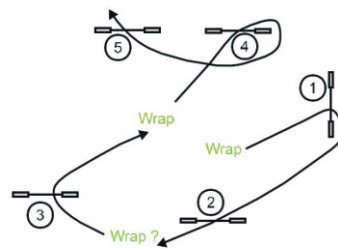
First, we need to teach the dog the mechanics of turning tightly around a jump. As usual, we will break the skill down into its component parts. We start with a turn around a cone or jump wing. We can shape or lure the dog around the obstacle, rewarding the dog for initially just going around the object and later rewarding to encourage speed and tightness. Place or deliver the reward on the dog's circular path. Practice wraps on something with some width to it like a wing instead of just a jump stanchion. Work both left and right turns, concentrating on one direction before adding the other. Once we have a single good turn, start asking for multiple circles around before rewarding. Next, we add a low bar and go back to a single wrap around the wing. Now that the dog is doing something close to the finished product, we can add a verbal cue to name this type of performance. Common examples: "Wrap", "Tight", "Dig", "Check". Since these verbals may be used at a distance, you may want different cues for a left wrap vs. a right wrap. Some examples are: "Loop"/"Wrap", "Lee"/"Ray", "Cik" / "Cap", usually repeated multiple times.

When navigating a dog through an agility course, the dog

needs information about where they are going as soon as logical and possible. Think of your verbals as the electronic voice on a maps application in a car. Would you rather it yell "TURN LEFT NOW!" or tell you "In a quarter mile, at the traffic light, use the left lane to turn left." Similarly, you should be giving the dog the verbal cue to wrap while they are still many strides away from the jump. This allows them to collect their stride in preparation for a short landing and immediate turn. If you don't give the cue soon enough, the dog assumes a straight jump in extension. When the cue comes while they are in the air, they physically can't change their trajectory, and they will land long. A good dog will then try to immediately turn, which is hard on their body and increases the chance of a slip or injury. If your cues are consistently late, the dog will always start slowing down and collecting for a jump in case you want a quick turn afterwards. This will lead to slower performances overall, which is not what we want in a timed sport.

To test the dog's understanding, stand back from a jump and send the dog ahead of you over the jump. Use your normal cue ("jump", "over", "go on", etc.) and reward after the jump on a straight path by either throwing the reward or using a remote treat dispenser. Then alternate with your wrap cue(s). For the wrap, reward from your hand or along the dog's circular path. The goal is for you to stand still while the dog, on a verbal cue only, either sends straight away over the jump or jumps then turns around the left or right wing back towards you.

Once the dog responds correctly to the wrap cue(s) on one or two jump sequences, we move it into course work. It is your job to decide when it is appropriate to use. I only use the wrap cue if the dog's path is really turning back the way from which they were coming. Is the turn just a 90 degree left or right? Then don't use your wrap cue, even if



you want a 'tight' turn. If you dilute the cue for just 'sharpish' turns, you won't get a true wrap when you need it. In the 5-jump sequence shown, you can see along the dog's path the timing of when you would want to cue the dog. You could argue that obstacle #3 is not really a wrap. And if obstacle #5 were not there, I would not use a wrap cue. But if using a regular turn cue, obstacle #5 is the

next obvious choice after #3. Here the wrap cue adds clarity and helps shape the dog's path to take #4. You may need to make these types of judgement calls but be aware of when you might be diluting a cue.

Wrap cues can also be used for coming out of tunnels or turning from the down ramp of a contact into a tunnel underneath. Having a well-trained wrap verbal will allow you to inform the dog well in advance and lead to tighter turns and faster scores. Better Practice wrapping it up!

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