

Beginner's Guide

Agility

What is Agility?

Agility is a competition where the animal's fitness and the handler's ability to train and direct the dog over and through certain obstacles are tested. Agility tests are run against the clock to ensure that handlers do not take their dogs round the course at a walking pace in hope of ensuring a clear round. The setting of a reasonable course time together with the careful design of the course allows the dog and handler to show their skill at control and speed.



Beforehand

Go and watch. It is a good idea to attend some Agility shows to just watch what goes on. There are many Agility shows every weekend so there should be some near to you. For details of shows there are two specialist magazines, Agility Voice and Agility Eye. The website www.agilitynet.com not only lists the shows but also allows you to download many of the schedules. Most show organisers are happy to have spectators, but as only entered dogs are allowed, do not take your dog.

A Suitable dog

Before training a dog to do Agility it is important to check that it is physically able to do what you are going to ask of it. Providing that it is not overweight most dogs can cope, but if there is any doubt ask an experienced trainer. Different maximum jump heights are used according to the size of the dog, i.e. dogs less than 350 mm (1ft 1.75 ins) to the withers, jump between 250 mm and 350 mm (1ft 1.75ins) these are referred to as Small dogs. Dogs over 350 mm (1ft 1.75 ins) but under 430 mm (1ft 5ins) to the withers are

Medium dogs, these jump between 350 & 450 mm (1ft 5.7 ins). Dogs over 430 mm (1ft 5 ins) are referred to as Large dogs, for these the jump height is between 550 and 650 mm (2ft 1.6 ins)

Age of dog

Dogs under 18 months are not allowed to compete, but depending on the breed some training can be done much earlier.

Join a club

The Kennel Club can give you a contact for you local dog training club, there are large numbers of clubs training Agility. Many of the clubs will insist that your dog does a basic obedience training course before allowing Agility training. Some clubs will also require handlers to take part in other activities, for instance attending regular obedience training evenings at a local hall.

Basic training

This is not a training guide, but you do need some control before starting Agility. Socialising with other dogs and people and ensuring that your dog comes to you will avoid your dog becoming a problem at Agility classes. Agility dogs work off the lead, so the dog must do as it is told. Some Agility clubs have waiting lists

to join. There may also be a private training organisation local to you, but this may cost slightly more. If you have problems finding somewhere to train, ask your YKC Agility Co-ordinator for advice.

It is a good idea to attend a training day with one of the many top handlers who offer these. This will provide your dog with a chance to work in a different place, and a lot can be gained from a training day by watching other participants as well as taking in what the instructor is saying.

Registration

Dogs must be Kennel Club registered. Working Sheepdogs or crossbreeds can be registered on the Activity Register. Note that some other countries do not have an equivalent of our Activity Register, so in these countries only pedigree dogs can compete.

Your first show

If you are training with a club the trainer and other members will advise you which shows to enter and will probably suggest that as several of the club members will be going you will have lots of people to help you.

If you do not train with a club, attending a training day is definitely something that you should do. The YKC holds training events which give you a chance to train with other YKC members. ▶



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Types of show

Limited

May be limited by age of handler, breed or by the number of dogs that can enter. Other examples include YKC events where entry is limited to members.

Club Matches

Many Agility clubs hold inter club matches with other local clubs. These sometimes have junior classes and they may be ideal for your first show.

Open

Open to all. Normal for big events.

Championship

A large show with a championship class.

Companion Dog Show

In Agility there are no exemption Shows. This is because it would not be a good idea to allow complete beginners to compete.

At the shows

Arrive early. Before the class begins the handlers walk the course.

First ensure that your dog is exercised has a drink, and then leave it safe whilst

Checklist for your first show

- ✓ A good pair of trainers with reasonable grip on grass
- ✓ Ring clip for attaching your ring number
- ✓ Ring card and running order if sent beforehand
- ✓ Schedule
- ✓ Suitable clothing according to weather
- ✓ Reflective cover to put on the car window if the weather is hot
- ✓ Collars. Only flat, close fitting, leather or webbing collars are permitted, with no dangling ID Disc. A plain identification panel is allowed as an integral part of the collar, i.e. not attached by a ring

you go and find the rings that you will be running in. The class number is listed on your ring card, and by the ring there will be a notice that tells you the classes that will be run in that ring. Watch for split classes as the parts may not be in the same ring.

Now walk the course. Please note dogs are not allowed in the ring except when competing. Do not tie your dog to the ring ropes as it may get into trouble trying to get to you. Firstly just walk around, following

the numbers, learn where to go.

Then walk it again visualising where you will be and deciding what side of the obstacles you want to go. If you have time walk it several times but do not forget that you may have more than one course to walk.

When it is your turn, walk calmly to the start. Remove your dog's collar and lead. Remember that you must not carry anything in the ring, so bum bags, toys, etc must be left at the start. At most shows a steward will take your collar and lead to the finish ready for you. Wait to be told by the timer or scribe/timer to go in your own time, but once given the OK do not delay. Try to keep calm and whatever happens be nice to your dog. Most errors are due to handlers.



Recommended Reading

Agility is Fun by Ruth Hobday
For further information about shows:

Agility Voice:
editor@agilityclub.co.uk

Agility Eye:
enquiries@agilityeye.co.uk

Agility Net:
www.agilitynet.com

Further information

For further information please contact the YKC office at ykc@the-kennel-club.org.uk or visit the Kennel Club website www.the-kennel-club.org.uk

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