

Obstacle Course 1 Training Instructions

These instructions are very basic guidelines to help you achieve the objectives on your merit badge check-off sheet. They are not intended to supersede any of the information your instructor gives you at the Orientation & Safety Lecture or Field Session.

Open Tunnel A-Frame Jumps

Open Tunnel Introduction:

Show your dog the tunnel. Let him sniff it. Toss his object of attraction into the tunnel a short distance to see if you can make him curious enough to venture in. Getting the dog to enter the tunnel the first time can be like trying to convince him to walk through fire! But, after as few as **one** successful attempt at going through the tunnel, the dogs are convinced that this is a really cool thing to do. After a few repetitions, you can't keep them **out** of the tunnel! Be patient. If you have to, crawl through the other end of the tunnel to coax the dog in to you, then give him a favorite treat or favorite reward item.

Sometimes it is helpful to "scrunch" up the tunnel and make it shorter, so that it doesn't look so spooky. By making the tunnel only a few feet long, some dogs will be a little more brave about going in. However, other dogs become even more frightened by the movement of the tunnel (while you are trying to hold it in a scrunched position) or the extra material which gets wadded up when you scrunch it (it makes the opening look even smaller).

Do not try to push or drag your dog through the tunnel! This will only make him more fearful of entering the dreaded "dog-eating snake." Take your time, and work slowly at the dog's pace. The dog needs to associate the tunnel with his best rewards, not with force or fear. Help the dog see that the tunnel is fun! Be sure not to use the tunnel cue until the dog is going through it confidently or the cue might get associated with the uncertainty of the learning steps.

When your dog will easily enter and exit the tunnel, you can then add the cue word, ("tunnel"). Then you can start working from further back, and from both sides, until the dog will approach the obstacle from any direction and take it as directed.

Do not proceed to learn the other tunnels (curved and chute) until your dog has mastered the straight open tunnel. Once that is mastered, add a very slight curve to the tunnel. You can gradually add more and more curve as the dog gets confident with each amount of curve.

A-Frame Introduction:

Start with the A-Frame lowered to a very negotiable height. If flat on the ground is necessary, then flatten that sucker out! However, most dogs are unafraid enough to try it for the first time with a slight incline. The instructor will help you judge the best height for your dog to start.

Walk the dog up and over the A-Frame. Place your treats on the "contact zones" (the yellow areas on the up and down sides of all ramp obstacles). Use a word to help your dog understand that he should look down for some food which has been left there for him. You can use any word for this. Some choices are: there, spot, treat, look, place, touch or whatever you think works best. The dog should always get his treat on these zones, never from your hand after he is already off the obstacle. In addition, if your dog accidentally by-passes the zones, do not let him return to the obstacle to get it. That teaches him that he does not have to stop, as he is free to go back. It also teaches him to steal food from the contact zones without being cued over the obstacle, and it also encourages him to run up on obstacles over which he was not asked to climb. If your dog misses the food, just go on.

As the height of the A-Frame is raised to become more of a challenge to your dog, he should still willingly try to traverse it, as he has done so at a less steep angle. Place your hand around the buckle collar to steady the dog if needed. As the A-Frame reaches full height, use a spotter (a person walking on the opposite side from you to keep the dog from falling or jumping off). If you are luring with food or a toy, keep it toward the center of the obstacle and not off the side. As with all the obstacles, be sure to switch sides from time to time so the dog gets accustomed to you being on either side of the obstacle.

If the dog balks on the A-Frame at its full height, it will usually be on the down ramp. Down is scarier than up. That is why dogs tend to want to exit the obstacle right after they get to the top (the most dangerous point). To help your dog overcome his apprehension, pick him up and place him on the down-side contact zone for his treat, then walk him off. Gradually place the dog further and further back up on the obstacle and have him walk down to get the treat, then walk off. Work your way to the top and over (in reverse) until the down-ramp will be a piece of cake to the dog. Any dog who shows fear at any time in the learning of this obstacle can be taught using a "back chained" method in this manner by starting him at the end of the obstacle and having him work his way in steps closer and closer to the beginning.

When the dog begins taking this obstacle with ease, add the cue. Some suggestions are: walk-up, climb, frame, scramble, wall, or anything else you wish to name it.

When your dog will easily enter and exit the A-Frame, and you have added the cue word, you can start working from further back, and from both sides, until the dog will approach the obstacle from any direction and take it as prescribed.

Jump Introduction:

Introduce the jumps by first walking the dog on leash over the jump at its lowest height. Jump over the jump with the dog. If the dog balks, put the jump bar on the ground and let the dog walk over it. Don't use your jump cue yet since the dog shouldn't really need to jump at this stage.

Next, use your target, or throw a treat or toy over the jump and have the dog jump after it. Some dogs do better if a helper holds the dog on one side (very close to the low jump) while the handler calls the dog from the other side of the jump (give the dog room to land!) Most dogs enjoy jumping, so they learn this one rather fast. Gradually raise the bar and once you know the dog will jump you can start to say your jump cue just before the dog jumps.

After the dog learns the basic bar jump, he may progress to other jumps, like the Solid, Brush, Long and Tire jumps. You'll also need to have him comfortable with jumping a jump that has decorative "wings" on each side. These wings force you to move farther away from the jump than a jump without the wings, so this can sometimes cause a dog to go around the jump toward you instead of over it. The jumps are different enough that you may want to name each type. For example, you may want to use the word "jump" or "hup" to cue the solid jumps - the word, "bar" to name bar jumps - the word "over" to name long jumps and the word "tire" to name the hoop jump.

When your dog will easily jump for you, and you have added the cue word, you can start working from further back, and from both sides, until the dog will approach the obstacle from any direction and take it as directed.

Combining Obstacles:

After your dog learns each obstacle, he can put them together as part of a course. To help your dog learn to do more than one obstacle, gradually add additional obstacles in a straight line before you reward the dog for completing them. After the dog will do several in a straight line, add curves.

Practice the three obstacles you learned for this badge by doing them first individually, then combine them as a series, to teach the dog the idea of going from one obstacle to the next. Try putting his favorite obstacle last, and place the target at the end. Practice the obstacles in a straight line, a curve to the right, and a curve to the left. Practice going out, and then back over the same obstacles.