

Dog Scouts of America

Flyball 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 supercede any of the information your instructor gives you at the Orientation & Safety or Field Session.

BACKWARD CHAINING

Backward behavior chaining is a term used to describe a type of training in which the last behavior in a chain is taught first. Flyball is not one behavior. It is a series of over 25 behaviors completed together, in a chain. The easiest way for the dog to learn a chained behavior such as flyball, agility or obedience is to start at the end and move toward the beginning. This accomplishes two very important things:

1. The task becomes ever more easy for the dog, instead of ever more difficult, as you add each new part of the behavior chain. Why? Because you're not adding anything new on the end. The dog always finishes up with something he already knows how to do well, and feels successful after completing each chained sequence.
2. Each behavior becomes a "cue" for the behavior which follows it. For example, jumping the fourth jump is the cue to hit the box; hitting the box is the cue to catch the ball; catching the ball is the cue to turn and run, etc.

TARGET (Focus)

The reward for the dog is **always** at the end of the chain. The end of the chain is when the dog has successfully run the course and brought back the ball. He is doing this for a **reason**, for his **reward**. The reward must be his **goal**, his **focus**, his **target**. The focus can be the other ball you will give him at the end. Or, it could be a toy a treat, a game of tug of war, or a wrestling match. Whatever it is, **IT MUST BE THERE EACH AND EVERY TIME** for the dog. If you train without a focus point, your dog will run without focus. He may wander into the other lane, or try to turn around and run back to get another ball from the box, or he may chase another dog down. The dog **MUST BE ABSOLUTELY RIVETED ON HIS TARGET**.

FINISH LINE + TARGET

Have a helper hold your dog and call him to you over and past the finish line. Show him his target. When he gets to you, give him the target as his reward.

JUMP #1 + FINISH + TARGET

Have the helper hold your dog behind the first jump. Walk away and go **over** the jump yourself. Show him the target. Call him. Get excited. The helper lets go and aims the dog toward the first jump. If the dog fails to jump, he does **not** get the target. Have him try again. Remember **not** to walk around the jump. The dog is not stupid. If he sees you go around the thing, he will, too. When he is doing well repeatedly go on.

JUMP #2 + JUMP #1 + FINISH + TARGET

Same as above. Remember to walk through (over) the jumps. Don't be surprised if the dog only jumps **ONE** of the two jumps. After all, that is what he knows so far! He may try to skip the 1 st or the 2nd, but be patient, and don't reward him until he does both jumps. When he is doing well repeatedly go on.

JUMP #3 + JUMP #2 + JUMP #1 + FINISH + TARGET

Same idea as last time. If you are progressing slowly enough, and your dog is focused, he should have no trouble adding the 3rd jump. When he is doing well repeatedly go on.

JUMP #4 + JUMP #3 + JUMP #2 + JUMP #1 + FINISH + TARGET

Just like before. When he is doing well repeatedly go on. Make sure you are rewarding him well past the finish line. You want him to continue running fast well beyond the finish.

1/4 TURN + J#4 + J#3 + J#2 + J#1 + FINISH + TARGET

Have the helper turn the dog slightly (about 90°), so that he has to **turn** and run to the 4th jump.

1/2 TURN + J#4 + J#3 + J#2 + J#1 + F + T

Have the helper turn the dog all the way around (180°) so that the dog must **turn around** and run to the 4th jump.

ANGLE OFF TO THE SIDE+4+3+2+1 +F+T

Have the helper hold the dog a little off to one side of the mat, so that the dog has to aim for that 4th jump instead of cutting the corner and running straight toward the finish line. This is necessary in case the dog ever drops or fumbles the ball during play. The dog **must go back** to that 4th jump, no matter how far out of line he had to chase a rolling ball. Leave the dog with the helper and walk around the **far** side of the jump. Touch the upright. Look at the dog. Pat the 8" board. Say, "jump, jump, jump," or whatever you usually say when he is jumping the series of jumps. Take a few steps toward the finish line so that you are about between the 4th and 3rd jumps (off to the **far** side of the racing lane). Get him excited and take off running toward the finish line. The helper lets go when you start running. The dog will beat you to the finish line, so **throw** the target well past the finish line, so it will be there for him. That is, IF he jumped as requested... Do angles off to the right and left, and move **progressively further out**, until your dog will run back to the 4th jump from 10 to 15 feet out of his lane.

NOTE: BY NOW, THE DOG MUST HAVE LEARNED THE BOX TO CONTINUE BOX (Pedal + Catch + Turn & Run) + 4+3+2+1 +F+T

Stand within 14 feet of the box. Have the helper encourage the dog to hit the box. Let go of the dog and turn and run beside the jumps toward the finish line. The dog should run to the box, hit it, catch it, turn and run back over the jumps. He will likely beat you to the finish area, so be ready to throw his target well past the finish.

JUMP #4 + BOX +4+3+2+1+F+T

Start between jumps 4 and 3. Let dog run to box over jump #4 and run back over all jumps to the finish. The following three steps are very important. Do not skip ahead because you know by now that your dog will do this. Back up **one jump at a time**, and do each one until your dog is doing it well.

JUMP #3 +4+B+4+3+2+1+F+T

Back up to between jumps 3 and 2. Same as before.

JUMP #2+3+4+8+4+3+2+1+F+T

Back up to between jumps 2 and 1 and do it again.

JUMP #1+2+3+4+8+4+3+2+1+F+T

Back up to the starting line to release the dog over all four jumps. Very good. You're not done yet.

Your dog has learned the main flyball sequence, but he is not the only dog on the team. Now you have to start backing up, 3 to 5 feet at a time, and keep practicing until the dog will run at the jumps from 25 or more feet back from the starting line.

Most mid-sized dogs can reach top speed in about 1.5 seconds, or about 15 feet. This means we want to let them go at least this far from the starting line to achieve maximum speed during the individual dog's run.

SHAPING THE FLYBALL BOX PEDAL PUSH

Begin by familiarizing your dog with the box (uncocked, unloaded). Praise your dog for going near it.

When working the box, the first rule is ALWAYS keep at least two balls on you at all times.

Encourage your dog to make contact with the box. Use a ball as a lure, and when he touches the box, use the reward marker and toss him his ball. (Reward marker can be verbal or a clicker.)

When the dog shows no qualms about touching the box, proceed to shape only touches on the pedal area of the box. Use reward marker and toss him the ball. Ignore all other attempts. NEVER put a ball in the cup at this stage, or you will have a dog that is bent on prying the ball out of the hole with his nose instead of using his feet to trigger the pedal, as he should.

When the dog will come up and hit the pedal area most of the time, begin only reinforcing direct hits which would be strong enough to trigger the box.

When the dog has the idea to walk up and pounce on the pedal with his feet, you can start cocking the box, which will make a thumping noise when he hits the pedal. DO NOT LOAD the box at this time, just cock it. Get him used to the sound. Toss his ball and praise for the reward. Start working with two people, if you haven't already. The handler needs to walk the dog up to the box, and the helper is loading and/or tossing balls to reward the dog. When the dog catches the ball tossed by the helper, call his name, and turn and run with him.

When he comes to ignore (or positively associate) the sound of the box, begin loading it also. Lure him up to the box, as always, with the other ball. When he trips the pedal, be ready to toss his ball to him (he may not see the one being projected out of the box). Always "load" with an extra ball in each hand, in case he misses it. The ball is his positive reinforcement. You want to make sure he gets it every time. When he catches the ball, call his name, and turn and run away (get the jumps out of the way--we're just working on the box, here).

Next, as he approaches the box, hide your ball behind the box, so that the only one in view is the one in the cup. If he misses it, encourage him to get it, but be prepared to throw your back-up ball. When he gets the ball, call his name, turn and run.

When he has the idea of hitting the box and catching the ball from the cup, concentrate on the turn from the box. The instant he has the ball, he should be hearing his name, and should turn and run to (with) you. If his turns are slow, he has not grasped the concept that his target motivator awaits him at the finish line.

To produce quick turns at the box, you can bounce a ball off the face of the box as your dog approaches. The dog will jump after the ball, landing on the pedal, but about that time, the ball will have already bounced and be on its way back toward the finish line. The dog will have to shove off the box the instant he hits it (like a swimmer's turn) to leap after the ball. The dog is actually turning and catching the ball at the same time. Another way to accomplish this, is by having the "loader" throw a ball from the side of the box as the dog is just getting ready to hit the pedal. As the ball zings past, the dog will push himself off to chase after the ball. NOTE: Throw the ball from the side the dog naturally turns toward.