

# AKC Agility Primer



## *Survival Guide to your First AKC Trial in the Post Covid Era*

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## Agility Competitions in the US

AKC sanctioned competitions (usually called trials) are hosted by dog clubs that are members of the American Kennel Club. Individuals may not host AKC trials. There are a number of other organizations that sanction agility trials besides AKC such as USDAA, UKI, NADAC, CPE and more. Each organization has its own set of rules and types of classes within the competition along with variations in jump heights depending on the official height of your dog. Europe and other countries have their own sanctioning organizations, each with their own set of rules. This guide pertains to AKC trials only and may not reflect any recent rule changes as we are in a state of flux due to the Covid pandemic.

### Regular AKC Trial & ISC AKC Trial

There are two types of sanctioned trials under the purview of AKC. The normal, basic AKC trial which is what most people do and ISC (International Sweepstakes Class) which is a completely different type of agility course. Recently (as I write this in 2024) ISC is becoming more popular and offered more often as a standalone trial. Sometimes ISC classes may be offered as part of a regular AKC trial. More on that topic later. For now we'll talk about regular, traditional AKC which is where the majority of exhibitors begin their agility competition journey.

### Who's Who at an AKC Trial

**Exhibitors/Competitors.** That would be you and almost every other person at the trial.

**Workers at trials.** Typically the only paid people at trials are the judge(s) and the trial secretary. All the other NUMEROUS jobs are done by volunteers who are also competitors just like you (description of the jobs will come later). Trials could not be held without many volunteers. Often clubs give something to competitors who work various classes, usually coupons for a few dollars off entries at the next trial or coupons that may be used at the snack bar at the trial. Sometimes they offer worker raffles for various fun prizes as well.

**Trial Secretary.** The trial secretary is an extremely important person. She/he is in charge of all things relating to entries, collecting payment, producing scribe sheets (more on those later), entering results in the computer system which is sent to AKC and so much more. Most of the questions you may have as a newcomer will come under the trial secretary's purview. You will have contact with a trial secretary prior to the trial after sending in your entry or entering via an online system. If you enter using one of the online entry systems, you will receive an immediate email confirmation that your entry was received. You will also receive an email confirmation from the trial secretary. This is the IMPORTANT one and the one you should read immediately and completely. NOTE: The confirmation from the trial secretary usually comes at a later time. It's usually best not to bother trial secretaries asking if they got your entry unless the trial is about to close and you haven't heard anything. Each secretary has their own system. **If the secretary found any issues with your entry form, they will be addressed in this confirmation or as a separate email and you need to fix them prior to the close of the trial or you may lose your spot.** Trial secretaries are extremely busy both before, during and after a trial. And they are usually running their own dogs so we try very hard not to disturb the trial secretary with questions that can be answered by someone else.



**Trial Chair and Trial Committee.** The trial chair is a member of the club hosting the trial and is responsible for almost everything relating to the trial. If there is a problem with anything at the trial NOT involving something that happens in the ring and is not related to the secretarial duties, it is usually up to the trial chairperson and/or committee to solve. The trial chair is the person to go to if there is a problem with the facility, parking, restrooms, warm up jump, etc. If there is a problem that requires action such as an aggressive dog incident there may be a hearing in front of the chairperson and the rest of the trial committee (designated club members) who are required to be present. A determination will be made whether or not the dog is allowed to continue at the trial or made to leave. If the incident happens INSIDE the ring, then the judge makes the determination. **This is very rare. A final determination will come at a later date directly from AKC as to the future of that dog in AKC.**

**VMO.** Volunteer Measuring Official. These are people licensed by AKC to formally measure your dog for his jump height card. VMOs are often other competitors at the trial. If no VMO is present, the Judge of Record acts as VMO. Post covid it seems we have fewer VMOs (at least in the area I trial at) so stay on top of the ever changing rules and make sure you know the club's policy if your dog needs to be measured. It will be stated in the premium. Details on getting your dog measured are further down in this primer.

**Judge.** The judge is responsible for pretty much everything that happens inside the ring. His or her word is law. Judges are also responsible for some things that happen outside the ring as well. The judge is usually the designer of the courses you will be running. These courses are planned well in advance and submitted to their supervising AKC representative for approval. Once in awhile at large trials with multiple rings and judges, a judge may be judging a course that another judge designed due to what they call load balancing. Judges are only allowed to judge a certain number of dogs per day so there may be some switching around at big trials.

**AKC Representative (aka "Rep").** Sometimes there is a Rep present at a trial. The Rep may be there for a variety of reasons such as a new judge, a club that has had some issues in the past and other things. It is unlikely you will ever have contact with the Rep.

## Entering Trials

To enter an AKC agility trial, your dog must be listed with AKC either as their registered breed, a PAL registration (for dogs that are clearly a stated breed but do not have papers - see [AKC.org](http://AKC.org) web site), or as a canine partner (mixed breeds - read about canine partners on the AKC.org web site). Note: a club does not have to allow canine partners but most do. It will be stated in the premium. There are other restrictions regarding dogs with disfigurement that interferes with movement, bandages, and more so read the AKC rulebook.

If you have never put an AKC agility title on a dog before, you will enter Novice A. Novice B is for those who have put agility titles on previous dogs. Trials that have only one judge tend to fill very quickly so you should arrange to have your entry in on the day the trial opens by one of the methods below. Secretaries are not allowed to accept entries prior to opening day.

**WITHDRAWING:** If you need to withdraw from a trial you entered, you must do so BEFORE the closing date of the trial to get a refund. **Exception BITCH IN SEASON.** If your entry is a bitch who comes in season, you must submit a veterinarian note prior to the trial day for a refund as bitches in season are not allowed to compete in AKC as of this writing. Some clubs also will give you at least a partial refund for an injured dog with a veterinarian note.

**READ the rules in the premium.** Each club has its own policies regarding parking, crating and any number of other things. For instance, smaller facilities may limit amount of space you can use. Two story facilities often reserve downstairs

crating for those with physical limitations. Parking may also have designated pre-assigned areas for the same reason. You want to know these things so you don't accidentally park or crate in the wrong place.

**ENTRY METHODS:** Most trials have two entry methods, paper and online. There are pros and cons to each method - see below,

**PAPER ENTRIES:** A paper entry with a check is acceptable at any trial. Filling out paper entries are cumbersome but there is an easy way. There is a free service online called Express Entries (link below). Create a free account and enter your dog's info one time. Then you'll be able to create PDF forms of entries with minimal input. Then just print them, sign them, include your check and mail! Here's the link to Express Entries: <http://www.oaklines.com/ExpressEntries/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fExpressEntries%2fDefault.aspx>

Pro: If you need to withdraw from the trial, and you notify the trial secretary prior the closing date, your check is simply shredded and you will not lose any money.

Con: If it's a popular trial that tends to fill immediately, you run the risk of getting waitlisted. Your entry isn't supposed to arrive any earlier than the opening date of the trial. Some people pay to overnight their entries but that is expensive and these days is not a guaranty either.

***If you get waitlisted....*** don't despair! You may well get in to the trial but you won't know until shortly after the closing date of the trial. Usually quite a few dogs get in from the waitlist.

**ONLINE ENTRIES:** Many trials allow entries via the AKC online entry system or via <http://www.labtestedonline.com>. There may be other online entry options in parts of the country I'm not familiar with. They will be stated in the premium. To enter a trial online via AKC, you will need to create an account if you have not done so and navigate to the online entry system.

Pro: You can enter at 8am the morning the trial opens and usually get into the trials that fill on the first day. You'll need to use a credit/debit card. Note: The AKC entry system is a bit cumbersome so allow extra time to figure it out! LabTestedOnline is simple and straightforward. It will also create a paper entry for you just like the one I linked above. LabTested charges \$10 per year but it is worth if you're in an area like mine where most trial secretaries use their system.

Con: If you need to withdraw, your entry fee will be refunded BUT you will not get the AKC fees refunded (about \$3/per run). Be aware that if you enter via the AKC online system, your card will be charged immediately.

**ENTRY BY AGENT:** This is unusual but I have used it for convenience because there is one trial in my area that doesn't accept online entries which is a pain. If you don't want or don't have time to print an entry, write a check, get a stamp and mail it, LabTestedOnline will do it for you. Super convenient. But there is a hitch I discovered. If you have to withdraw from a trial and you used this method, it gets confusing because LabTested wrote the check, not you. I had this happen and it took awhile to get things sorted out. I informed the trial secretary and LabTested that I was withdrawing. LabTested told me they had to hear from the trial secretary. Well, neither of us did, until both LabTested and I made several requests. By this time, the closing date had passed but I was able to show I had withdrawn in a timely manner. Eventually LabTested got the refund and they refunded me immediately.

**Check Your Email!**



Once you've entered, keep checking your email. You will get several important notices from the trial secretary. You will typically get an initial confirmation soon after entering. Closer to trial time, you will get a Final Confirmation. **It is imperative that you read this.** Make absolutely sure your dog is entered in the correct classes and the correct height group. If you spot an error, email the trial secretary **IMMEDIATELY**. If you wait until the trial, it may not be possible to fix the error.

## Agility Gate App



At this time, many trials are using the Agility Gate app. The app is available free to exhibitors for both iOS and Android. The club has to pay a fee to use the app so it may not be in use at all trials. The Agility Gate app allows exhibitors to check in for their runs through the app and to follow along by looking at the gate sheets on their phones as dogs are crossed off when they run. This prevents large groups of people from gathering at the ring and gate sheet area. Learn more about the app here: <https://agilitygate.com> The code for your trial will be emailed by the trial secretary several days prior to the trial.



Using Agility Gate you can:

- Check in your dog / Mark your dog ABSENT / Mark a CONFLICT/Mark a marker dog
- Follow in real time to see who is running in the ring using the running order. On the app you can see as the gate steward marks each dog on the line the same way you would see it on the paper gate sheets. You will be able to see the whole gate sheet to know how many dogs before your run or how many dogs are left in that class. NOTE! Once in awhile, there are technical issues. If you notice no dogs are being crossed off and you cannot see the ring, you should go to the ring to see where they are at so you don't miss your run. It happens.
- Download the course maps \*posting time is dependent on the schedule of the developer\* but is usually sometime after midnight the morning of the trial.
- You cannot check-in until 6 am on the morning of each trial day. This is a precaution so people do not check in and then forget to mark themselves if they decide to not run.

## What to Bring

You will undoubtedly develop your own checklist of things to bring to trials but here are a few to get your started. These are just the basics if you will be crating in a building or near the ring. At some trials it may be possible to crate out of your car.

- Crate & Crate Mat
- Water bowl/pail and jug of water
- Treats/toys + treat bag to take to ring area



app

absent

here

- Poop bags
- Food/drink for yourself
- Chair for you
- Collar/Leash
- Sheet to cover your dog's crate to protect them from other dogs.
- A copy of your dog's registration papers or a photo of it on your phone so that you can read the registration numbers for measuring paperwork.
- Collapsible wagon to haul everything (often available at Academy Sports and other outdoor stores) if you have to park a ways away from the crating area.
- If you're trialing on artificial turf, you'll probably want a small sprayer bottle of water to wet your dog's feet before they run. Artificial turf can be slippery and just plain water tends to work very well for most dogs.

Many people bring an extra set of sneakers and socks. One to walk the dog (where your feet often get wet from grass) and another clean, dry set to change into - especially at an indoor trial. A towel is often a handy item to have. I keep a complete change of clothing in my car, including shoes and socks ever since a friend of mine fell into a muddy sinkhole at a trial and was drenched to the bone! I also keep yet another pair of running shoes in my car just in case. One time a friend, who was running late, arrived at the trial in her bedroom slippers. Luckily for her, she was my size and I had an extra pair! Crazy things happen at trials.

## When to get there

Many trial secretaries provide an estimated timeline which will help as a guide. These are usually posted on the secretary's web site and/or the club's web site a day or two before the trial. However, these are **ESTIMATED** times! The only guaranty is the very first class start time. Do not rely on the timelines. Typically classes will run earlier than the timeline shows - sometimes as much as an hour early. Allow plenty of time to arrive, unload, set up your crating area (if not done the day before) potty your dog, etc. You're stressed enough without having to rush

## Crating at Trials

If your dog tends to bark, whine or be reactive toward dogs getting near his crate, then PLEASE try your best to crate in an area away from the heavy traffic area. Covering your dog completely usually resolves this problem. If you are outdoors and it's warm, leave the back open for air circulation. Even if your dog is quiet and calm, it's still a good idea to cover at least the front of their crate as sometimes people walking by with their dogs will let their dogs rush up to crates. Your dog shouldn't have to be bothered by other dogs. At some trials, it's possible to crate out of your car.

## Getting Your Dog Measured

Your dog **MUST** be measured prior to running at his first trial. If your dog is under the age of two, your height card will be temporary and the dog must be measured again after turning 2. Dogs aged 2 and older must be measured twice by two



different VMOs to get their permanent height card. This need not happen at the same trial. If there is only one measuring person at your first trial, you can still run as long as you have one measurement. But you must get your second measurement prior to running at the next trial where there is a different VMO. If one measurement puts your dog in one jump height and your second measurement puts him in a different height group, you will need to get a third measurement to determine final height. Jump heights are determined by the official measurement - see rulebook. Larger trials will state in the premium what time the VMO(s) will be available. You can ask the trial secretary to point out the VMO to you or just ask other exhibitors. People are happy to help you. If there is no VMO at the trial, the judge of record will measure your dog (see current rules on this).

Somewhere around the ring or crating area, you will see the measuring table (usually an agility table) with a wicket on it and clipboards with paperwork. Before asking the VMO to do your measurement, fill out the paperwork on the clipboard. If your dog is age two or over and you're getting two measurements, you must fill this out twice. **You WILL need your dog's AKC number (or Canine Partner number) for the paperwork. It's a good idea to keep a copy of their registration in your trial bag or a photo of it on your phone.** Once your paperwork is complete, THEN ask the VMO(s) when they will be free to measure your dog. Remember, they are volunteers and are usually running their own dogs so be respectful of their time. While your dog is being measured, follow the instructions of the VMO. They will usually tell you NOT to feed cookies as that tends to change the dog's stance and can make them measure higher. They will want your dog to be as relaxed as possible and a good VMO knows how to achieve that.

## Courses & Maps

Courses are designed by the judge(s) and approved by their Rep prior to the trial. In pre-covid times, we picked up printed maps somewhere near secretary's table the morning of the trial. As of this writing, all maps are either being uploaded to the Agility Gate app or the trial secretary or club's web site the evening before each day of the trial. Courses won't be uploaded until some time after midnight. Some judges upload to their own web site. Your final confirmation will tell you where to find the course maps.

## Checking your dog in for each run.

It is very important that you check your dog in as soon as you arrive at the trial. For trials NOT using Agility Gate, check ins are done on actual printed gate sheets. The gate sheet is the running order for that particular class. Many trials post the gate sheets early in the morning so you can check your dog in ahead of time. Some trials put the gate sheets up against a wall ringside. Other trials keep them in a binder either at the course map area or on a table ringside. Just put a check mark next to your dog's name which lets the gate steward know that you are present and intending to run. A few trials wait until your class is course walking to make the sheet available - it will be on the board by the ring entrance. **Do NOT forget to check your dog in, preferably before walking the course if at all possible.** During the walk, the scribe (score keeper) and gate steward will be going through the scribe sheets making sure they're in proper order so your run is scored correctly. If your dog is not checked in, they will likely call out for you to see if you're running. You won't want to have your walk interrupted with these details.

## Potty Your Dog, Potty Your Dog, Potty Your Dog

When it's getting close to time for them to build your course, POTTYYOUR DOG! Even if they've gone earlier. Many times dogs will stress potty and you sure don't want that to happen in the ring so make sure the tank is empty. You will be nervous and that transfers down the leash so they will often have to potty more frequently than usual. Be sure to allow enough time for

walking your dog and be sure to always have extra poop bags with you. As of this writing, it is legal to keep a poop bag tied to your leash even when you go in the ring.

## Judge's Briefing

Once your course is built, the judge will call you all into the ring for the briefing. Do NOT miss this briefing! Please be respectful and listen to the entire briefing. No one should be walking the course during a briefing! The judge will go over some of the more important rules for you and will answer any questions you may have. Most judges are very nice to novice exhibitors (and hopefully everyone else!). They WANT you to qualify! And remember, judges are also agility exhibitors and they have all been in your shoes. It's also important to remember the judge is NOT judging your handling. He/she only cares about whether your dog makes it through the course according to the rules.

## The Walk Thru

AKC rules give you 8 minutes to walk your course. Then there is a 5 minute break before the first dog runs. Depending on the schedule, often the judge will extend this walk thru time in Novice. But they only have to give you the 8 minutes and sometimes they can't give you more. NOTE: In large classes, usually Exc/Mas, walk thrus are broken into groups. If there are multiple walk groups then there is no 5 minute break before the first dog runs. Only persons entered in that class are allowed to walk the course and if there are multiple groups of walk thrus due to a large number of entries, you must walk in your appropriate group which will be shown on the gate sheet and/or in the app. This is almost never the case in Novice.

When walking the course, try not to listen to what others are saying. They are not running YOUR dog. You know best how to get your dog through a course. If you see someone walking a sequence in a manner you have not thought of, you might walk it that way just to see if it might be right for you. If it feels good, fine but if not, go back to your original plan.

Often the judge will wheel the course while you walk. The judge will do this twice. Wheeling means they are measuring the yardage of the dog's intended path so they can calculate standard course times for each height group. Always move out of the way of the judge while you're walking.



Judge's wheeling apparatus

## Bringing your dog to the ring

Novice goes pretty fast so make sure you get your dog to the ring in a timely manner. Jumpers goes faster than standard. You will also want to make sure you have good treats and a toy if your dog plays with toys. Keep some treats with you to work your dog with before you go in the ring. **Remember, you may NOT have treats on your person in the ring.** Put the rest of your treats (a treat bag is a good idea) somewhere near the exit gate of the ring so you can quickly take your dog to reward them after the run. Often there is a table in the area you can set your treats on. NOTE: FEO entries may bring a toy but read the AKC rulebook as to which are acceptable - more on FEO later.

Look at the app or gate sheet so you'll know the two dogs ahead of you. Try to locate those dogs so you can be ready when you see them entering the chute area. The "chute" is the area leading up to the ring gate. If you see the dog ahead of you is, say a poodle (breed will be on the gate sheet), it is perfectly acceptable to ask anyone holding a poodle if they are so and so (use dog's name). Don't worry if you cannot identify the breed - just call out something like "Who is Spot?" That way you know who you follow.



**Trials on artificial turf.** Many dogs may slip a bit on artificial turf. You can usually prevent this by spraying your dog's feet with plain water a few minutes before going in the ring. Don't forget to bring your spray bottle to the ring.



## Getting ready to go in

The gate steward will be (should be) calling out dog's names. Some are louder than others so don't count on hearing them. Be ready to go! There is usually a chute area (a holding place) that is where the next dog waits. You are not required to wait in that area. If you have a dog that is highly excited by the sight of a dog running in the ring, it's fine to keep them back a ways until time to go into the ring as long as the gate steward knows where you are. This varies depending on the layout of the facility.

Water for artificial turf trialing to use on dog's feet

When you are getting close, you should be getting your dog's focus. This is not the time to be involved in conversation. The judge will have told you in the briefing when to go to the start line. Normally they will tell you something like "When the dog ahead of you is at the teeter (or some obstacle), take your dog to the line." Often the gate steward will tell you also to go in the ring. Sometimes gate stewards are a bit stressed (remember, they are all volunteers) so they may sound a bit short.

**IMPORTANT:** There are often inexperienced dogs and handlers. For safety reasons, I do not enter the ring until the dog ahead of me is under control regardless of when told to go in. The gate steward may be telling you to go in but he/she may not be aware that the dog ahead of you is a problem. If you think YOUR dog is going to be a problem after a run, it is a courtesy to mention to the person running after you that they should wait until you have the leash on before they go in.

## Entering the ring and going to the line

You must enter the ring ON LEASH even if you are carrying your dog. Set your dog up where you want them on the start line. LEAVE YOUR LEASH ON until you hear the electronic timer say either Go or Ready. That means the dog ahead of you is under control and the judge is ready for you. Do NOT remove your leash before the timer says go - this is not a rule but it is a safety factor.

The electronic timer lets you know the judge is ready for you to begin. It does **NOT** mean you must run immediately. Just that it is ok to take your leash off, get ready and begin your course. Most important: **Do not start your run until the timing machine has said Go or Ready.** While it sounds simple, nerves can take over and this is a common problem with novice handlers.



Waiting to hear Go or Ready from the timing machine.

**ABOUT YOUR LEASH.** Some rules enacted during covid for safety ended becoming permanent rule changes which is great. Leashes are one of them. You now have the choice of keeping your leash with you as long as it fits entirely in a pocket I believe. If you choose not to or you are using a harness that is not possible to keep with you, make sure to toss it in the general direction of the leash runner so that it will not be in the path of either you or your dog. Try not to hit the leash runner with your leash. Those metal clips hurt and it's hard to get volunteers after they've been hit in the shins with a metal buckle!

## Leading Out

At the time of this writing, the AKC rule allows you to lead out ONCE past the first obstacle. Check the rulebook for changes. If you lead out past the first obstacle (past the timers) and your dog gets up, you are allowed to go back and reset your dog WITHOUT TOUCHING him as long as he has not taken the first obstacle. If you do this, you may NOT lead out past the timers again. You will have to start with your dog. NOTE: This writing does not cover the Fix and Go rule (FNG). You can read about FNG in the rulebook.

## End of the course

You will exit the ring on the opposite side you came in on. Even if your run doesn't go as planned and you leave early, you must go to the exit gate. AKC rules state you MUST have your dog on leash prior to leaving the ring. Most clubs have gates set up to help you but some don't. A leash runner will have moved your leash to a spot (usually on a chair or in a bucket) near the exit. **LEASH YOUR DOG BEFORE LEAVING THE RING!** Even if you carry your dog out, the leash must be on! If you forget to put the leash on or if your dog runs into the exit chute area on his own, the judge MUST give you an NQ even if you ran clean. You will hear the judge blow their whistle if this happens. This is not the judge's fault. They are required to do this even though they don't want to.

When you come out of the ring: REWARD YOUR DOG FIRST!!!! You can talk about your run shortly but first reward your dog! Everyone will understand this.

## What to do if...

**The gate person tells you to go in the ring but the dog ahead of you may be a problem.** If you feel the dog in the ring ahead of you is not under control, do not enter the ring. The gate person is trying to do what the judge has asked but has no authority to "make" you enter the ring (although sometimes they sound like drill sergeants). Don't be intimidated by a gate person. Often the gate steward may not be aware of a problem. Be polite but indicate there is a problem.

**You get on the line but don't hear Go or Ready shortly thereafter.** This can happen if there is some sort of problem in the ring, usually difficulty with re-setting a fallen bar or adjusting a tunnel. But sometimes there is a problem that the judge must work out with the scribe (more on scribe later) which can cause a longer delay. If you are the first dog after a height change, it will take several minutes for ring crew to change the height of all the jumps (in this case, I do not enter the ring until all jumps have been changed or are almost finished). If the delay seems brief, you may wish to walk your dog in a small circle or doing something to keep focus rather than keep him parked on the line which may cause anxiety for both of you. In the rare case of a long delay, you may exit back out the gate, wait next to it and come back in. That is up to you. When you see the judge walking back to the center, put your dog back on the line. This is another reason not to remove your leash until you hear the timer voice say Go or Ready.

**The Judge blows a whistle during your run.** This means you are being excused from the ring. You have done something that requires you to stop running, gather your dog and leave the ring as quickly as possible. Don't question the judge, just leave immediately ON LEASH. When you come out, someone will likely have seen it and be able to explain what happened. Reasons for mandatory excusals are in the rulebook.

**Your dog runs off sniffing.** This is a very common sign of stress and happens frequently with novice dogs. Do your best to try to get your dog back and working again. Even if you are lost, just find a jump and try to pick a path toward the exit gate. If your dog will not go back to work, try to get control of your dog as quickly as possible by gently taking his collar or

picking him up if small enough and leaving the ring. The judge may blow the whistle if he/she feels your dog presents a problem. If a buzzer goes off, you have used your allotted time and must take your dog out of the ring. Remember to leash your dog before leaving.

**Your dog poops or pees in the ring.** This is the worst nightmare but it can happen. Sometimes dogs will do this due to stress. The problem is that the odor may distract dogs that run after you so people really don't like it when this happens. Exhibitors have been known to actually catch poop in their bare hands to avoid the wrath of fellow exhibitors (ewwwwwww)! If your dog pees, stay at the spot to mark where it happened until someone arrives to spray the area. If your dog poops and you have a poop bag, pick it up but remain in the spot until someone arrives with cleaner. Try to gently hold your dog's collar so he is not roaming the ring during this time. Then take your dog out of the ring as quickly as possible as the judge will have blown the whistle. If you are at an indoor facility, be prepared to pay a nominal fine to the facility for soiling the turf.

## **Workers Needed!**

Trials are run by volunteers. Clubs need the help of exhibitors just like you in order to run a trial. Typically there is a worker sign up sheet both on the trial secretary's web site or club's site and at the trial. Be aware that a class cannot begin until there are enough workers to hold it. Below is a description of each job.

**Ring Crew.** This is the job I recommend newcomers start with. Ring crew members sit in a chair in the ring during a class and set bars knocked by dogs and raise/lower jumps for the various jump heights. If you've never done it before, just let the others know and they will help you as will the judge. Note: Should a dog approach you while sitting your chair, turn your head away and ignore the dog. You may not bring food or drink into the ring except water. You will learn a lot by volunteering as ring crew as you will be in the ring with nothing to do but watch the dogs run. You'll be amazed at how much you will learn by watching dogs/handlers without the inevitable interruptions talking to friends outside the ring. Also you will come to understand how the viewpoint changes when you are in the ring compared to standing somewhere outside the ring (i.e. outside the ring, it may appear that a dog made a contact when it didn't and people are quick to blame judges for making a "bad call.." The truth is the judge is a trained professional who is right there at the optimal viewing angle and rarely do they make bad calls.).

**Leash Runner.** If you want to get your steps in quickly, this is the job for you. The leash runner stands quietly near the entrance gate and after the dog has begun their run, the leash runner picks up the leash and walks it down the fence line to the designated area at the exit gate (usually a chair or bucket) and then walks back to the entrance area to be ready for the next dog. Obviously there is a fair amount of walking and bending. Some clubs provide a grabber tool so the leash runner doesn't have to bend over. The leash runner should never interfere with the dog running the course so you'll need to be familiar with the course pattern and adjust your timing accordingly.




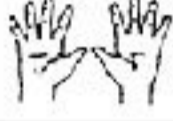




**Score Runner:** Another great way to get your steps in! The score runner stands behind the scribe/timer table outside the ring and after a few sheets have been completed, takes them to the trial secretary then goes back for the next pile. The trial secretary then enters the scores in the computer. If it's a large class, such as Exc/Mas, you'll be making a number of trips back and forth.

**Timer.** The timer sits next to the scribe. The timer watches the judge when a dog comes into the ring and pushes the Go button on the electronic timing machine when the judge gives the thumbs up sign. This is the button that makes the machine say Go or Ready that you hear when you are on the line. At the end of the run, the clock stops and usually the scribe will ask you to read off the time so they can write it on the scribe sheet for each dog. The timing machine is pretty simple to

## AKC Scribe/Timer Guide

operate (in the capacity of timer anyway) and people will be more than happy to show you what to do so don't be afraid to volunteer for it. It's an easy job. Just let the ring captain (also known as the "worker herder") know that it's your first time.

**Scribe.** This job is best left to experienced exhibitors. Each dog entered in the trial has what is called a scribe sheet for each class the dog is entered in. The sheet has the dog and handler information along with a scoring area. The scribe focuses on the judge during the entire run and writes down the error signals given by the judge by raising arms and other signals. The diagram shows the various hand signs. This is a critical job obviously and the scribe must have the ability to focus exclusively on the judge for extended periods of time. In addition, the scribe and usually the gate steward make sure all the scribe sheets are in the proper order that the dogs are running in prior to the start of the class. They do this by going down the gate sheet together. This is why it is so important to check your dog in ahead of time. If a dog is not checked in or has a C next to its name (indicating a conflict with another ring), the scribe sheet is turned sideways in the stack so that it can be determined easily when the class is running whether the dog is actually running or not. It is obviously critical that the scribe has the correct sheet for the dog that is actually running!

Judge	Scribe	Timer
	<b>R</b> – Refusal: the dog sees but goes around the obstacle.	
	<b>W</b> – Wrong course: dog performs wrong obstacle.	
	<b>T</b> – The dog jumps off and back on table before count ends.	
	<b>F</b> – Failure to perform: dog knocks bar off jump or misses a contact zone or won't complete an obstacle.	
	 <b>Fix and Go*</b> Exhibitor goes back and fixes something previously executed. <b>NT</b> – No Time	When judge signals <b>FIX</b> the timer will look at the clock and press the horn or blow whistle when the times listed below are reached. • <b>60</b> seconds – Standard classes • <b>45</b> seconds – <b>JWW</b> classes For <b>T2B</b> and <b>FAST</b> dog is dismissed at the sound of the horn at the appropriate time.
	<b>FEO-E</b> For Exhibition Only* FAST and T2B only <b>NT</b> – No Time	Timer is to start time when exhibitor starts their first lead out/steps away from their dog. Dog is dismissed at the sound of the horn at the appropriate class time (T2B, FAST).
	<b>E</b> – Elimination: the dog fouls the ring or does not run the course. <b>NT</b> – No Time	

**Gate Steward.** The gate steward also has a fair amount of responsibility. They are responsible for helping the scribe make sure the sheets are in order and anyone not checked in or has a conflict is turned to the side. Once the class is ready to run, the gate steward has a lot to do. If the Agility Gate app is being used, the gate steward will be marking dogs off on an iPad as they run in addition to marking on the printed gate sheet. If the app is not being used, they will be marking them on the gate sheet alone. The gate steward is responsible for letting the scribe know the name of the dog on the line. He/she also calls out the names of the dogs getting close to running so that exhibitors who are hopefully near by can hear. Gate stewards need to speak loudly and sometimes downright shout in noisy venues to do this job well. Usually, they will say something like "Spot is on the line, Joe is on deck, Seeker is in the hole." Some gate stewards (my favorite ones) call out the following "Joe, you're up in 1, Spot in 2, Buster in 3, Trigger in 4 and Tommy in 5." This gives you a good sense of how soon it will be before you run. At the same time, the gate person is often answering questions from exhibitors such as "Who does Rover follow?" The gate person sometimes has to call out repeatedly for dogs that may not be close to the gate as well as deal with exhibitors who have ring conflicts in multiple ring trials. And if that isn't enough to do, the gate steward also calls out to the judge and ring crew when the last dog in a jump height is going in to let them know there will be a height change ("Last 16" dog") AND when the very last dog in the class is about to run, the gate person calls out "Last dog this class!" If it sounds intense, it certainly can be! Some trials are easier than others and some classes are easier than others. I always recommend doing one of the Exc/Master jump heights or Premier when you're first learning to gate steward as these have the most experienced exhibitors and they are usually very good about getting themselves in the ring in the proper order without too much help from the gate person.

### How not to sound or act like a newbie!

Caveat! You ARE a newbie, so don't hesitate to ask questions! But here are some common acronyms, slang terms, abbreviations and more that you'll want to be familiar with.

**Running Order:** Height groups in AKC are 8", 12", 16", 20", and 24". 4" is the preferred height for 8" dogs. Each trial day will either be a tall to small day or small to tall and typically swap each day of the trial. This means that either small dogs run first or big dogs run first in all classes for the day. Each class has its own running order. Once in awhile, height group orders may be changed to accommodate ring conflicts. Running orders are created by random computerized draw in the trial secretary's software. The preliminary running order is often posted a couple days before the trial and a link will be sent in email. There are often minor changes to this on the trial day however due to conflicts and move ups so be sure to check the gate sheet or Agility Gate app the morning of the trial (see below).

**24C:** 24" Choice - this is for dogs who measure into the 20" height group or lower but wish to jump them at 24". Often these are handlers working on meeting qualifications for various world event teams but there may be other reasons. The thinking is that it isn't fair to the legitimate 24" jumping dogs to have to compete with extremely fast but smaller dogs.

**QQ or Double Q:** A double Q (or QQ if written on Facebook) refers to dogs running at the Masters level that qualify in both Standard (std) and Jumpers with Weaves (jww) on the same day. These are very important as you need 20 of them (plus points) to earn a MACH (Master Agility Champion) title. If you qualify in both std and jww in Novice or Open, it is NOT called a QQ, but, hey, CONGRATULATIONS!

**Double Q, Double Blue:** A QQ where the dog WON both JWW and STD at the Master Level!

**NQ:** A non qualifying run.

**Points or MACH Points:** MACH points are earned at the Masters level. On each qualifying run, you will receive 1 point for each FULL second that you in under standard course time. You can start earning points in masters even if your dog is still in a lower division in either std or jww.

**Preferred Division:** A preferred division is offered for dogs who, for any number of reasons, need to jump one height lower than their actual measured height group. Titles earned in Preferred are the same except that letter P is added.

**Regular Division:** This is the division most dogs run - the height group the dog has measured into.

**SCT & MCT:** Standard course time and maximum course time. These are calculated by the judge when he/she wheels (measures) the course. Every class has an SCT and/or MCT. The SCT will be different for various jump heights. Preferred dogs are given an extra 5 seconds. It is often posted on the gate sheet.

**FEO:** For exhibition only. NEW IN 2024! You may now run FEO in any class at the trial if the club allows FEO runs. FEO runs are limited to 45 seconds in both standard and jumpers. This is a great way to train new dogs. You can mark yourself FEO on the gate app if you know ahead of time. But the cool thing is that you don't have to. You can decide when you walk in the gate! **Either way, YOU MUST call out FEO to the judge when you come in the ring.** You will need to read the rules regarding what is and is not allowed. The rulebook is linked at the end of this.

**Legs:** Each time you qualify in a class, you get a "leg" toward a title in that event. So you might hear someone say "I only need one more leg in Open jumpers." That means they need one qualifying run to title and move into Excellent. Most basic titles require 3 legs. Other titles require more and these requirements may be found in the rulebook which is linked at the end of this. Prior to Covid, you needed to have legs under at least two different judges. This rule was changed during pandemic trials but may be changed again. You may want to verify with the trial secretary when you fill out your move up form if your three legs have been earned under the same judge.

**Move Up:** When a dog earns enough legs to acquire a title, they need to formally move up to the next level.

*During a trial.* If this happens in the middle of a trial, you **MUST** fill out the move up sheet before the end of the day. If you forget, your dog **CANNOT** be moved up the next day. The Move Up sheet will be near the secretary's table. If not, ask the trial secretary.

*Last day of trial.* If your dog moves up on the last day of the trial, **you must email all the trial secretary's for any upcoming trials you have entered not later than 6:00 p.m. on the Monday** preceding the set of trials for trials starting on a Thursday-Sunday. In the email, state the dog's name and that you are moving FROM Novice A into Open (or whatever the move up is). Make sure you email each trial secretary if you are entered in multiple upcoming trials with different secretaries. **NOTE! If you use LabTestedOnline**, be sure to go into your dog's information section to make changes on class levels. Otherwise, the software won't let you enter the next level!

**STD, JWW, Pre, Nov & more:** These are abbreviations for classes that you will see on estimated timelines and other places. STD (gotta love that one) refers to Standard classes. JWW is jumpers with weaves (commonly called jumpers), Exc/Mas mean Excellent and Masters which are run together (see rulebook for title info), Pre is premiere.

**EXC/MAS:** Excellent/Master. These are class levels. Exc runs concurrently with Masters on the same course. You must earn your Excellent title in order to move up to Masters (see rulebook for scoring).

**FAST and T2B:** These are abbreviations for classes like those above but these two are game classes.

**FNG:** Fix and go. This is a rule in AKC which allows you to train in the ring **ONE** time with specific conditions. Refer to AKC agility rulebook.

**C:** If you see a C next to a dog's name on the gate sheet, that means the person has a conflict with another ring and may or may not be able to run in that spot. Conflict dogs are often moved in the running order so if you see a C on the dog before you, be prepared to run a bit sooner.

**ABS:** If you see ABS on a dog's name on a gate sheet, it means the dog is absent. If you decide not to run for whatever reason and you are at the trial, be sure to mark your dog ABS on the gate sheet or on the Agility Gate app. Do not simply draw a line through your dog's name as it will appear later as if you did run and could cause a problem with scribe sheets.

## **Read the Rulebook!**

As of this writing, the link to the current rulebook is below. This is subject to change though so you may want to Google "AKC agility rules." <https://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/REAGIL.pdf> Often there are colored inserts at the beginning of the document with new rules that are not yet in the actual book.

You can also find information on new rules, proposals, and more on the Judges' Blog. This blog is available for anyone to read here: <https://akcagilityjudges.wordpress.com/>

## **Judge's Guidelines**

Judge's Guidelines are posted online here: <https://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/REAJG1.pdf>



## **ISC Classes and Trials**

ISC classes and trials are for those wishing to run courses designed by European judges and are quite different from regular AKC. There are three levels with level 3 being the most challenging. But all ISC courses require specialized training and highly skilled dogs and handlers. Usually the exhibitors running ISC are those who plan to try out for some of the World teams but not always. Sometimes people who have been running regular AKC for many years are just wanting new challenges. Because world team hopefuls have to have a certain number of qualifying runs at these top levels and there are not a lot of ISC trials, you will often see teams that travel from quite a ways at these trials and often you will see some of the best handlers and dogs the sport has to offer so even if you never plan to try it, it is fun to watch if you have the opportunity.