

A Beginner's Guide to Companion Events

Obedience • Rally • Tracking • Agility



AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB®

Welcome to the world of AKC® Companion Events!

These events were developed so ANY dog and anyone of any age could show off their athletic abilities and demonstrate the bond that can develop between a well trained dog and its owner. Companion Events consists of four different events: obedience, tracking, agility and rally. Obedience trials are one of the AKC's oldest traditions; it is truly a sport of finesse, precision and accuracy. Tracking evolved originally from obedience, but it has grown and developed into its own event that demonstrates the dog's natural ability to recognize and follow a scent. Agility is a fast-paced obstacle course that relies on nearly flawless communication between handler and dog. AKC Rally® is the newest event to join the Companion Event family and it was developed after rally-style auto racing. The dog/handler team must navigate a course made up of directional signs. Each course is unique and different; it is great for first-time competitors or anyone new to Companion Events.



Tips for the First-Time Spectator

- However tempting, do not pet a dog without asking for permission first.
- Many trials have vendors and an information booth with helpful information for the general public.
- Bring a chair and arrive early. Trials often start very early in the morning.
- If you have not yet purchased your dog, speak to exhibitors about their breed to gain knowledge of the best dog for your family. Please be considerate and approach them after they have competed, not before they are getting ready to go into the ring. This way they will be able to give you their full attention.
- If you bring a baby stroller to a trial, be careful that you do not run over any dog's tails, and that your child does not grab or poke the dogs it can reach. Avoid having them near ring entrances or exits. Some crowded trials forbid baby strollers.

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Am I Eligible?

To be eligible to compete in obedience, tracking, agility or rally trials, a dog must be:

- Registered with the AKC.
- Enrolled in the AKC Canine Partners program. A program for mixed-breed dogs and dogs ineligible for AKC registration to participate in obedience, rally and agility. Tracking is not available for Canine Partners at this time.
- Enrolled in the PAL (Purebred Alternative Listing)/ ILP program. A program for purebred dogs that cannot be fully registered with the AKC to participate in AKC events.
- Be a member of a Foundation Stock Service® (FSS) recorded breed.



How Do I Get Started in Companion Events?

The best way to start is to join a local dog-training club. A list of clubs is available at www.akc.org. Local clubs frequently offer training classes for all different types of competition. Even if competition is not your ultimate goal, the relationship that training forms between you and your dog will be very rewarding. Local clubs also have “fun matches,” where you and your dog can test your skills in the ring. Training and handling your dog in any Companion Event is an exceptional and enjoyable experience. From your first attempted trial to earning your first AKC title, you and your dog will develop a bond. Training classes offer the best hands-on way to practice for the ring, and watching exhibitors at actual trials will gain you expertise. These events bring many hours of fun for you and your dog. You will make lots of friends in the sport, and you and your dog will take pleasure in your new hobby for many years to come.

What is Obedience?

Consider taking obedience training with your dog to a whole new level! Help your dog realize its full potential by entering obedience trials and earning competitive obedience titles. AKC obedience trials demonstrate the usefulness of the dog as a companion to man. Developed in the 1930's it is one of the AKC's oldest events! Obedience trials showcase dogs that have been trained and conditioned to behave well in the home, in public places, and in the presence of other dogs. AKC trials allow exhibitors and their dogs to enjoy companionship and competition as they proudly earn AKC titles. You can find a list of clubs that offer training classes on the AKC website under Clubs, then Club Search. These clubs also hold the AKC events that you can enter once you and your dog are ready.

AKC Obedience Trials and How They Work

An obedience club wishing to hold an obedience trial must first meet all AKC requirements before applying for permission from the AKC. This ensures that the event will be held under AKC Rules and Regulations and that any scores your dog earns during competition are recorded on the dog's AKC awards record.

To enter an obedience trial, you must submit an official AKC entry form to the trial secretary or superintendent of the trial. Entry forms can be found on the AKC website or in the club's premium list; the premium list contains all relevant information regarding the trial, including date, location, classes offered, and judges – as well as the entry form, it is the official announcement of the club's event. There is also an online event calendar on the AKC website that contains this information.

After the entries have closed, a program showing the schedule for the judging of each class will be mailed to the owner of each entered dog.



Levels of Obedience Competition

There are three main levels of obedience competition which are listed here, but there are several optional titling classes or non-regular (non-titling) classes that you can choose from if you want to try out different exercises or just for fun! You can find a complete list of all obedience classes in the AKC Obedience Regulations.

NOVICE – For the dog just getting started in obedience. Exercises include:

- Heel on Leash and Figure Eight – show whether the dog has learned to watch its handler and adjust its pace to stay with the handler.
- Heel Free – The dog and handler perform a heeling pattern for the judge with the dog off-leash.
- Stand for Examination – The dog must stay in a standing position as its handler walks a short distance away. The judge will then lightly touch the dog on the head, the body and the hindquarters. The handler then returns to the dog.
- Recall – Demonstrates that the dog will come to the handler on command.
- Long Sit (1 minute) – The dog must remain sitting in the presence of other dogs while the handler stands across the ring.
- Long Down (3 minutes) – dog must remain in a down position in the presence of other dogs while the handler stands across the ring.

OPEN – The second level includes more complicated exercises; the dog must be able to perform a variety of tasks and follow commands either by voice or signal. Exercises include:

- Heel Free and Figure Eight – Same as Novice, but off leash.
- Drop on Recall – The dog must come to the handler when called from across the ring and on the handler's command or signal drop into a down position and then on command or signal from the handler resume coming to the handler.

- Retrieve on Flat – Demonstrates a dog’s ability to retrieve an object on command.
- Retrieve Over High Jump – The dog must jump over an obstacle in order to retrieve an object and then jump the obstacle again to return it to the handler.
- Broad Jump – This exercise shows that the dog is able to jump a width that is twice as long as the dog is tall.
- Long Sit (3 minutes) – similar to the long sit in Novice, but the position must be held for a longer period of time with the handler out of the dog’s sight.
- Long Down (5 minutes) – dog must remain in a down position with the handler out of sight.

UTILITY – The third and highest level of obedience competition. Exercises include:

- Signal Exercise – shows the dog’s ability to understand and correctly respond to the handler’s signal to stand, stay, down, sit and come. No voice commands are given; only hand signals are allowed.
- Scent Discrimination – shows the dog’s ability to find the handler’s scent among a pile of articles.
- Directed Retrieve – proves the dog’s ability to follow a directional signal to retrieve a glove and promptly return it to the handler.
- Moving Stand and Examination – the dog must heel, stand and stay as the handler moves away. The dog must stay and accept an examination by the judge and return to the handler on command.
- Directed Jumping – the dog must go away from the handler, turn and sit. Then, the dog must clear whichever jump its handler indicates and promptly return to the handler.

Qualifying Performance

A qualifying performance indicates that the dog has performed all the required exercises according to *AKC Obedience Regulations* and justifies the awarding of the obedience title. A qualifying score is earned when more than 50 percent of the points are awarded for each exercise, with a total of at least 170 points. A perfect score in any class is 200. All dogs that have received a qualifying score in their class receive a dark green ribbon to indicate that they have earned a “leg,” or qualifying score toward their title.



What is Rally?

AKC Rally® is a companion sport to AKC Obedience. Both require teamwork between dog and handler along with similar performance skills. Rally provides an excellent introduction to AKC Companion Events for new dogs and handlers and can provide a challenging opportunity for competitors in other events to strengthen their skills. The dog and handler team move at their own pace, very similar to rally-style auto racing. Rally was designed with the traditional pet owner in mind, but it can still be very challenging for those who enjoy higher levels of competition. A rally course includes 10 to 20 stations, depending on the level. Scoring is not as rigorous as traditional obedience. Communication from the handler to the dog is encouraged and perfect heel position is not required, but there should be a sense of teamwork and enthusiasm as they go through the course.



Rally Signs

The signs may be any color and they include descriptions as well as directional arrows of exercises. Signs are numbered to make it easy to find the next station when navigating the course. All signs are placed to the handler’s right side. The signs are large enough to be easily recognized when going through a course. The exercises designated on the signs will be performed in close proximity to the sign itself, either directly in front of, or in front of and to the left of the sign.

Levels of Rally Competition

The three levels of competition in AKC Rally:

NOVICE - this is the first level for those just getting started in competition.

- All exercises are performed with the dog on leash.
- There is a requirement of 10-15 stations to complete with no more than five stationary exercises.
- The exercises performed vary from turning 360 degrees to changing paces during the course.
- Exhibitors at this level may clap their hands, talk to the dog, and pat their legs through the course.

ADVANCED – this is the second level, which includes more difficult exercises throughout the course.

- All exercises are performed off-leash.
- There is a requirement of 12-17 stations with no more than seven stationary exercises.

Exercises include a jump as well as calling your dog to the front of you instead of to a heel position.

EXCELLENT - this third and highest level of AKC Rally is the most challenging.

- Exercises are performed off-leash except for the honor exercise.
- There is a requirement of 15 to 20 stations, with no more than 7 stationary exercises.
- Handlers are only allowed to encourage their dogs verbally. Physical encouragement is not allowed at this level.
- The Excellent-level exercises include backing up three steps, while the dog stays in the heel position and a moving stand, while the handler walks around the dog.



Qualifying Performance

A qualifying performance indicates that the dog has performed the required exercises according to the AKC Rally Regulations. Each performance is timed, but times are only counted if two dogs earn the same score. All dogs and handlers begin with a perfect 100. A dog and handler team is awarded a qualifying score if it retains at least 70 points after the course has been completed.



What is Tracking?

Dogs have a very keen sense of smell – 100,000 times stronger than humans! Dogs with the help of their noses are often used to find lost people and animals, drugs, avalanche and disaster victims, and even to detect cancer! AKC Tracking is a canine sport that demonstrates a dog's natural ability to recognize and follow a scent and is the foundation of canine search and rescue work. Unlike obedience and rally trials, where dogs respond to the handler's commands, in tracking the dog is completely in charge, for only he knows how to use his nose to find and follow the track. For many, the greatest pleasure of tracking is the hours spent outside training and interacting with their dogs. The tracking community is known for its camaraderie and they all share in the excitement of a "pass" and the disappointment of a "fail."

How Do I Get Started in Tracking?

Getting started in tracking is easy and you won't find a more willing participant than your dog! A puppy instinctively uses his nose – training your dog to track simply hones his natural ability. And since all dogs have a natural ability to follow a scent, any breed is capable of learning to track. Your first step is finding a tracking class or an instructor who is experienced in the sport. Some AKC-affiliated clubs offer tracking classes and some are "Tracking Only" clubs. To find a club in your area, go to the AKC website, Club Search or Training Resources. Tracking requires very little equipment. You just need a harness, a 20-to-40 foot lead, a few flags to mark your track, and an open grassy area free of obstacles such as roads, ditches or woods. Before you enter a Tracking Dog Test (TD), you must have the dog certified by an AKC-approved or provisional judge. This certification form must accompany the entry form. Once you and your dog are ready, find a tracking event in your area by going to the AKC Events Calendar on the AKC website. There is a great demand for tracking tests and the number of dogs that can be judged in one day is very limited. As a result, there are more entries than spaces available. For this reason tracking is not open to dogs listed in AKC Canine Partners at this time.

Tracking Titles

A dog can earn three AKC Tracking titles, each with an increased degree of difficulty. The TD (Tracking Dog) title must be earned before competing for a TDX (Tracking Dog Excellent) or VST (Variable Surface Tracker) title. A Champion Tracker (CT) is awarded only to those dogs that have earned all three tracking titles – TD, TDX and VST. If a dog is awarded the CT title, he is among the elite of those active in tracking. To earn a tracking title, a dog needs to pass the test in which he is exhibiting only once.

Tracking Dog (TD)

The TD track is from 440-to-500 yards long with 3-to-5 turns (or change in direction), and aged from a half-hour to two hours. A dog must indicate a glove or wallet placed at the end of the track. Tracks are plotted in an open field with uniform cover. There are no obstacles. The start of the track will be marked with a flag. A second flag is placed 30 yards from the start flag to indicate the direction of the first leg of the track. There are no other flags in the field.

Tracking Dog Excellent (TDX)

The TDX track is 800-to-1000 yards long with 5-to-7 turns, and aged from 3-to-5 hours. The track also has two sets of cross (diversionary) tracks and has some of the aforementioned obstacles. The start is marked with a single flag and the dog must determine the direction of the first leg. There are four dissimilar articles for each track, one at the start and three more on the track.

Variable Surface Tracking (VST)

A VST track is from 600-to-800 yards long, with 4-to-8 turns, and aged from 3-to-5 hours. The articles must be one each of leather, cloth, plastic and metal. The VST track must also contain three different surfaces with one turn on a non-vegetated surface such as concrete. This test demonstrates the utility of the tracking dog to work in an urban environment.

How a Tracking Test Works

For the host club and the two judges, a tracking test is a two-day commitment, regardless of weather. Tracking tests are usually held on Sunday, but the judges and tracklayers spend most of Saturday plotting a track for each dog. The judges draw charts of each track indicating landmarks that will allow them to locate the track with flags that mark the turns. The flags will be removed when the tracklayers walk the track the morning of the test. On the morning of the test, the exhibitors gather for a “draw,” which determines the order dogs are to exhibit. After the tracks have aged the required time, the exhibitor puts the harness on the dog, attaches a 20-to-40-foot lead and begins the track. The dog is not allowed off lead at any time. The dog must follow the path the tracklayer has walked and find the article(s) dropped along the track. Judges follow the dog and handler to determine if the dog is on or off the track. If the dog is off the track and the judges determine the dog cannot return, one judge will blow the whistle signaling the dog has failed. There is no time limit as long as the dog is working. If the dog follows the track and finds the article(s) placed on the track, he earns the tracking title for the level at which he is exhibiting.

What is Agility?

Running a dog in an agility trial is the ultimate game for you and your dog and is one of the most exciting canine sports for spectators. In an agility trial, a dog demonstrates its agile nature and versatility by following cues from the handler through a timed obstacle course of jumps, tunnels, weave poles and other objects. It's an activity that strengthens the bond between dog and handler and provides fun and exercise for both, which might explain why it's so enjoyable to watch and has become the fastest-growing dog sport in the United States!

Types of Classes

There are several types of classes offered at an agility trial: Standard, Jumpers with Weaves, Fifteen And Send Time (FAST) and Preferred. The Standard class has contact obstacles, which have yellow “contact zones” at each end. Contact obstacles include A-frame, dog walk and seesaw. The dog must place a least one paw in the contact zone in order not to receive a fault. This encourages safety in training and in running the course. The Standard class also has a variety of jumps; weave poles, pause table, tunnels and a closed tunnel. The Jumpers with Weaves class does not have contact obstacles or a pause table to slow the team's forward momentum. This is a very fast course requiring instant decisions by the handler and close attention from the dog. The FAST class is an additional test of strategy, skill, accuracy, speed, timing and distance handling, to demonstrate a dog's athletic ability and willingness to work with its handler in a fast-paced atmosphere over a variety of agility obstacles. As indicated by the title, the Fifteen and Send Time class uses fifteen (15) point-valued obstacles and/or obstacle combinations. The course will include a ‘Send Bonus’ or distance element that will award a bonus of twenty (20) points if completed successfully.



Levels of Agility Competition

There are three different levels of competition in agility:

NOVICE – for the dog that is just starting in agility. There are 14 to 16 obstacles on this course. The focus of the Novice class is on performing the obstacles with minimal handling technique.

OPEN – for the dog that has completed the Novice level. There are 16 to 18 obstacles on this course. The focus of the open class is on more difficult obstacle course performance with more handling skill required.

EXCELLENT – for the dog that has completed the Open level. There are 18 to 20 obstacles on this course. The focus of the Excellent A & B class is to provide the opportunity for dogs and handlers to demonstrate their superior skills in moving quickly and efficiently with close communication and teamwork through challenging agility courses. The Excellent B level is the class where dog/handler teams can earn the title, Master Agility Champion (MACH), in the Regular Classes.

How Agility is Scored

Agility is a time and fault sport where the qualifying requirements are more challenging as the competition class levels get higher. There are two types of faults: time and penalty. Time faults are given for every second a dog goes over the Standard Course Time as set by the length of the course.

Below are examples of Penalty Faults that a judge may assess a handler and dog:

- Taking an obstacle out of sequence
- Missing a contact zone
- Displacing a bar or panel on a jump
- Jumping off the pause table before the judge is through counting
- Running around or refusing the next obstacle
- Exceeding the amount of time set by the judge for running the course
- Touching either the dog or any obstacle by the handler while running the course
- Outside assistance may be penalized
- Handler failure to control the dog may be penalized



Agility Jump Heights

The classes are divided by jump heights in order to make the competition equal between the different sizes of dogs.

REGULAR CLASS

8" Class – dogs up to 11" at the shoulder

12" Class – dogs over 11" and up to 14" at the shoulder

16" Class – dogs over 14" and up to 18" at the shoulder

20" Class – dogs over 18" and up to 22" at the shoulder

24" Class – dogs over 22" at the shoulder

26" Class – dogs may be entered at this height at their owner's discretion.

A dog may jump in a jump height class higher than his/her shoulder measurement, but never lower.

PREFERRED CLASS

This class affords an opportunity for a greater variety of dogs, and their handlers, to participate in the sport of agility. Handlers have the option to enter the Preferred classes with modified standards of lower jump heights and more generous course times. They must compete at the required jump height.

Qualifying Performance

A perfect score in any class at any level is 100. A dog must earn 3 qualifying scores under two different judges. The minimum score to qualify is 85 in all classes except in the Excellent B class where the minimum score is 100. The minimum time allowed to run the course and the number of obstacles to complete successfully, increase as the level of difficulty increases.

Tips for the First-Time Exhibitor

- Make sure your dog has an AKC number.
- Be sure your dog is current on all inoculations.
- Learn from an experienced trainer in order to compete competently and safely.
- Join a local training club.
- Become familiar with the AKC regulations for the sport you are interested in. These are available on the AKC website.
- Attend trials and become familiar with the ring procedures.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions of the experienced exhibitors.
- Attend training classes with your dog.
- Visit the AKC website at www.akc.org to find a club in your area.

Information about AKC Trials

The AKC offers a wide variety of resources to assist anyone interested in Companion Events, whether you are new to the sport or want to know how to offer a trial. Contact AKC Customer Service at 919-233-9767 or Orderdesk@akc.org to inquire about the following resources:

Obedience Regulations, Obedience Judges Guidelines, The Steward in Obedience

A comprehensive book giving the regulations and guidelines for AKC obedience trials at which titles are earned.

Rally Regulations, Rally Judges Guidelines, The Steward in Rally

A comprehensive booklet giving the regulations and guidelines for AKC Rally trials, which titles are earned, and the descriptions and symbols of the rally signs. The AKC Obedience Regulations are also included in the same booklet.

Tracking Regulations

A comprehensive booklet detailing regulations and guidelines for AKC Tracking Tests at which titles are earned

Regulations for Agility Trials and Agility Judges Guidelines

Two important books for any agility exhibitor to have. These regulations and guidelines for AKC agility trials explain how titles are earned, courses designed and levels of competition.

The AKC Website

The AKC website, www.akc.org, contains a wealth of information about the world of dogs, including information on breeds, AKC registration, canine legislation, public education and canine health issues. View a complete listing of AKC-sanctioned shows and trials by accessing the AKC website and then clicking on Events, then click on Events and Award Search. You can select a timeframe, competition type, and your home state or several surrounding states. The Events Calendar is compiled by day and date, and has the club name and location of the trial. Entry forms for trials may be downloaded from the AKC website.

Glossary

Agility Handling Terms – “Front cross,” “cross behind,” and “blind cross,” refer to the handler's position to the dog that is running the course.

Article (Tracking) – These are the items the dog must find. In a TD test one article is used, either a glove or wallet. For the TDX, there are four different personal articles, one at the start to provide the dog with the scent he should follow and three others along the track. For VST, articles consist of four dissimilar, common, everyday items, which can be easily carried by the tracklayer and safely picked up by the dog. Articles are leather, plastic (rigid or semi-rigid), metal and cloth.

Brisk – Keenly alive, alert, energetic.

Course Design (Rally) – A set of signs, previously arranged by the judge, that the dog and handler team will navigate for competition. Each class will have a different course design.

Crowding – A dog that is so close to the handler as to interfere with the handler's freedom of motion.

Faults (Agility) – Penalties assessed by the judge when a dog or handler does not perform the obstacle correctly.

Gently – With kindness, without harshness or roughness.

Indication – A change in the dog's behavior when he experiences loss or discovery of the track or article.

Leg – A term that is used frequently for a qualifying score. Unlike obedience, rally and agility where a leg refers to a qualifying score, in tracking, a leg refers to the straight portion of the track between two turns.

Natural – Not artificial; free of affectation; what is customarily expected in the home or public places.

Refusals/Runouts – Type of fault given in agility when the dog refuses to take the obstacle as they approach it or they run past the obstacle instead of performing it.

Scent or Track Scent – The substance the dog actually smells that allows him to follow a track. It is made up of the odor of crushed vegetation, overturned earth and the odor left by a person.

Standard Course Time – Judge measures the agility course with a surveyor's wheel and determines the Standard Course Time that will be allotted for the particular course set up for the class.

Track – The actual path the tracklayer walked.

Walk-through (Agility, Rally) – Handlers are permitted to walk the course, without a dog, prior to the start of the class to plan their strategy. The walk-through gives handlers an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the course.

Wrong Course – Type of fault given when the dog does not take the next agility obstacle in correct sequence.

MISSION STATEMENT

The American Kennel Club is dedicated to upholding the integrity of its Registry, promoting the sport of purebred dogs and breeding for type and function. Founded in 1884, the AKC and its affiliated organizations advocate for the purebred dog as a family companion, advance canine health and well-being, work to protect the rights of all dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership.

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