

ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COMPETING IN AGILITY



BEFORE THE COMPETITION

Entering a Championship Show

Before you can enter a Championship show both you and your dog must be registered with the New Zealand Kennel Club. To join the NZKC see their website www.nzkc.org.nz. When you are a member you will receive a copy of NZ Dog World monthly, this will contain the upcoming agility events. You need to enter these on the official entry form which you have to purchase from the NZKC. You will also need to have an official measurement certificate (ask your trainer who the measurers are) before you can compete.

Entry Number and Show Information

For a championship show you will usually receive your running order for each class via email and your number should be included in the class(es) you entered. If you receive your information via email you will need to pick your number up on the day (Some clubs still send this via Post). There may also be additional information such as reporting times and “house rules” for the host club. Make sure you read the information thoroughly. If you ordered a catalogue this may arrive by post, email or you may need to pick it up from the show secretary/manager on the day. A catalogue gives more detailed information about the competitors such as their name and address, the dog’s pedigree name, breeding and NZKC numbers.

Entering a Ribbon Trial

Ribbon Trials are entered on the day of the competition. Each club does this a little differently but generally you need to find out when you arrive where the entries are being taken, you will be asked your name, your dog’s name and what classes you would like to enter, you will then be given a number (some clubs are now asking that you put your own number on the board for each class. Information about ribbon trials is usually posted on the Waimak Yahoo group, so keep an eye out for that.

Get the Rules and Read Them

You can’t play the game if you don’t know the rules. Download the Agility Regulations from NZKC’ Agility Committees web site www.dogagility.org.nz Ask your trainer to explain any rules you don’t understand. It is always unfortunate when a new handler gets faulted or disqualified because they didn’t know the rules.

Work on Your Dog’s Show Behaviour in Advance

The days are long and your dog will actually be performing for less than five minutes on a typical day. That means lots of down time for your dog. He/she should be comfortable and settled, ideally in a crate. You are going to need to contain your dog where he can’t get to other dogs or people and no other dogs can get to him and at the same time have adequate water, ventilation and shade if it’s hot and be cosy and warm if it’s cold. If its your own club’s show you will be required to help out so you may be away from your dog for up to an hour or more at a time and he needs to be safe and settled while you are away.

Work on Your Dog’s (And Your Own) Fitness and Training

Increase the fitness work you do with your dog in the weeks leading up to the show. Make sure you attend regular training sessions and concentrate on any weak areas. Work hard on your handling techniques. You can’t expect either you or your dog to perform to your best without regular training.

Get Your Gear Together

Create a check list and use it for each event so you don’t forget something. As it will be a long day you need everything to keep yourself and your dog comfortable no matter what the weather.

Be Prepared for Any Weather

No matter what the forecast always bring your wet weather gear, sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat and towels and a coat for your dog. Dress in layers so you can remove or add layers if the weather changes. Always bring plenty of water for both you and your dog. You might find a tarpaulin and a piece of shade cloth handy for covering your crate or shading the back of your car.

Plan to Be There The Whole Day

Try not to double book yourself for the day of the show. Remember that you have been working towards this day for months so you owe it to yourself to give yourself and your dog the best chance of a good result. Even if you know that Starters will be on last it is a good idea to get to the show before the first class begins to find a good park and get your dog settled. Your dog will have a chance to get acclimated to the busy and noisy show environment and you will be able to take the time to watch how the show runs and to see some other handlers and dogs compete.

If it's your own club's show you will be required to be at the venue up to an hour before the first class begins to assist with setting up the equipment. You will also be expected to stay on at the end and help put the gear away.

Volunteer To Help

If it's your own club's show you will be expected to help out with some of the various tasks involved in running the show. Working ringside is an excellent way to get exposed to the flow and timing of an Agility Event, the rules and strategies and various handling techniques. Most of the jobs are simple and easy and if you haven't done a job before we will pair you with someone who will show you the ropes. The jobs are usually allocated prior to the show so if you don't understand what a task entails ask for a job description. Remember that if you have agreed to do a job then the show manager is relying on you to be there.

SHOW ETIQUETTE

Show Respect For The Judge

Remember that without judges we wouldn't have a sport. Judges stand out in the ring for hours on end in any weather and often pass up the opportunity to run their own dogs in order to judge our competitions. Judges do not get paid to judge.

If you really enjoyed a course or your run went awry and the judge was particularly helpful, approach the judge during the break between classes and express your appreciation.

The judge is obliged to adjudicate your run in accordance with the rules and "call it as they see it". You will occasionally have calls that go against you that you might not agree with, however, remember that the judge's decision is final and one day you will get lucky and a judge will let you away with something you probably should have been faulted for! Learn from your mistakes and if you are often faulted for the same thing then train harder to rectify the problem. If you are unsure why you were faulted ask a senior club member.

IT IS VERY BAD FORM TO ARGUE WITH A JUDGE OR TO QUESTION A JUDGE'S DECISION OUTSIDE THE RING.

Show Respect for the Helpers and the Host Club

Months of preparation goes into organising a show and the helpers will have been at the venue at least an hour before the first class and many will have been up late the night before doing last minute organising. They will be doing everything humanly possible to ensure that the show runs smoothly. Some of them will be doing a job for the first time. Help the stewards by turning up on time to the ring and wearing your number. Ask questions politely. If you enjoyed the show tell someone from the club and thank the Show Manager at the end of the day. If you are not doing anything and see a job that needs doing then volunteer your services—you will instantly win some new friends!

Show Respect For Your Fellow Competitors

- Give everyone else the chance to achieve their goals.
- Watch and encourage your fellow club members and classmates. Give positive feedback.
- Attend the prizegivings and clap and cheer loudly for the place getters. And shout "GO WAIMAK" for any of your club mates.
- Don't use squeaky toys or clickers around the ring. Don't sit too close to the ring.
- Keep an eye on your children if they are with you and remember that not all dogs at the show will be used to children.
- Keep your dog well contained and under control.
- Pick up your dog poo.
- Give other dogs the space they need.
- Take your trainers advice and respect their feedback which is always offered in your best interests.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

Control Of Dogs

The following are the recommendations set out by the NZKC Agility Committee and will be enforced at all shows:

- Ensure that at all times your dogs are either contained in a crate, vehicle or trailer or on a lead unless toileting them or warming up
- Pay attention to your dog while walking on lead and keep the lead short enough to prevent your dog from causing problems for people/other dogs passing
- Take care with the use of flexi-leads to ensure that they do not extend to the point where they pose a hazard to others
- When off led ensure that your dog is directly and visually attended at all times
- Show courtesy in the warm-up area and do not stand talking or walk through the warm up area unnecessarily with dogs (either on or off lead)
- Muzzle any dog which has given or may give cause for concern in terms of biting or rushing at other dogs or people
- Please bring your dog to the ring on a lead and have your dog under control (i.e. on lead) prior to leaving the ring area
- Do not allow your dog to charge out of the ring under any circumstances
- Do not throw toys for your dog in congested areas or into a group of other dogs
- Do not leave toys and food unattended around the ring edge

Bad Sportsmanship and Harsh Handling Will Never Be Tolerated

Bad sportsmanship is very bad form. In the months after the event very few people remember who placed first in Starters but everyone will remember the person who behaved badly towards the judge, another competitor, their dog or the host club.

Harsh handling—physically, psychologically or verbally abusing your dog will never be tolerated inside or outside the ring. Harsh handling will possibly result in your expulsion from the show and if a complaint is laid your membership to the club and the NZ Kennel Club may be revoked. Our club promotes only positive training techniques and the use of negative or hurtful techniques is not tolerated.

Don't Forget About Your Dog

It is easy to get self-absorbed at competitions—there are a lot of things to focus on and it's easy to get distracted talking to people and you may be away from your dog for up to an hour if you have to help with a class.

It's very easy to fall into the routine of pulling your dog out of the car, expecting him to perform and stuffing him back in the car. Remember that your dog has other objectives so make time to play a game of fetch, to play with other dogs and wander around the grounds with you to check out the excitement. The sniffing around is particularly important when you first arrive to get him comfortable—another reason to get there early.

It's A Team Sport

In Agility you and your dog work as a team—you owe it to your team-mate to work as hard as you can on the course and if something goes wrong it is not the dog's fault. Give your dog all the help and encouragement he needs and keep the experience positive.

Remember Why You're There

Agility competitions should be FUN for both you and your dog. If you get so wrapped up in the competition that you forget to have fun, your dog will ultimately shut down. Be competitive but keep it positive. Remember that there is something to be learnt from and something to be pleased with in EVERY run, not just the clear ones or the ones that win you ribbons. Be thrilled by moments of brilliance or success on an area that has been an issue in the past.

Record Your Runs

Keep a record of each run by noting what happened (good and bad). This way you can review your notes to check for trends or developing problems. Sketch full courses or just the segment that caused you trouble—you can pass these segments onto your trainer to set up at training. Useful things to make notes of can include your score and time, the course length and standard course time, how many dogs went clear, the winner's time, your dog's speed around the course (metres per second). If you faulted try to analyze what handler error or hole in your training caused it (with your trainer if they watched your run).

Set Goals

Set achievable realistic goals—Set a goal for the result—for example your goal in your first run might be just to keep your dog in the ring and working. Set a goal for yourself as a handler—it might be to remember to give early commands or to work hard to achieve a handling manoeuvre. Set a performance goal for your dog and work to help him achieve it—what have you been working hard to achieve? A solid start line leadout? Perfect contacts? Doing the collapsible tunnel? Weave entrance? As you achieve your goals set new, higher ones. Celebrate the achievement of your goals.

ON THE DAY

Get There Early

To find a park, toilet and settle your dog, find the toilets and canteen, etc, etc. Make sure your dog has toileted (it's helpful if you can teach your dog to toilet on command) as you will be disqualified if it happens in the ring.

Walking The Course

Before judging starts competitors have the opportunity to walk the course (without dogs). If you want to, ask one of our trainers to walk the course with you to help you decide your handling strategy and identify any challenges in the course. Any of our trainers (who aren't competing in that class) will be happy to walk the course with you if you ask. You can also ask them to watch your run and give you feedback.

If you are unsure about how a particular obstacle will be judged then ask the judge—they can tell you while you are walking the course but they can't tell you once you are running your dog.

You cannot at any time take any food or drink into the ring area, it is also not fair to be eating a nice big sandwich if you are working close to the start line – many dogs will be distracted by this.

Judges Briefing

Sometimes a judge will call the competitors together during or immediately after the course walk to give specific instructions. Pay attention and ask questions if you need clarification.

Check the Board

There will be a whiteboard near the start line with the competitors' numbers listed. This is the running order. Identify your number in the running order and try to find out who the competitor listed immediately before you is and confirm that they are present at the show. Keep an eye on the running order throughout the class. You should collect your dog and report to the Call Steward between 5 and 10 dogs before your run. When you report to the Call Steward identify your number to the Steward and wait for their acknowledgement. Once they have acknowledged you it is important that you don't move away from the ringside. You should be ready to move to the line as soon as the dog immediately before you begins their run.

Wear Your Number

You need to securely attach your number to yourself where it can be seen by the call steward, scribe and judge—you can wear it on your chest, your sleeve, or anywhere it can be easily seen. If you have more than one dog you must show the correct number for the dog you are running and only that number. You can attach it with a safety pin or you can buy a special arm band type holder.

Warm Your Dog Up

This is VERY IMPORTANT, no matter what the weather. Never just get your dog out of the car and expect them to run without a warm up as this could result in an injury. Warm up yourself too—remember you are about to do a 150m sprint with lots of turns over possibly uneven ground. Your warm up should include stretches, walking, then jogging and some lead hand handling/circlework exercises. Your warm up should not include any jumping—you are warming your dog up to jump. If you want to do some jump practice before your run warm your dog up first.

A warm up will “hold” for about 10 minutes so if you are amongst the first competitors in the ring warm your dog up before you walk the course, put his coat on if it’s a cold day, and put him in his crate or the car while you walk the course then collect him and continue the warm up on the way to the ring.

Practice Equipment

Sometimes practice equipment will be available ringside. If you want to use the practice equipment make sure you warm your dog up first. Use common sense and common courtesy when using the practice gear. Make sure the jumps are not spaced too close together (they should be a minimum of 4m apart) and are the right height for your dog. If a handler and dog who are ahead of you in the running order are waiting to use the gear then let them go first. Make sure your practice will not distract a dog in the ring.

YOUR RUN

On The Start Line

Unless the judge has instructed otherwise you should be able to take your training aids (toys and food) into the 5 metre assembly area. Make sure you do not have food or a clicker in your pockets so you don’t accidentally take them into the ring. Once you have moved to the start line you can continue to work your dog up by playing tug if you wish but be careful not to distract the dog in the ring. NEVER USE SQUEAKY TOYS ON THE START LINE OR AROUND THE RING. Try to avoid using a clicker as well. If you like you can ask a trainer or a friend to take your training aids from you before you start and place them or wait with them at the finish line. However, they must be very careful not to place them inside the ring rope or if they are holding them they must not show them to your dog or encourage your dog over the finish line. This is called double handling and you will be disqualified for it.

Once the competitor in front of you has started their run be ready to move quickly into the ring. When the scribe (who writes the faults as indicated by the judge) has finished noting the previous competitor’s time verbally advise your number to the scribe. Check that the judge and scribe are ready (they judge may eliminate you if you begin your run before they are ready to judge you) and begin your run. It is important that you are ready to move quickly to the start line before the previous competitor finishes and that you are ready to go as soon as the judge is ready. It is very bad manners to keep a judge waiting.

Electronic Timing Start/Finish

The following will usually apply, however the judge may decide to vary the start line rules but will usually brief the competitors at the course walking about this or they will post a notice near the start line. Pay close attention and if in doubt err on the side of caution and play by the rules for manual timing.

- You can usually take your dog into the ring on a collar and lead but you must throw your lead out of the ring before you start. Your dog is now allowed to wear a plain collar (no tags attached) in the ring.
- You MUST NOT take food and toys into the ring.
- Judging will start as soon as you set your dog at the first obstacle—if your dog refuses the first obstacle you will be faulted, even though the time hasn’t started.
- Judging will finish after the last obstacle.
- Timing will begin as your dog enters the first obstacle and will finish as your dog completes the last obstacle—i.e. as they pass between the uprights of the electronic timing device.

What If My Dog

Misses An Obstacle - This will be a refusal and you will be given five faults, or a disqualification if your dog has done the next obstacle before you can call him back. When you call him back be very careful he doesn’t come back over the refused obstacle as this will also result in a disqualification.

Misses The Weave - If your dog misses the weave entry or “pops out” before completing the weave in Starters you can try again without any faults (you must complete the weave correctly). In Novice a missed weave entry or popping out will earn five faults.

Misses a Contact - If your dog misses a contact then you will be given five faults. If you decide to take your dog back over the piece of contact equipment to reinforce the behaviour this will result in a disqualification but can be a useful training exercise (ask your trainer about this). While it is acceptable to bring the dog back over once, it is bad manners to keep on training in the ring so repeat it once, make sure your dog gets the contact and then continue around the course or thank the judge and exit the ring.

Refuses to Go Through The Collapsible Tunnel - Try again—you can have up to three refusals on a course before you are disqualified. If your three refusals are up and it's still looking too hard ask the judge to hold it up for you, that way your dog will achieve the obstacle. Thank the judge and continue around the course or exit the ring.

Runs Out of The Ring - If your dog runs out of the ring try as hard as you can to call him back and regain control and continue around the course. You may be disqualified if the judge deems that the dog is out of control and is no longer working. Consult your trainer for advice if you have a problem with your dog running away in Agility.

Fouls The Ring - Stop immediately and mark the spot and wait until a steward arrives with the clean-up equipment. You must clean up your dog's mess yourself—don't expect the judge or a steward to do it for you. Once you have cleaned up, apologise to the judge and leave the ring. You should not continue with your run.

After Your Run

Your lead and any toys or treats should have been taken to the finish area by the lead runner (Look for a bucket). Praise and reward your dog with lots of food and/or a game of tug but be considerate towards the next competitor in the ring—keep control of your dog while rewarding him and don't throw your toy near the ring. Know that your dog gave his best effort and you are both still learning. Celebrate your achievements great and small. Work on problem areas at training. Enter the next show.

TYPES OF AGILITY COMPETITIONS

Ribbon Trial

An Agility Ribbon Trial is open to anyone, you do not have to be a member of the NZKC (or your dog). You enter a ribbon trial on the day.

Open Show

These are very rare these days but if one is offered you have to pre – enter as per a championship show, but you can not “win out” of championship classes at an open event.

Championship Show

See the full description as at the start of this document.

“The Nationals”

The Nationals are a Championship Agility event tacked on to the breed nationals, they move about the country and happen in September each year.

NDTA (National Dog Training Assembly)

This is the premier Agility event of the year. It happens at Labour Weekend (October) each year. The event moves between the historical zones so happens in the South Island twice every five years. You do not have to qualify to enter this event, numbers are usually very large and the shows are run over the 3 day weekend.

TYPES OF CLASSES

Elementary A – A class for experienced handlers with new dogs.

Elementary B - A class for new handlers and dogs.

Elementarys are generally only offered at Ribbon Trails. If you enter an elementary you cannot enter a Novice at the same show.

Starters – The easiest level of agility. There will be jumps, tyres, tunnels and weaves, but no contact gear. To win out of starters you need 2 wins on a clear round.

Novice – The next level. It may contain any obstacle apart from the See Saw. To win out of novice you need 3 wins on a clear round.

Intermediate – Is the next step up from Novice it may contain any obstacle and will have more handling challenges.

Senior – The most advanced class which will generally contain several handling challenges.

Jumpers C – The first level of Jumpers classes. Will be reasonably straight forward. All Jumpers classes do not contain any contact equipment or weaves. You need 2 wins to progress to Jumpers B.

Jumpers B – The second level of Jumpers classes. The course will contain more handling challenges. You need 2 wins to progress to Jumpers A.

Jumpers A – The most advanced Jumpers class, will contain several handling challenges.

All of the above classes (except Elementary) could be run at Ribbon Trial and Championship level. Your Ribbon Trial wins will not affect your status at Championship Shows, but your status at Championship Level will affect your status at Ribbon Trials.

HEIGHT CLASSES

Recently the NZ Agility Committee introduced changes to the heights. Any standard class that has more than 15 dogs in each height (micro/mini, midi, maxi) will be split into 3 competitions. For a full explanation see the NZKC' Agility Committees web site www.dogagility.org.nz