

Dog Agility Pre-School

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Dog Agility Pre-School – Basic Concepts Agility training concepts

Types of training in foundation agility class:

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- 1. Skill (behavior) training:** This is where most of your “dog training” skills are used and what we spend most time on in agility. You use dog training concepts to teach your dogs obstacle and course running fluencies.
- 2. Strength (anaerobic) training:** This is a hard area for us to train dogs because they can't go to the gym and lift weights. Nevertheless, like all athletes, dogs need strength training. Dr. Zink suggests tugging and performing stationary exercises like sitting up and begging (calisthenic exercises). Suzanne Clothier suggests running up hills. Being in the Central Valley we don't have many hills. Running flat out over a low A-Frame (4 feet) is a good substitute for hills and also accomplishes 1. If you have a swimming pool, teach your dog to swim laps (also accomplishes 3). Doing 5 jumps in Clothier's natural jumping method also builds strength and aerobic capacity.
- 3. Aerobic training:** Take your dog jogging with you or teach her to run along beside you while you are riding a bike. Do aerobic training almost daily, i.e., 5-6 days a week. You can teach a dog to run on a treadmill or do jump work like Clothier's natural jumping method to condition aerobically.
- 4. Proprioception training:** Proprioception is knowledge of where all your moveable body parts are and the ability to move them voluntarily. Some uncooperative muscles can be “trained” to be contracted voluntarily if you tickle the muscle. Dogs don't use their hind legs as much as their front legs. Their front legs generally contribute at least 60% of the force for moving forward. Dogs are less aware of the positions of hind legs—this matters a lot for the larger dogs, especially on contact equipment. We train proprioception with cavaletti, perch work, backing up on the flat and up stairs. Susan Salo uses proprioception training in allowing dogs to figure out how to jump most efficiently.
- 5. Flexibility training** (not in Zink's article). Flexibility increases performance and prevents injury. A flexible dog has a longer stride, allowing him to go faster using less energy. Suzanne Clothier's book shows how to stretch a dog. We'll be having Ziji Scott come and talk to us about how to stretch and massage our dogs to avoid injury.
- 6. Overtraining.** Like human athletes, dogs can train too much. Overtraining tears down muscles, making dogs weaker and more prone to injury. Human competitive athletes build rest cycles into their training. If you compete every weekend, you may need to take some time off to rest your dog.
- 7. Weekend warriors:** This pattern of athletic training is when the athlete does no athletic conditioning between periods of intense athletic activity. This is essentially a burst of 2-day overtraining. If your dog lies around the house all week and then you drag the two of you out to sprint around a course at an agility trial, you are both weekend warriors. Weekend warriors are at most risk for injury and of course their athletic power is not as great as if they conditioned regularly.