

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

*The following are general answers pertaining to the main agility venues in New England (AKC, CPE, NADAC and USDAA). Always be sure to thoroughly read your entry premiums, confirmation letters, and the organization's rules and regulations.*

### **Where do I begin?**

Start with a good beginner's class. An instructor can provide an introduction to obstacle performance, and also give you feedback on how your team is progressing. Once you and your dog have mastered the fundamentals of the sport, your instructor can advise you about when your team is ready to start entering competitions.

Before you enter any shows, it would be best to attend some agility "run-throughs," "show & go's," and/or "fun matches." These three terms are used to describe formal practice sessions that offer a full agility course. These type of events offer several benefits to a novice team over entering an actual trial. They can be much less expensive than entering a show, while still offering a trial environment. Teams can also make up their own courses, work only on select obstacles, and training in the ring is encouraged. At a trial, such actions are usually prohibited, and may lead to excusals. Check with your local training centers and agility clubs to see if they offer these practice opportunities.

While it is customary at these events to allow toys/treats in the ring, confirm that they will be permitted if you want to use them during your run. Also ask if there is a time limit on runs, as some groups will set a maximum time as a courtesy to all.

### **How do I know what height my dog should jump?**

Check to see if your agility instructor or agility club has a measuring device for this purpose. If one is not available, you can stand your dog in a natural relaxed position, and with help if needed, take a measurement with a yardstick. You will be looking for the height at the top of the dog's shoulders (you may feel the round top of the shoulder bones). This will give you an approximate height.

Pay close attention to where your dog's approximate height falls in the range for the jump class in which you are expecting to run. If your measurement is near a cut off, it is a good idea to enter a show in the lower height class. This is because agility organizations do not allow dogs to drop to a lower height class at an event. If the judge measures your dog taller than you anticipated and/or entered, your dog must be "bumped up" to the next height level. If this does happen, make sure every run takes place in the corrected height, otherwise a successful effort may be altered to an elimination! Tip: the jump height classes vary between the agility organizations, so carefully check each venue's height requirements carefully.

### **Where can I earn agility titles?**

In the US, there are four primary dog agility organizations:

- [American Kennel Club](#) (AKC): Open to pure-bred dogs that are 15 months or older.
- [Canine Performance Events](#) (CPE): Open to all dogs that are at least 15 months of age.

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

- [North American Dog Agility Council](#) (NADAC): Open to all dogs that are at least 18 months of age.
- [United States Dog Agility Association](#) (USDAA): Open to all dogs that are at least 18 months of age.
- ASCA, DOCNA, Teacup and UKC are also national organizations, but events for these venues are hosted less often in New England.

### **How do I find a show to enter?**

The websites of the various venues carry nationwide listings of all their events. You can also check out the events section at [Clean Run](#). The entry form for a show is included in what is called a “premium”. A premium contains an abbreviated version of the venue’s regulations, any rules the hosting club may have, as well as directions to the event, nearby accommodations and other helpful information. The premium will also specify who to contact if you have questions about the event.

### **I don’t have a registration number. Can I enter a show without one?**

This depends on the venue you are entering.

- AKC requires the dog be registered with them in advance, as does CPE and NADAC. NADAC does offer instant registration on its website.
- USDAA allows new competitors to either submit registration forms with their first entry or in advance of it.

### **How do I get a permanent height card?**

- AKC offers “day of show measuring,” which is valid for that trial only, or a Volunteer Measuring Official (VMO)/ Measuring Judge (MJ) will be available to issue permanent height applications. A VMO/MJ will provide you a form to fill out. You will need the dog’s pedigree information and AKC registration number to complete it. The VMO/MJ will send the finished form to the AKC, and you will be provided a copy of it. This can be used as a temporary height card pending your official one’s arrival. AKC also has an age requirement to earn a permanent height assignment.
- CPE currently keeps track of the heights taken at their shows, and will automatically send you a card. CPE also has an age requirement to earn a permanent card.
- NADAC has a form that three judges need to sign, and again, has an age requirement to be eligible for a permanent card.
- USDAA will send you a temporary blue card and you will need three judges to fill out a height measurement. One of these judges must be a Certified Measuring

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

Judge (CMJ). The exception would be if your dog clearly jumps the tallest height—then get your dog measured once, just to be sure. When your card is completed, send it back to USDAA, and depending on your dog's age, a permanent card will be issued.

In general, dogs that are age eligible to participate in events, but too young to earn a permanent height card, are issued “temporary” ones. A final height assignment is made pending an additional measurement(s) upon the dog reaching a certain age (usually around 2-3 years old).

### **Regular or Preferred? Skilled or Proficient? Championship or Performance?**

Agility organizations have created different divisions between dogs jumping at full height (per their regulations) and those jumping at lower heights. Other differences between the divisions may exist, such as additional course time and/or some changes to equipment. The rationale for offering separate programs is to provide a greater range of teams more opportunities to participate in competition.

The AKC divides their program into *Regular* and *Preferred*. NADAC refers to their divisions as *Skilled* and *Proficient*, while USDAA uses the terms *Championship* and *Performance*. The *Preferred*, *Skilled* and *Performance* classes all offer teams more standard course time, lower jump heights, and various other differences particular to their venues. The two divisions also have separate titling tracks. Teams can alternate between an organization's two programs, but only USDAA allows for a mixed division entry at a single trial.

CPE's divisions are *Standard*, *Enthusiast*, and *Specialist*. There are various differences between the three programs, significantly regarding jump height expectations. Check the rules of the venue of your choice regarding the range of variations between their divisions.

### **Are the obstacles the same for all four agility organizations?**

No, there are differences. For example, NADAC uses rubber coated slat-less contacts, and does not use the chute, tire jump or table. CPE allows clubs to use slatted or slat-less contacts. USDAA and AKC require slats on contacts, except the teeter. Please refer to the organization's equipment regulations for detailed information as other differences may exist. If your dog is not familiar with the type of contacts or equipment used by a particular agility organization, it's a good idea to try and get some practice on it prior to entering a show.

### **First Received, Random Draw, or Postmark?**

- “**First received**” means that entries are accepted on a “first come-first served” basis. For these types of shows some people may overnight/express mail their entries so that the trial secretary receives it on the event's opening day. Time and method of arrival may also be specified. Be sure to meet all the requirements, otherwise a trial secretary can discard or bump your entry to the back of the line if it arrives earlier than the date/time listed.

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

- In a “**random draw**” show, all entries received during the allowed open submission time will be pooled together, and then exhibitors are randomly selected.
- The “**postmark**” method requires an entry’s envelope to have a specific cancellation date stamped on it by the Post Office. A later date would be acceptable if the show did not fill on its opening date. Be aware that an earlier cancellation date may also result in a submission being discarded or bumped back.

### Novice A or Novice B?

- The Novice A division is for dogs that have not earned an AKC agility title and its handler has never shown any dog to an AKC agility title. Additionally, to be eligible to run in Novice A, the handler must also be the dog’s owner, co-owner, or a member of the owner’s household.
- Novice B is for dogs that have previously earned an AKC agility title or are being handled by someone who has, or if the handler is not an owner/co-owner nor a member of the owner’s household. Refer to your AKC regulations for more details.

### What do I need for my first show?

- **Your dog!** In case of an emergency, it may be helpful to have a copy of your dog’s vaccination record, a list of any medications that your dog may regularly take, a current photo your dog, and a dog first aid kit.
- **Dog equipment:** leashes, training treats, toys, water, water bowl, and poop bags. You will need a safe place for your dog while you are walking your courses, using the restrooms, volunteering, etc. Many people use a crate to contain their dogs because using their car may not be possible due to weather conditions, or it may be parked simply too far away from the rings. If using a crate or ex-pen, consider bringing a sheet to cover it to create a more relaxing environment for your dog.
- **Collars:** Some venues do not allow collars of any kind in the ring. Tip: if you plan on showing in different venues, to avoid confusion, just have your dog run “naked” (without a collar) at all events. All organizations allow this option. Wearing a collar in the ring (even accidentally) in some venues is an automatic excusal! Some organizations also have restrictions on the use of certain types of training collars, leashes, and halters. They may prohibit them on the show grounds, even on a dog that is not entered in their event. Be sure to check the venue’s regulations or the show’s premium for what is allowable.
- **For yourself:** layers of clothing, cleats (depending on the ground conditions), an extra pair of running shoes and socks (just in case!), any special weather gear (if the skies are threatening or the temperatures are dipping), a chair, sunglasses, sun block, hat, and your sense of humor. Some shows may not have a food vendor present, so you may want to pack yourself beverages and snacks/meals.
- **At outdoor shows:** Be prepared to provide your own shelter. Most people have some form of portable shade/tent/screen house. Shows are held rain or shine, so your team may need some form of protection from the elements. If weather conditions are too

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

extreme for you or your dog, you can “scratch” (withdraw without refund) from your runs as you see fit.

- **Documentation:** your confirmation letter and running order, the premium list, your dog’s jump card (either a permanent or temporary card, or the form for the judge to fill out), and for reference, a copy of the organization’s rules.

### **It’s the day before my first show, what happens now?**

Some shows allow set-up in the afternoon or evening before the event. If possible, take advantage and attend it. Doing so will give you the opportunity to explore the site, find a good spot to put up your crate/chair/shelter, and possibly even check-in and get your dog measured. If you can’t attend it, arrive early enough the next morning before check-in begins to get your space established and familiarize yourself with the site’s layout.

### **Where do I check-in at an outdoor show?**

Generally outdoor events have a main tent where the club will hold check in and measuring. Course maps and the volunteer schedule will also be located there. If armbands are being issued, you will be able to obtain them during check-in. If you have any questions or concerns during the trial, the main tent is a good place to find someone who can help you.

### **It’s the day of the show; I’ve set up, got measured and checked in— what happens next?**

- If you were given a catalog, check it for the rings’ running orders. Look carefully over your course maps, but be aware that judges can alter the lay out without notice.
- Be sure to attend the general briefing, as well as the judge’s briefing for whatever classes you’ve entered. Ask questions during the judges’ briefings, if you have any.
- During the show keep an eye on what is happening in your ring(s) as sometimes running orders may suddenly change without much announcement.
- Take note if your class has split walk-throughs, or only one.
- While clubs are very careful in creating ring schedules, sometimes folks will find themselves needing to be in two places at once. This is called a ring conflict, and despite a club’s best efforts to avoid them, they can, and do occur. If a conflict happens to you don’t panic! Report it to both gate stewards, and they will help you resolve it. Most often just moving your team up or down in the running order will take care of the problem. If there is no gate steward present, you **MUST** make a notation of a conflict next to your name on the gate sheet, otherwise the ring workers are not required to make accommodations for you, and you will be marked “absent”, and not given an opportunity to take your run later. Sometimes one ring may take precedence over another. If you find yourself in a ring conflict, ask if one ring has priority over another, and then plan accordingly.

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

- Before starting your run, take a glance around the ring. Confirm that the jumps and other equipment are at their correct heights. As an example, if a jump is too high and your dog knocks it down, some judges may be forgiving, while others may not be, and you could end up with a disqualifying score (NQ) even though the jump was set inaccurately. Remember, it's your responsibility to make sure the course is set to the requirements of your height category.
- When walking the course, take note of any slippery spots, dips in the terrain, and anything else that might be a safety concern, including the position or quality of equipment. If you discover something you think is unsafe, point it out to the judge or one of the course builders. It maybe something that can be changed, and everyone will appreciate the correction for safety's sake.

### **How do I get the results of my runs?**

This will depend on the agility organization and the trial secretary who is running the show. USDAA trials use an "accumulator sheet," which is a large piece of paper that resembles a scoring sheet used for bowling. Other venues offer electronic scoring, and will post print outs. Accumulators or score sheets are usually found in a central location and will list the results for all the exhibitors. This will include course time, faults, placement, and whether the team qualified ("Q"), or did not (NQ).

Some groups provide copies of scribe sheets. If available, you can immediately review it for your time and faults.

If when checking your scribe sheet or posted scores you think there is an error, ask about it at the scoring table. If the scorers refer you to the judge to confer about your results, approach the gate steward to intercede for you with the judge. It is best to do this sooner rather than later, so your run may be fresh enough for the judge to recall it. Keep in mind that most venues do not allow judges to review recordings of runs, and that the judge's decisions are final.

Be aware that some organizations will let non-qualifying teams earn placement ribbons, while others require that you qualify in order to earn a ribbon. All shows will have a location where you can pick up ribbons. Sometimes the ribbon distribution is on the honor or "self-serve" system, while in other cases, someone will present you with your awards. Generally, prizes/ribbons are not mailed to winners and must be claimed during the event.

### **What's this about volunteering?**

Volunteers are the heart and soul of most shows. They are the folks who time your runs, gate steward, reset fallen bars, and carry your leash to the ring exit, in other words, the very people who make your participation in a show possible! Volunteers fill jobs both big and small. Volunteering is a great way to pass the time between your runs, get to know people, and most of all, an excellent way to learn more about your new sport. Most clubs provide volunteers with incentives such as vouchers for meals or future shows, a refreshment table, and sometimes gifts or a special workers' raffle.

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

### **Summary of information needed to enter a show:**

#### **American Kennel Club (AKC):**

For all of the specifics, please refer to the AKC regulations. However, the basics include the following:

- Your dog must be registered with the AKC in advance.
- Your dog's jump height. The AKC confirms the dog's height by one of two methods: a judge will measure the dog on the day of the show (which is valid for that event only), or the handler must show a Jump Height Card. To get a Jump Height Card, you will need to attend a trial that offers a Volunteer Measuring Official (VMO) or Measuring Judge (MJ). The VMO /MJ will have a form for you to fill out for either a temporary (dog under age 2) or permanent card. The VMO/MJ sends the completed form to the AKC, but you will be provided a yellow copy that you can use until you receive your official card.
- Regular or Preferred Class. The Preferred classes have lower jump heights than the Regular classes (typically by four inches). There are separate titles for Preferred and Regular classes, and owners and dogs can switch back and forth between the two, but not at the same trial.
- Novice A or B Division. Novice A classes are for teams, meaning both the dog and handler, that have never earned an AKC agility title. Additionally the handler must be the dog's owner/co-owner, or member of the owner's household. Novice B classes are for dogs who have previously earned an AKC agility title or are being shown by someone who has, or if the handler is not the dog's owner/co-owner/member of the owner's household.

#### **Canine Performance Events (CPE):**

For all of the specifics, please refer to the CPE regulations. However, the basics include the following:

- Your dog must be registered with CPE in advance.
- Your dog's jump height. CPE currently keeps track of the heights taken at their shows, and will automatically send you a card. CPE has an age requirement to earn a permanent card, and if your dog is younger than it, you will be provided a temporary card.
- *Regular, Enthusiast* or *Specialist*. In addition to the *Regular* division, CPE offers *Enthusiast* (dogs are allowed to enter a height class that is four inches lower than their permanent jump height assignment) and *Specialist* (jumps are eight inches lower). The *Veteran's* program is being eliminated at the end of 2007, and dogs that had not entered it previous to February 2007 are no longer eligible for it.

#### **North American Agility Dog Council (NADAC):**

For all of the specifics, please refer to the NADAC regulations. However, the basics include the following:

- Dogs must have a NADAC identification number before entering a show, and NADAC does offer instant registration on its website.

## Information For Novice Agility Teams

- Your dog's jump height. NADAC has a form for a permanent jump height card that three judges need to sign, and again, has an age requirement. This form can be found on their website, and is not provided at a trial.
- *Proficient* or *Skilled*. In the *Proficient* division, dogs must jump their measured jump height per the NADAC jump height table. In the *Skilled* division, dogs may jump one height lower than required in *Proficient*. *Proficient* runs must also be "clean", or without faults for qualifying credit, whereas the *Skilled* program may offer allowable faults.
- Veteran dogs, veteran/disabled handlers, and junior handlers may enter in veteran or junior handler classes and are eligible take a lower jump height in either the *Proficient* or *Skilled* divisions. Please refer to the NADAC regulations for more information.

### **United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA):**

For all of the specifics, please refer to the USDAA regulations. However, the basics include the following:

- USDAA allows new competitors to submit registration forms either with their first entry or in advance of it.
- Your dog's jump height. USDAA will send you a temporary blue card, and you will need to get your dog measured by three judges, who will sign your card. One of these judges must be a Certified Measuring Judge (CMJ). Even if you think your dog clearly falls into the tallest height category, get your dog measured once, just to confirm it. When your card is completed, send it back to USDAA and a permanent card will be issued, depending on your dog's age.
- *Championship* or *Performance Program*. The *Championship Program's* equipment and heights are based on international standards of competition. The *Performance Program* offers lower equipment heights, no spread jumps, plus a few seconds more course time.