

Agility Training for Dogs

- Dog agility training is a great form of exercise for dogs and handlers, can harness a dog's energy and boost his or her confidence, and can help improve the human–animal bond.
- Always put your dog's health and safety first during exercise. Your veterinarian can help you determine whether your dog is a good candidate for dog agility training.
- Completion of an obedience class is required for enrollment in most dog agility training classes.
- The United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA) oversees recreational and competitive dog agility programs.

The Basics

There are many kinds of organized sports and activities that you can do with your dog.

Dog agility is a competitive sport in which a person (handler) directs a dog through a timed obstacle course. Handlers and dogs race against the clock as the dogs jump hurdles, climb ramps, run through tunnels, cross a see-saw, and weave through a line of poles. Scoring is based on faults, similar to equestrian show jumping. Dog agility competition has become an exciting spectator event, and training for it is a great form of exercise for dogs and handlers, can harness a dog's energy and boost his or her confidence, and can help improve the human–animal bond.

Dog agility is frequently referred to as *a sport for all dogs* because any type of dog, purebred or mixed breed, can compete. More than 150 dog breeds (including mixed breeds as a single group) have performed well in this sport. Dogs with high energy and good agility make good competitors.

Training Classes

Dog agility training is physically and mentally demanding for dogs. Your veterinarian can help you determine whether your dog is a good candidate for dog agility training. Always put your dog's health

and safety first during exercise. Never force your dog to perform a task that makes him or her anxious or scared. If your dog does not appear comfortable with an obstacle, he or she should be taken to another obstacle. A dog may need time to work up to a large or complicated obstacle.

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An average dog agility class may meet for about 1 hour weekly for 6 weeks. Classes often begin with playtime and warmups to accustom the dogs to their surroundings. Classes tend to be enjoyable for dogs, and they give handlers the opportunity to meet other dog owners in their community.

Competition

The United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA) has four basic height divisions within its two competitive programs (performance and championship). The jump heights have proven to be safe for properly trained dogs. Developed for recreational competition, the performance program involves lower jump

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heights and more generous time limits. As with any sport, considerable training time is required to be highly competitive. Dogs must be registered with the USDAA to compete in its events and are eligible to compete beginning at 18 months of age.

USDAA also promotes dog agility as a community sport, offering people a fun alternative for spending quality time with their dogs. Handlers and dogs can do reasonably well and have fun without

Behavior and Training

the training time required in other competitive canine activities. USDAA has developed a junior handler program for school-age children and their pets to encourage their participation and teach responsible pet ownership.

Getting Involved

To get involved in dog agility, locate a group and/or attend an agility test or demonstration in your area. For more information, visit the USDAA Web site: www.usdaa.com.