

Ask the Obedience Experts

Teaching Directed Jumping – the Basic Principles

By Elaine Hamill and Amy D. Stephens

Directed jumping is one of the exercises required in the Utility class. It is comprised of three basic parts:

- Dog takes a mark and goes to it on command
- Dog turns and sits on command
- Dog takes direction to jump on command and return to handler.

There are many pieces that make up this puzzle, and each of them starts from the basics in training. (What follows is an “abridged” version of the training involved, but it is enough to get you started correctly).



Elaine marks the target for Linus. Photos courtesy Elaine Hamill.

First off, your dog needs to be taught to take a mark. In our September 2004 column, Elaine discussed the basics for teaching a good mark. In case that was a while ago for some, here are her words:

“Later, but before six months, I introduce marking a target. With the pup sitting in heel position, I point to a largish piece of food about 4’ away that he can easily see, using the same signal as I would for a glove retrieve in Utility. As soon as the pup stares at the food, I release him and he goes and eats it. Now he knows to look where you point; a valuable skill for finding a stray tennis ball, too! Later, you can use this set up to start go-out training by marking a toy or food 4’ from the baby gate and working back from there.”

Teaching the mark is crucial in teaching the go-outs. Just as with the mark, once the dog/pup understands that looking where you point and going in that direction is rewarding, you need to change from a food target to something a bit more tangible. We do not use food as our go-out target. We tend to use something equally rewarding, but easier to wean away from (ie – a toy). The important part about the toy is that it is visible and the dog LIKES it. We want

to build the dog up to going a healthy distance away from us in a straight line to a target that they can see plainly.

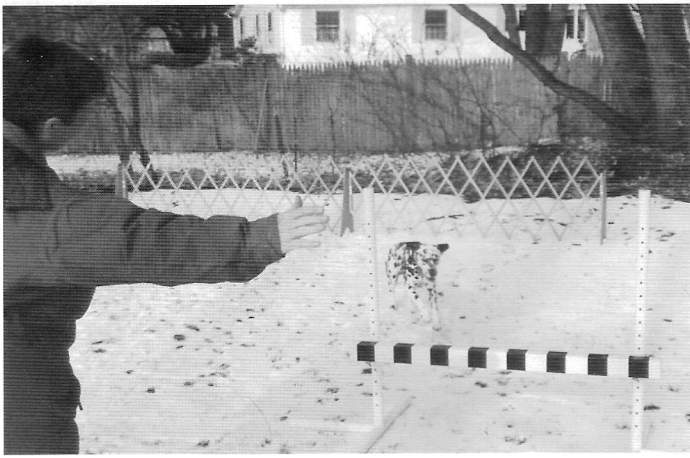
I like to start the dog off simply with the idea of what “go-out” means. I put the dog in a sit stay, and I walk about 10 feet or so straight out in front of dog. I put the toy down on the ground, and I return to heel position. I then give the dog the “mark” and tell them something to identify it (“mark,” “show me,” “target,” etc). Be consistent in what word you use to identify your target; you will be using this word for a looonnnnggg time! Once the dog clearly has the mark, I send them using the words “Go-Out,” while sweeping my left hand along side of his/her face in the direction of the target. This gives the dog both a verbal command and a hand signal to indicate where to go. Dog goes out and gets toy. We cheer a lot. Instant reward.

Part two of this exercise is the turn and sit. The key part in this is that the dog needs to understand that when you say “sit” you mean “sit right now facing me.” I tend to work this through early in the process of the go out, so the dog can put the pieces together fairly quickly. I will call “random” sit commands when just out and about with my dog, so that they learn to sit quickly on command, and then I toss a goodie to them. This teaches the dog to sit quickly, but watch mom as she has the food. With the go out command, I will periodically call the sit just before the dog gets to the toy. Then I will go to the dog to give him/her a goodie and release the dog to the toy as a reward also. The important detail here is that the dog needs to turn and sit on your command, and not come forward toward you, but stay where you tell him to sit.

Part three of this exercise is taking the direction for the jumps. At this point, your dog should understand both how to jump, and to watch your hands. I introduce “hands” to puppies using what is popularly called “touch” – a piece of food between my middle fingers



Linus has just executed the ‘turn and sit.’



Elaine demonstrates the bar jump signal while Linus starts towards the jump.

with my hand open (palm facing the dog) and telling the dog to “touch.” When the dog touches my hand with his nose, I give him the food; then I keep switching hands and the location of my hands so the dog learns to follow where my hands are going. Starting with the jumps only about 10 feet apart and set at about half the dog’s jump height, I will sit the dog about 15 to 20 feet centered behind the jumps. I then go about 5 feet or so on the opposite side of the jumps (centered also) and face the dog. Slowly I will begin to lift one of my arms out to the side, palm facing the dog. When the dog sees my hand moving, I then use the dog’s name and give the jump command. The dog should take the correct jump. I then call to front and reward the dog. Then I put the dog back out at the same spot, and repeat the process using the opposite jump.

As you are working through this process of teaching the whole picture to your Dal, it is important to point out that you will hit some “bumps” along the way. Common issues are: dog sits on command, not facing handler (not squared); dog chooses opposite jump, not one commanded; dog goes under bar jump; dog goes out to corner of ring, not center; dog takes jump on way out. All of these issues have happened to us at some point during our own training – it is all part of the natural learning curve. Here are some suggestions to help avoid having them become major problems in the exercise.

Dog sits not facing handler: Believe it or not, this is NOT scoreable! This is only annoying because it opens the possibility for the dog to miss your command and/or take the wrong jump. Most dogs work this out pretty easily on their own, because if they take the wrong jump, you will be stopping them for it. Eventually they learn it is a whole lot easier and way more fun if they actually WATCH what you are doing. Plus, by teaching random sits with rewards, the dog learns to sit and face you for the reward.

Dog chooses different jump: In the early stages of teaching this exercise, if the dog heads in the wrong direction, I stop everything. I have been known to use what I call the “universal ‘Hey!’ command,” which means I usually say something like “Hey!” which my dogs understand to mean that something isn’t right here. It is meant to simply get their attention and stop them from continuing toward the wrong jump. Once stopped, I go to the dog and bring him back to the go out point. I remind him to stay, and then I go back to where I was standing. At this point I will be slower and more deliberate in my signal, and may even step over towards the correct jump to make it super obvious so that the dog cannot be wrong. Also, I never repeat a jump if it has been taken correctly on

command, instead I always alternate my jumps. *IF* (in rare cases) the dog continues to refuse the jump commanded, it may be a jumping issue; which could mean several things, none of which I will be covering in this column.

Dog goes under bar jump: Also known as “playing limbo.” This was a much more common issue back in the days of higher jumps, but it can still be an issue for some dogs. It almost always means improper introduction to the bar as a jump for that dog. I would go back to a lower height on the bar jump, and work it through to full height slowly so that the dog gets the idea.

Dog goes out to corner of ring, not center: Many times, especially with Utility A dogs, this is a confusion issue with gloves. Often the dog will go to the corner in which the glove was retrieved from. To help lessen the probability of this happening, I do a proofing exercise where I send my dog on a go out (full distance) while leaving gloves #1 and #3 out. Same as if the dog is heading for the wrong jump – if the dog goes towards a glove, I simply stop everything. Then, I will shorten up my distance and try for a straight go out again. As the dog gets the idea to go straight and ignore the gloved corners, I increase my distance to full distance again.



Linus gets ready to take the high jump after Elaine gave him the signal to take the jump.

Dog takes jump on way out: This happens to a lot of people, and it can be frustrating. Basically it means that the dog doesn’t understand that the go out NEVER includes a jump, only on the return should they be jumping. Lots of times this can happen simply because the go outs were taught without jumps being present. To avoid this issue, I start teaching go outs with the jumps in the picture fairly early on – usually by the time I am doing 15 foot go outs. In the beginning, I am setting up to send the dog a little ahead of where the jumps are set. Over time, I increase my distance so I am between the jumps, then a little behind them, until I am at full distance. As I increase my distance on the go outs, I am also increasing the distance between the jumps, so the dog eventually gets the full picture. If the dog is shown early that jumps are not part of the go out, then the temptation to take a jump is significantly minimized and even eliminated.

That’s it for now. If anyone has questions on specific areas of training you would like to see covered, feel free to email either Amy (dalcollic@comcast.net) or Elaine (otchdal@comcast.net). We would love to hear from you! Happy Training!