

2026 Course Design Guidelines for Judges

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Basic Course Design:

Use a Grid

Use a grid when designing courses. This way you will not be disappointed when you actually figure out the true distances. It's amazing how far off you can be when just putting it on paper or a white board without a grid.

Entry & Placement of Start Sign

Placing the Entry on the right side of the Table Steward's Table (facing the ring) will save time. This way, the judge will easily see the Arm Band number when leaving the Table to begin judging. The judge needs to get from the Table to begin judging in as little time as possible.

Placement of the Start to the left of the Table may prevent the Judge from easily seeing the Exhibitor's arm band number when leaving the Table to begin judging.

Distance Between Signs

It's always a good idea to know what distance is best between signs. This distance is different for many signs. If a Team completes an exercise in front and to the left of the sign, a good rule of thumb is to have the next sign in about 10 feet. If a Team will complete a sign further back, then the next sign can be placed closer than 10 feet from that sign. If a Team will complete a sign beyond the sign, the next sign should be about 10 feet from where the previous exercise ended.

When Designing Courses, set up portions of the Course and Walk it to figure out a comfortable distance between each sign. Don't just put it down on paper and think it will work. NOTE: After designing and setting up courses for a couple of years, you will develop a natural feeling for most distances while designing them.

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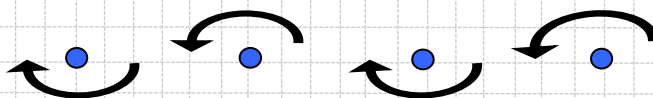
Distance Before/After Jump

Keep in mind the large variety of teams (sizes of dogs or handicapped handlers) that will be using the course. Handlers who walk when passing the jump will probably not need as much room as handlers who run. Some teams need to run when passing the jump in order for their dog to clear the jump. Keep this in mind by allowing at least 10 feet before the jump and 15 feet after the jump to be fair for all teams. (*You will have a better understanding if you set up a jump and try it yourself.*) Have different sized dogs and breeds try this so you can actually see how different teams work. For the jump #210 "Send to Jump", the sign following this can be 10 feet because the dog will be heeling with the handler when crossing the plane of the jump.

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Distance Between Cones in Cone Exercises

The distance between cones is stated in the Regulations. Make sure you allow for this in designing your courses. Make cone exercises according to the regulations and place where desired. Do not put cones closer than 6 feet apart otherwise there may not enough room for some exhibitors, including handicapped exhibitors.



In this example, you can see the cones are 6 ft. apart on the grid.

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Placement of Finish Sign

It is important that the Finish sign is not too far from the Exit or the Sit-Stay.

Keep in mind that a judge will put the Time Steward where he/she feels the Timer can best see the team cross the finish line. If you design the course so the Timer can actually sit next to the Table Steward (inside or outside the ring- judge’s choice), and see the team cross the finish, the Timer will not have to keep getting up to take the timer to the Table Steward.

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Placement of Sit-Stay

The Sit-Stay needs to be close to the Finish to save time. There needs to be a location to put the Leash that is 15 feet from this sign. Make sure the handler can easily sit the dog *facing the direction he will go to fetch the leash. (*Dog does not have to sit squarely in front of this sign).

Exit

If you have an Entrance and an Exit, place the Exit far enough from the Entry to prevent dogs from passing each other closely when exiting/entering the ring.

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Table

The Table Steward’s table should be as close to the Start sign as possible. The judge will need to go from the Table to the Start in a minimum of time.

Angles of Turns

Design courses so the 90 degree and 180 degree turns are very close to those angles. Do not make a 90 degree turn into a 45 degree turn to get a diagonal in your course. You must use the cone exercises or sign #s37-40. With the diagonal signs (37-40), the course must go in the direction of the arrow, which is 45 or 225 degrees.

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Course Design Choices

Using Cone Exercises to Your Advantage

Cone exercises, diagonals and loops can add variety to the courses you design.

A serpentine-weave-once can angle you away from a jump when changing from an Excellent course to an Advanced course.

A spiral, or an off-set-figure-eight can be used in making a wide 180 degree turn. A straight-figure-8-weave-twice can be used at an angle to add variety to your course and can also end at an angle.

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A straight-figure-8-weave-twice can be used as a 180 degree turn.

The following Signs need cones to be placed 6-8 feet apart:

#21. Spiral right – Dog Outside

#24. Serpentine Weave Once

#22. Spiral left – Dog Inside

#32. Figure 8 – No Distractions

#23. Straight Figure 8 Weave Twice

#41-42 Offset Serpentine (1st & 3rd cones 6’)

#108. Offset Figure 8 - Distractions

Center cone is offset right/left 3-4 ft.

need to be 5-6 feet apart.

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Stationary Signs with Sits

Keep the number of “sits” on a course to down as much as possible. Some signs have several sits. Sits use up precious time.

Choice of Signs for Courses.

Stationary Signs

Try not to put too many stationary signs next to each other. It generally makes courses too choppy.

40 Make each course a “Rally Challenge” for Novice, Intermediate, Advanced & Excellent. Signs to consider using in these courses:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| change of pace | call front |
| walk around the dog | cone exercise |
| down | stand (except Novice) |

Placing 360/270 turns consecutively can cause dizziness, especially if they are both the same direction.

30 Using a single jump in Excellent class saves time for the Ring Steward. However, two separate jumps can be challenging for the exhibitors. Don’t hesitate to use the Broad Jump occasionally, even though it’s time consuming to change. The Broad Jump can be problematic for teams with sign #210 – Send to Jump.

Sharing Cones/Sign Holders on Courses.

More than one sign can be placed on a sign holder to save space if they are 90 or 180 degrees to each other. Cones cannot be shared with the two Figure 8 and Cloverleaf exercises.

20 **White Board Designs**

Get a small white board (12x15). Make 1” rally signs and copy them onto a magnetic sheet. These magnetic sheets can be purchased on line. Cut them out and you have what you need to design courses! The signs will not be set to scale, but you can get a good idea for some course designs. This will be a rough copy of a course until you can put it on a grid to actually see the distances. This is how I began designing Rally courses in 2003, before it became a Non-Regular AKC class in 2004. It’s been a wonderful journey!

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Timing a Course

Now comes the fun in finding out how much time your course will take. Two minutes or less is a good time to work for. Include that 15 seconds for the Sit-Stay in Excellent.

First, walk the length of a course from the beginning to the end without performing the signs. It should average one second for every five feet of this length. If you use my grid, you can count the seconds at every five foot grid line.

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Once you have the 'length' time, you will need to add this time to the time it takes to perform each exercise. Here is a chart I use. I came up with these times by using several dogs and handlers of different sizes and speed and took an average. These times are very close to the actual time it would take for the average team to perform each exercise.

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Novice		Novice		Advanced		Stationary are Bold		Master	
Sign No./Time		Sign No./Time		Sign No./Time		Sign No./Time		Sign No./Time	
3.	3	26.	13	101.	4	201.	8	301.	13
4.	7	27.	4	102.	4	202.	6	302.	13
5.	0	28.	3	103.	0	203.	6	303.	13
6.	0	29.	2	104.	7	204.	6	304.	7
7.	2	30.	6	105.	9	205.	4	305.	7
8.	2	31.	9	106.	5	206.	7	306.	12
9.	3	32.	11	107.	6	207.	7	307.	12
10.	3	33.	4	108.	11	208.	13	308.	12
11.	4	34.	3	109.	4	209.	13	309.	5
12.	5	35.	7	110.	9	210.	6	310.	5
13.	5	36.	4	111.	9	211.	5	311.	10
14.	5	37.	3	112.	5	212.	5	312.	4
15.	7	38.	3	113.	6	213.	5	313.	3
16.	6	39.	0	114.	7	214.	2	314.	15
17.	0	40.	0	115.	5	215.	2	315.	7
18.	0	41.	6	116.	3	216.	6	316.	7
19.	0	42.	6	117.	4	298.	15	317.	16
20.	1			118.	3	299.	0	318.	16
21.	16			119.	5			319.	4
22.	17			120.	3			320.	3
23.	12			121.	5			321.	4
24.	5			122.	5			322.	4
25.	12			123.	2				

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Summary of Sign and Course Times

Sign Time: These times were averaged by timing many dogs of different sizes and speeds performing each sign.

Length Time: To walk the path of the course from beginning to end without the signs takes an average of 1 second for every 5 feet.

TOTAL COURSE TIME = COURSE LENGTH TIME + SIGN TIME

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