

Elicia Calhoun Seminar for Mobility Challenged Handlers

PART 2

Independent obstacle performance:

With each of the agility obstacles Elicia took us back to basics. She stressed one goal: the dog should be so comfortable and confident on each piece of equipment that the dog can perform independently with the handler at a distance, i.e.. “independent obstacle performance.”

Weave poles:

The dog’s weave pole performance consists of the following elements:

- Rhythm
- Correct Entry from any angle or distance
- Accuracy
- Speed
- Performing the poles with handler at a distance

Elicia uses all the different techniques for teaching the weave poles:

- **weave-o-matics** for teaching the dog foot work
- **channel weaves** for developing speed and confidence
- **free shaping with clicker:** for entries and exits, helps build independence
- **hand-in-collar:** quick learning curve but it requires that the handler have the coordination and physical ability to hold the collar while moving with the dog
- **guide wires:** complement the other methods, gives the dog independence with upright poles early on, but must be faded gradually and carefully to be sure dog understands the task without the wire.

Elicia believes that it is important to teach both speed and accuracy at the same time. She reminded us to always go up and back on the same side of the poles to give equal emphasis to weaving on both sides of the handler, stopping to treat at each end of the poles. She told us emphatically not to try to rush weave pole training, **it takes time** to develop truly independent proficiency.

When first shaping the entry use two poles. Add the third pole when the dog enters two poles consistently when the handler is twenty feet away.

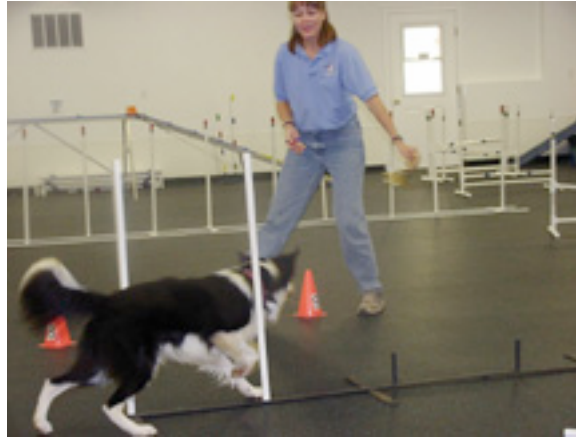
To get the correct entry the handler must consider the dog's path, her own path, and the space between the handler and the dog. Elicia explained how visualizing an **infinite line** leading into the poles helps to line the dog up for the entry. She said "the younger and more inexperienced the dog is the longer the infinite line needs to be for the dog to find the correct entry. Squaring the dog before the entry helps the dog find the entry and get his rhythm in the poles." It is better to send to the poles from too far away than from too close.

Getting the wheelchair lined up with the poles is crucial as is the ambulatory handler's shoulder position and the direction her feet are pointed. Elicia suggested having the dog do a wrap around the handler (or wheelchair) to improve the dog's approach to the "invisible line" into the poles.

To proof the weave poles, Elicia told us to practice rear crosses while the dog is in the poles. She throws a toy along the invisible line and then veers off laterally from the poles expecting the dog to complete the poles on his own.

The next four pictures show Elicia demonstrating with Ice how to develop independent weave pole performance by sending the dog to the pole entry while she stands back at the various distant positions marked by the cones.





Hand-in-collar method of training weaves
photo by Peg Forte)

Waltzing Paws Plank Work:

Elicia showed us how to use plank work to build the dogs' comfort and confidence on the dogwalk and teeter. She used a low hurdle straddling the plank for the dog to jump and wallpaper paste trays for them to walk over. We also taught the dogs to hop onto the plank, sit, lie down, turn to reverse direction, and accelerate while moving on the plank.





Elicia introduced hurdles on the floor before putting them into play on the planks.



Photo by Laurie Storm

The tipping Buja Board is another form of “plank work” that builds confidence. Photo by Peg Forte

Contact Training:



The plank work led up to using the boxes on the contact obstacles to help the dogs learn to stride into the contact zones.



Photo by Peg Forte



Striding through the contacts or “running contacts” may work for some but not all dogs. Elicia cautioned that dogs with especially long strides might not be good candidates for training running contacts using the boxes on the equipment. Elicia teaches both running contacts and two-on-two-off stops in the contact zone. To teach the dogs consistent footwork for the running contact, Elicia assessed the dog’s stride length and then carefully chose the placement for the wallpaper paste trays on both the up and down sides of the obstacle. In order to place the trays accurately, an instructor or skilled observer must evaluate the dogs’ stride length. The trays are

then placed according to the assessment of each individual dog, so that the dog will jump or stride over them and consistently land with a foot in the yellow contact zone.



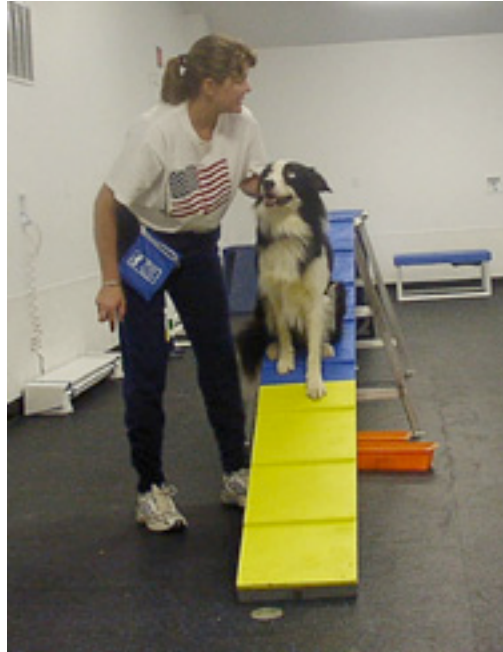
Elicia illustrates how to assess where to put the wallpaper trays on the up contact.)

Familiarizing the dogs with the paste trays began on the flat as did teaching the dogs the position for the stop on the contacts.

Back-chaining contacts: First shape the finished contact position and then incrementally begin the dog's approach to the contact higher up on the equipment. The handler should start from beside the plank and have the dog hop on from the side, progressively starting higher and higher on the contact.



Ice mounting the dogwalk to begin to back chain the contact position from a position low on the equipment.



Elicia revving Ice up to go on to the contact position.



Two on two off contact position



Elicia suggests teaching large dogs with long strides to sit in the contact 2o2o position to encourage them to shift their weight back and lessen the chance of their bounding over the contact zone



Proofing the 2o2o stop in the contact with the dog on leash.

When the dog is first learning his contact position, the handler's stopping is a cue to the dog to stop. Ultimately, when at the proofing stage, the dog's contact position should be so automatic and solid that he will stop even though the handler keeps moving. The contact position must have value to the dog. The dog is rewarded for maintaining his position while the handler varies her own position. The handler should be able to send the dog to a contact obstacle and expect the dog to finish in the contact position while the handler remains standing still at a distance from that obstacle.

Elicia uses a table under high end of the teeter to teach the dog to run through the apex. She runs the dog over the teeter in both directions, holding the teeter either up or down until the dog is into the yellow zone. She suggested doing recalls over the teeter starting with someone else holding the dog.



Photo by Peg Forte

In Part 3 of this three part series, Barbara describes Elicia's techniques for training send outs, and directional commands to enhance dog and handler's team ability to work at a distance from each other.

Elicia Calhoun is in the final stages of producing her new book and video, both will be released very soon.

Barbara Handelman is list-owner for the Agility On Wheels e-list (agilityonwheels@yahoogroups.com). The list welcomes all handlers with mobility challenges, their training partners and instructors. Moon, Barbara's five-year-old Aussie, finished his NADAC Novice Outstanding title this year and will soon take the plunge into Open competition. Luca, her two-year-old GSD, Service Dog has just started his competition career. Discover Barbara's new dog training services at www.DogTrainingatHome.com. She is offering individualized e-mail evaluations, lesson plans, and video demonstrations geared to empowering physically challenged individuals to train at home

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