

## HINTS FOR OBEDIENCE STEWARDS

Geoff Stern sternmandell@att.net

Charles River Dog Training Club

=====

Stewarding in obedience is a great way to support the sport and to represent the club. If you're interested in showing your dog in obedience, stewarding also gives you an opportunity to observe the action close up. It's a good way to learn some handling techniques, ring procedures, regulations, and the nuances of competition. Also you'll get to meet some nice people, including judges (who aren't ogres after all).

Here's a list of hints for stewards at AKC obedience trials and matches. If you've never stewarded before, don't worry, it isn't difficult — it's fun. If you're an experienced handler and you've stewarded before, you can skim through these hints for reminders of what to teach to rookies.

=====

### Rules and Regulations

=====

- The judge runs the ring. Stewards are provided to assist the judge and can act only on the judge's instructions. Some judges cede authority to stewards for logistical matters such as resolving conflicts in showing order or deciding where the handlers will go for the out-of-sight sits and downs in the Open class; but ultimately, any decisions about the competition are the judge's alone.
- Dogs are judged in catalog order. If a handler has a conflict - for example, if a handler is showing two dogs or in two classes or in breed and obedience - the judge decides how to solve the problem. Typically, the judge resolves schedule conflicts by moving a handler to the end of the class or group (that is, by having the stewards tell the handler the revised order). As a steward, you might be approached by a handler who wants to be rescheduled (usually for later in the class) whether as a matter of "gamesmanship" or to avoid being next to some particular dog in the group exercises. Stewards can't change the showing order. Any adjustments or accommodations for conflicts, dealing with latecomers, and so on, are the judge's decision.
- Remember this rule about catalog order when you line up the dogs for the group exercises (sits and downs) in Novice and Open. The dogs line up in catalog order, even if that wasn't how they did the individual exercises. The dog with the lowest number in the group goes in first. For example, even if dog #3 was judged at the end of the class (because of some conflict or late arrival), the order for the group exercises might be 3, 20, 21, 22...
- In conferring with the judge about a handling conflict, latecomers, or other matters, don't show the catalog to the judge. Judges aren't allowed to look at the catalog until after their classes are completed and their judge's books are turned in. Also, in calling or referring to any handlers, use their armband number, not their names.
- Scores are confidential until the end of the class. Stewards (and judges, for that matter) can't disclose any score or partial score or placements until after the class is completed. Handlers are understandably eager to learn their scores and might ask a steward to sneak a peek at the judge's worksheet - but that's a no-no.
- Stewards should be courteous and considerate, but don't play favorites. It's quite natural to do some silent cheerleading for your friend in Novice A or for the old, white-faced Golden in Graduate Novice or Veterans - that's fine, but stewards should be impartial, too. It's a matter of good sportsmanship. Likewise, if there's a run-off, don't give anyone advanced notice. In a run-off, the judge will want the dogs involved to be called back one at a time.
- Stewards help run the show. The best stewards are quietly efficient, just as the best umpires in baseball are "invisible." If there are problems with the ring, gates, jumps, mats, and so on - problems you can't solve - notify the judge, chief steward, or show chair.

=====  
Before Your Class  
=====

- Report to the chief steward about 30 minutes before your class is scheduled to begin, so you can pick up your steward's badge, a catalog for the ring, and your lunch ticket.
- While waiting for your class to start, stroll around the obedience rings to find out where the handlers have set up camp. This will help later on, when you're rounding up handlers for the group exercises or a run-off. Find out where the bathrooms and X-pens are, because some nervous handler is bound to ask about them.
- Meet with your judge. Some judges give their stewards very detailed instructions; others are more casual. If you've never stewarded before, or never stewarded in Open or Utility, let the judge know. Most judges are very helpful. Everyone was a rookie once, so don't be bashful about asking for help.
- Check your ring and make sure everything's all right - poster board sign with the correct numbers for the class, clean-up supplies, mats, gates, jumps, and so on. Make sure you have a catalog and the armbands for your class.

Of course, stewards, like exhibitors, should have no food in the ring - check your pockets! Don't chew gum (some judges consider it food, and so do some dogs). Also, make sure you don't have any jangling keys or jewelry, a floppy hat (for outdoor shows), or anything else that could distract a dog in the ring.

Ideally, each ring should have three stewards (and, in case of very large classes, four). Very small classes (typically Utility and the Non-Regular classes) can get by with two stewards. Regardless of the number, the stewards have to work together, efficiently, as a team. Decide beforehand who'll do which jobs.

=====  
Gate Steward and Table Steward  
=====

Usually, one steward serves as the gate steward or table steward, performing some clerical chores and other jobs. If you're shorthanded, you may have to be the gate or table steward as well a ring steward.

- Armbands  
As the handlers check in, give out the armbands and check them off in the catalog. For Open and Utility, as the handlers check in, ask for their dog's jump height and jot it down in your catalog.
- Ring sign  
Near the gate, there's usually a poster board sign listing the armband numbers for that class. As each handler checks in, put one slash line (/) through her number on the sign. Later, as the handler enters the ring with her dog, put another slash (\) through her number (making an X).
- Mark the break and the jump heights  
You can also mark on the ring sign when the judge will break for the group exercises (sits and downs) or for lunch - it's a real convenience for handlers (and it'll save you from answering the same question from every handler in the class). For Open and Utility, you can jot the dogs' jump heights on the ring sign as a convenient reminder for the ring stewards who set up the jumps.
- Keep count  
Keep count of how many dogs have checked in and entered; judges often rely on the stewards for reminders about when to break for the group exercises (6 to 12 dogs).

- Get the next handler ready

As the dog in the ring gets close to the end of the individual exercises, make sure the next dog is ready outside the gate (unless the judge is going to break for the group exercises or for lunch). Don't let the next dog into the ring until the previous dog has left and the judge is ready. If you don't see the next handler, call her armband number, not her name. For the group exercises - Sits and Downs - help line up the dogs in catalog order.

- Worksheets and the judge's book

Most judges use some kind of worksheets (and then transfer the scores to their judge's book). Usually, the table steward prepares the worksheets, listing each dog's number and breed. There's usually a separate worksheet for the group exercises, listing the dogs in the group in catalog order. Make sure the judge's book and worksheets are face-down on the table so no one can peek at the scores. Judges often ask the table steward to double-check their arithmetic, but as a steward, you shouldn't make any changes to the worksheets - and, of course, only the judge can mark the judge's book.

- Ribbons and prizes

As the class nears completion, you should get the ribbons and prizes (usually from the chief steward or whoever is in charge of trophies). When the judge finishes scoring, check if any handlers are eligible for prizes which may require them to register at the trophy table, such as Highest-Scoring Junior Handler, Highest-Scoring Golden Retriever, etc., High-in-Trial (or -Match), and High Combined (Open B and Utility B).

=====  
Ring Stewards - Novice  
=====

In the Novice class, ring stewards serve as posts for the Figure-8, an extra set of hands for the judge, and benign sentries in case a dog breaks during the group exercises or runs out of the ring . When you're not in the ring, stay close by the gate and be alert for dogs who might bolt. Make sure the next handler knows she's next - some Novice A handlers might need a friendly reminder, and some handlers may be unaware of changes in the showing order because of latecomers, absentees, and so on. Here's the order of exercises for Novice:

1. Heel on Leash
  2. Figure-8
  3. Stand for Exam
  4. Heel Free
  5. Recall
- 
6. Long Sit (1 min)
  7. Long Down (3 mins)

- Figure-8 posts

Take your position for the Figure-8 without having to be reminded by the judge. Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" at the end of the Heel on Leash. Judges and handlers alike appreciate stewards who are alert and prompt. The posts should be 8' apart. The judge will usually have marked the positions. Decide beforehand which steward will take which post. Some judges want the stewards to stand with their arms folded to avoid distracting a dog going around the post. Stand still and avoid staring at the dog.

- Stand for Exam

Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" at the end of the Figure-8. One steward should take the leash from the handler and put it on the ring table. Meanwhile ...

The other steward usually remains to hold the judge's clipboard during the Stand for Examination. (Decide beforehand who'll do which job.) When the judge says "Exercise finished," return the judge's clipboard and get out of the ring.

- After the Recall (end of the individual exercises)

Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" at the end of the Recall. One steward should return the leash to the handler - quickly - so she can get her dog back on leash. Handlers appreciate being able to get their dogs back on leash to leave the ring. Give the leash to the handler with the clip up, so she can easily fasten it onto her dog's collar.

Meanwhile, the other steward should make sure that the next dog is ready at the gate (unless the judge is breaking for the group exercises or for lunch). Don't let the next dog into the ring until the previous dog has left and the judge is ready.

- Group exercises (Long Sit & Long Down)

Find out when the judge will break for lunch or for the group exercises, such as after each ninth or tenth dog. It's a real convenience for handlers if you mark this on the ring sign (and it'll save you from answering the same question for every handler in the class). Line up the dogs in catalog order. Follow the judge's instructions on dealing with dogs who break.

- At the end of the class

After the last group of dogs does the Long Sit and Long Down, you can help the judge and table steward in double-checking the judge's arithmetic and handing out the class prizes and ribbons. Be ready to round up handlers if there's a run-off.

=====

#### Ring Stewards - Open

=====

In the Open class, ring stewards serve as the Figure-8 posts, handle the leash and dumbbell, set up the jumps, and help with the group exercises (sits and downs). Decide beforehand who'll do which jobs.

All exercises in Open are off leash and in the group exercises, the handlers leave the ring and go out of sight of the dogs. Decide beforehand which steward will lead the handlers out of the ring and where they'll "hide."

When you're not in the ring, stay close by the gate and be alert for dogs who might bolt (yes, even in Open B).

Open A always uses the same order of exercises (given above). Open B has six possible orders (defined in the Obedience Regulations); the judge chooses from these and posts the order of exercises before the start of class. These "scrambled" orders can make stewarding in Open B a little disorienting at first. Here's the standard, Open A order of exercises:

1. Heel Free
  2. Figure-8
  3. Drop on Recall
  4. Retrieve on the Flat
  5. Retrieve Over Jump
  6. Broad Jump
- 
7. Long Sit (3 mins)
  8. Long Down (5 mins)

- Setting the jumps

Set the jumps according to the information from the gate steward or table steward (who notes the dogs' jump heights when the handlers pick up their armbands). Usually, one steward sets the high jump; the other steward sets the broad jump. (Check each other's settings.)

- High jump

For the high jump, put the larger boards toward the bottom. For example, if a dog is jumping 22", you'll put two 8" boards on the bottom, then the 4" board, and the 2" board on top. (This makes it easier for the judge to check the setting is correct.) Store any unused boards out of the way (usually, outside the ring).

- Broad jump

The broad jump is twice the high jump - for example, if the high jump is 18", the broad jump is 36". Here's an easy formula for how many boards to use:

$$3 - 28 - 44$$

That is, use three boards from 28" to 44". Less than 28", use two boards. More than 44", use four boards. Space the boards evenly, without moving the end board.

- As the dog enters the ring

One steward should take the leash and dumbbell and put them on the ring table. Don't hold or play with the dumbbell - many Open dogs are dumbbell-happy and easily enticed or distracted by it. Handle the dumbbell by an end, not the shaft.

- Figure-8 posts

Take your position for the Figure-8 without having to be reminded by the judge. Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" at the end of the Heel Free. Judges and handlers alike appreciate stewards who are alert and prompt.

The posts should be 8' apart. The judge will usually have marked the positions. Decide beforehand which steward will take which post. Some judges want the stewards to stand with their arms folded to avoid distracting a dog going around the post. Stand still and avoid staring at the dog.

- Retrieve on the Flat

Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" at the end of the Drop on Recall. Some judges like to deal with the dumbbell, and others want a steward to give the dumbbell to the handler. If you're dealing with the dumbbell, get it to the handler without being prompted. (Judges and handlers alike appreciate this efficiency.) Hold the dumbbell by an end, not by the shaft which the dog will have to mouth. Likewise, be ready to take the dumbbell from the handler as soon as the Retrieve Over the High Jump is finished.

- After the Broad Jump (end of the individual exercises)

Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" at the end of the Broad Jump. One steward should return the leash to the handler - quickly - so she can get her dog back on leash. Some very hyper dogs might keep jumping all the way out of the ring! Handlers appreciate being able to get their dogs back on leash to leave the ring. Give the leash to the handler with the clip up, so she can easily fasten it onto her dog's collar. Then reset the jumps for the next dog (if any) or move them out of the way for the group exercises. Don't let the next dog into the ring until the previous dog has left and the judge is ready.

- Group exercises (Long Sit & Long Down)

Find out when the judge will break for sits and downs, such as after each ninth or tenth dog or if the judge is going to break for lunch. It's a real convenience for handlers if you mark this on the ring sign (and it'll save you from answering the same question from every handler in the class).

For the group exercises, line up the dogs in catalog order. Follow the judge's instructions on dealing with dogs who break. At least one steward should stay with the dogs in the ring. Another steward leads the handlers out-of-sight and

stays with them until the judge calls them back. Watch carefully for the judge's signal to return. It's very helpful if you can "run interference " for the handlers making their way through the crowd, back to the ring.

- At the end of the class

After the last group of dogs does the Long Sit and Long Down, you can help the judge and table steward in double-checking the judge's arithmetic and handing out the class prizes and ribbons. Be ready to round up handlers if there's a run-off.

=====  
Ring Stewards - Utility  
=====

In the Utility class, the ring stewards set up the jumps for the Directed Jumping and also handle the Scent Discrimination articles and the Directed Retrieve gloves. Utility is often a small class (and there are no group exercises), so you may need just two stewards - one places the scent articles, the other places the gloves; one sets the high jump, the other sets the bar jump. Decide beforehand who'll do which jobs. If there are only two stewards, one of you will have to be the gate steward and get jump heights as the handlers check in for their armbands.

If the class is very large or scheduled later in the morning, find out if the judge will break for lunch. It's a real convenience for handlers if you mark this on the ring sign (and it'll save you from answering the same question from every handler in the class).

When you're not in the ring, stay close by the gate and be alert for dogs who might bolt (yes, even in Utility).

Utility A always uses the same order of exercises (given above). Utility B has six possible orders (defined in the Obedience Regulations); the judge chooses from these and posts the order of exercises before the start of class. These "scrambled" orders can make stewarding in Utility B a little disorienting at first. Here's the standard, Utility A order of exercises:

1. Signal Exercise
2. Scent Discrimination (first article)
3. Scent Discrimination (second article)
4. Directed Retrieve (gloves)
5. Moving Stand & Exam
6. Directed Jumping (first jump)
7. Directed Jumping (second jump)

- Setting the jumps

Set the jumps according to the information from the gate steward or table steward (who notes the dogs' jump heights when the handlers pick up their armbands). Usually, one steward sets the high jump (boards); the other steward sets the bar jump. (Check each other's settings.)

- High jump

For the high jump, put the larger boards toward the bottom. For example, if a dog is jumping 22", you'll put two 8" boards on the bottom, then the 4" board, and the 2" board on top. (This makes it easier for the judge to check the setting is correct.) Store any unused boards out of the way (usually, outside the ring).

- Bar jump

Set the bar jump the same as the high jump.

- As the dog enters the ring

One steward should take the leash and scent articles from the handler and put them on the ring table. Don't hold or play with the articles - many Utility dogs are ardent retrievers and easily enticed or distracted, and you don't want to get your

scent on the articles yet. When you're not in the ring, stay close by the gate and be alert for dogs who might bolt (yes, even in Utility B).

- Scent Discrimination

The judge selects two scent articles (one leather, one metal) for the handler to use. One steward then places the remaining articles in the ring. Place the articles about 6" apart and about 20' away from the handler and dog. (Usually, the judge will tell you where to place the articles.) Remember to handle each of the articles as you put them down. (The judge will place the other two articles.)

Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" after the dog has retrieved the second article. One steward should gather all the scent articles, put them back in the handler's carrying case. Make sure the case is locked and put it on the ring table or near the gate just outside the ring so the handler can pick it up conveniently on her way out of the ring. Meanwhile ...

- Directed Retrieve

The other steward places the three gloves for the Directed Retrieve. Wait until the dog and handler are in position before you put out the gloves. Usually, the judge will have already told you where to drop the gloves. Put the three gloves 3' from the ring barriers.

When the judge says "Exercise finished" after the dog has retrieved the glove, one steward should gather the gloves and put them with the handler's scent articles on the ring table.

Meanwhile ...

- Moving Stand & Exam

The other steward usually holds the judge's clipboard during the Moving Stand and Examination. The judge will usually tell you where to stand so you'll be out of the way. After the exam, give the judge the clipboard and get out of the ring. You can start to put together the things you'll give back to the handler: scent articles, gloves, and leash.

- After the Directed Jumping

Your cue is when the judge says "Exercise finished" after the second jump. Return the leash to the handler - quickly - so she can get her dog back on leash. Some very hyper dogs might keep jumping all the way out of the ring! Handlers appreciate being able to get their dogs back on leash to leave the ring. Give the leash to the handler with the clip up, so she can easily fasten it onto her dog's collar. Give the handler her scent articles case and gloves as she leaves the ring. Then reset the jumps for the next dog (if any). Don't let the next dog into the ring until the previous dog has left and the judge is ready.

- At the end of the class

After all of the dogs in the class have been judged, you can help the judge and table steward in double-checking the judge's arithmetic and handing out the prizes and ribbons. Also, be ready to round up any handlers involved in a run-off.

## PART 2 August Waggs

### Non-Regular Classes

These classes are just for fun and glory - there's no title involved. They're offered (if at all) after the regular classes. The entry for these classes is usually small. There are no qualifying scores or placements here; typically, every handler gets a "participation ribbon."

- Pre-Novice - Sometimes called Sub-Novice - is the same as Novice but all the exercises are on-leash (for example, there's no Heel Free). Usually, the dogs and handlers are both "green" and will need some additional shepherding and encouragement.
- Graduate Novice<sup>1</sup> - You'll need to set the Broad Jump and deal with the dumbbell as in Open:
  1. Heel Free (incl. Figure-8)
  2. Moving Stand and Exam
  3. Moving Drop on Recall
  4. Dumbbell Recall
  5. Recall Over Broad Jump
  6. Long Down
- Graduate Open<sup>1</sup> - Similar to Utility. You'll need to set the high jump and bar jump, and deal with scent articles and gloves:
  1. Signal Exercise
  2. Scent Discrimination
  3. Directed Retrieve
  4. Moving Stand and Exam
  5. Go-Out
  6. Directed Jumping
- Brace - One handler, two dogs in tandem; Novice exercises. This is always fun to watch.
- Team - Four dogs and handlers working together in a double-sized ring with two judges. The exercises are largely the same as Novice, except for a rather intricate way of doing the Figure-8 (requiring five stewards) and a serial Drop on Recall.
- Veterans - Older dogs, Novice exercises. Of course, everyone should turn out to watch and applaud the Veterans - keep the Kleenex handy - and indeed sometimes that's where you'll see some truly splendid work from a retired OTCh dog. So don't take this class lightly.
- Versatility - Dogs and handlers perform 6 individual exercises - two each from Novice, Open, and Utility - chosen randomly. (Judges usually have the handlers draw cards.)

---

<sup>1</sup> The exercises in these classes will change in October 2004.

### Dos and Don'ts for Stewards

- Avoid conflicts of interest



If your spouse or other family member is showing a dog in the class where you're stewarding, tell the judge and the chief steward. You can usually swap with a steward from another ring until that dog has finished working. You might also want to swap with someone to avoid stewarding for a dog and handler whom you train with all the time, if your familiar presence might distract the dog.

If a trial is shorthanded, it's generous and considerate to volunteer to steward, but do not steward for a judge if you're showing your dog under that judge - even in a different class. (This rule is often relaxed in emergencies when there are not enough steward volunteers but it is the general rule.)

- Observe courtesies of address

While you're in the ring, always address the judge formally (Mr., Mrs., etc.) even if you're otherwise on friendly terms. The dog fancy thrives on such old-fashioned etiquette as well as collegiality, and the formality simply looks better to spectators.

Likewise, call handlers by number, rather than by name - for example, "Open A dog number 201" or "Golden Retriever number 44."

Yeah, everybody knows everybody in obedience, but this form of address pays homage to a principle of impartiality and avoids the appearance of favoritism.

- Be quiet and unobtrusive

Some judges enjoy chatting with their stewards; others are more taciturn. Bear in mind that judging requires careful concentration. If you have questions about how to do something - such as how to deal with a dog who breaks in the group exercises - by all means ask. If you have general questions about rules or scoring, or if you have comments about a particular dog, handler, or exercise, hold off your comments until after the class or until lunch.

Likewise, in chatting with handlers: Some handlers may appreciate a friendly, encouraging remark; others may be too nervous or trying to focus on the competition. Novice handlers, of course, may be especially anxious or uncertain. Your courtesy, cheerfulness, and efficiency can help reassure first-timers and veterans alike.

- Be neat and efficient

If the hospitality wagon comes by with drinks and snacks for the judges and stewards, remember to keep your refreshments out of the ring. If you need a break - especially during large classes - tell the chief steward.

Stewards needn't dress formally, but please keep in mind that you're representing the club and the sport. You should dress neatly - no blue jeans and T-shirts. Wear comfortable, non-skid shoes. Outdoors, if you're wearing raingear or a jacket, make sure it doesn't flap around (especially on the Figure-8 or any time you're in the ring).

- Bring a leash with you

Maybe a lightweight four-footer or one of those noose-style leashes used by vet techs and kennel workers. This can be handy in Novice or Open if a dog breaks in the group exercises or any time there's a run-away dog. You should also have a pen and, say, an index card or two, so you can jot down the order of exercises in Open B or Utility B, the rule for setting the Broad Jump, or other notes.

- Do what you can to make the show a success

Stewards aren't expected to be janitors, but whatever you can do to help keep the show moving will be most appreciated. If a dog fouls in or near the ring, call for a clean-up crew or tell the chief steward (who'll get a clean-up crew for you).

Help out with the spectators. Some spectators may not be aware of the rules and customs of obedience competition and could be distracting to a dog in the ring. In such cases, politely ask them to move back or to be quiet. For example, watch for children with dripping ice cream cones, breed-ring handlers strewing liver treats, and so on. Try to keep the aisle clear near the ring entrance so handlers have enough room to warm up their dogs and when they line up for the group exercises in Novice and Open.

Stewards aren't umpires, but if you notice any problems affecting the competition, tell the judge. Not all problems are your concern. For example, if you notice that a dog has broken a stay in the group exercises and that the judge seems to have missed it (perhaps, the dog lay down and then got back to a sit), there's probably no point in saying anything. Judges can't change their scoring based on a steward's say-so. However, if you think there's an error in the judge's arithmetic or in identifying a dog - for example, if two handlers' numbers were confused - notify the judge, chief steward, or trial chair.

- Support the sport

At the end of the class, stick around and help distribute the ribbons and prizes. Be a good ambassador for the sport. Congratulate the handlers whose dogs qualified or placed; offer an encouraging word of consolation to those whose dogs didn't qualify. Hold your opinions about the judge or any of the handlers and dogs until you're well away from the show site.

After the class is completed, always part cordially from the judge - "It was good working with you," etc. - even if the judge was a tyrannical slave-master and the class was a disaster. You might be showing under that judge sometime. Thanks for stewarding! Here's hoping you enjoy the show!