

Beginner's Guide to Competitive Obedience

Areas for Discussion

1. Target Audience

- Dog owners who have never heard of Obedience
- Dog owners who have done some Obedience at their training club
- Competitors who are ready to enter their first show
- Inexperienced competitors who have already entered one or two shows

2. Objectives of the Guide

- To encourage new competitors into the sport of Competitive Obedience
- To give a flavour of the sport and how it develops your relationship with your dog
- To advise dog owners how to get started in Competitive Obedience
- To explain what to expect at an Obedience Show and guide a new Competitor through the day

3. Tone of the Guide

- Warm and friendly
- No jargon – or explain jargon if used
- Supportive - sounds like we are right there with them

4. Written Format for the Guide

- My preference for this is a mix of short paragraphs, sub headings and bullet points where appropriate. I do not intend this to be endless prose. I would expect the reader to dip in and out of the guide to refer back to items and for useful checklists.

5. Overall Format of the Guide

My questions are:

- Is this intended to be a printed booklet or downloadable item (bearing in mind the changes to classes and rules that may be planned)?
- What size – A4 or A5?
- Any restriction on word count or page numbers?
- Can illustrations be used? If so line drawing or photos? Are stock drawings or photos available?

6. Chapter Headings

- The Proposed Chapters are:
 1. *Why take up an activity with your dog?*
 2. *What is Competitive Obedience?*
 3. *How to get started*
 4. *The Exercises and what the judge will be looking for*
 5. *Entering a Show*
 6. *In the run up to the Show*
 7. *On the day of the Show*

- 8. *After the Show*
- 9. *Helping at Shows*
- 10. *Where to go for more information*
- 11. *Enjoy yourself!*

- A more detailed outline of each proposed Chapter is attached

7. Timescales and Budget

- When do you want to launch the Guide?
- Is there someone who will be turning the words and pictures into a printable Guide?
- Is there a budget for production in terms of photos etc?

Outline of Beginner's Guide to Competitive Obedience document

1. Why take up an activity with your dog?

- Building the relationship with your dog
- A day out with your dog
- A personal challenge
- Enjoying the training
- Meeting like-minded people

2. What is competitive Obedience?

- Definition
- Types of Show
 - Championship, Open, Limit, Breed Limit, Companion, Club Matches
 - How to find out about shows
- Classes
 - KC Good Citizen Special Pre- Beginner, Introductory, Pre Beginner, Beginner, Novice, A, B, C, Ticket, Special Classes
 - Difference between classes how to progress
 - Can be split Dog or Bitch or combined
- Roles of Judge, Ring Steward and Scoreboard Steward
- Class Splits
- Running orders
- Scoring system
- No titbits or toys when competing
- Certificates of Merit
- Excellence Awards
- Venues – can vary in grass length and quality of ground – be prepared for anything!

3. How to get Started

- Any breed can do this
- Over 6 months of Age
- KC Registered Club or training group
- Spectate at local shows or at a local club

- Talk to people involved in the sport
- Watch Crufts Videos on the website
- Look on KC Website or Obedience UK
- G regulations
- Registering your dog with the KC
 - Activity Register and choosing a registered name
- When are you ready to enter a Show?

4. The Exercises and what the judge will be looking for

- **Heelwork**
 - On lead and off lead
 - One collar and no 'tuggy' leads
 - Commands you can use
 - Accuracy required at different levels
 - Setting off
 - Common Faults
- **Recall**
 - Explain exercise
 - Commands you can use
 - Common Faults
- **Stays**
 - Explain exercises
 - Set times – take precedence over everything else, will not wait
 - Commands you can use
 - All competitors together in a separate ring
 - Carry a lot of marks
 - No talking after 'leave your dog'
 - Usually stand sideways on
- **Retrieve**
 - Explain exercise
 - Dumbbell or your own Article
 - Commands you can use
 - Common Faults
- **More advanced exercises** (A recall, scent, sendaway, positions on the move, DC)
 - Brief description of the exercises

5. Entering a Show

- Shows always pre-entered usually entries close about 6 weeks before show date.
 - Mention eligibility
- Obtaining the schedules
- NFC Entries
- Catalogues
- Enter by post or online
 - Produce your own standard entry form using KC specimen. Saves writing out registration numbers and avoids errors
 - Do in good time – rushed entries usually have mistakes
 - Enter lowest scheduled class and one or two others and a special (check schedule) – mention e.g. Introductory Class may be lowest class
 - Don't enter too many classes as need to fit in stay times too. If new to competing your dog may find the whole event overwhelming
 - Receipt of entry if required

- Checking your entry
 - Check; classes entered, especially Dog or Bitch, registration numbers included, entry is signed and dated, cheque has correct date and is signed and included in the envelope
- Running Orders by Post or online
 - Requests for running orders or judges not always honoured – is meant to be random!

6. In the run up to the show

- What to practice
 - Transitions between exercises
 - Practice in places where there are lots of people and dogs
 - Don't teach anything new too close to the show
 - Working without titbits
 - Set up a ring if you can
 - Think about what you may want to do in a training round
- Equipment needed
 - **One** collar and a spare just in case
 - No 'tuggy' leads that could be seen as toys
 - Dumbbell or retrieve article
 - Toy for training
 - Titbits
 - Small bag to take items to the ring if you prefer
 - Covers for the car
 - Lockable cage for car
 - Water and water bowl for dog
 - Ring number clip or armband
 - A chair to sit by your car or by the rings
 - Your lunch although catering is usually available
 - Schedule , directions and any proof of entry you may have
- Running Order Notification
 - Unless you requested this by post check on Obedience UK
 - Check all parts of all classes you have entered as will not always be in your higher class
 - Keep with your schedule
- Plan your journey
 - Plan your journey beforehand and give yourself plenty of time. You don't want to be arriving flustered
 - Aim to arrive at least an hour before judging commences
 - Check for any road works on the route
- If you cannot go to the show
 - Don't need to advise show secretary but polite to if you have a running order, especially an early one as it helps the other competitors in the running order

7. On the day of the show

- Arrival
 - Always park where the car park stewards direct
 - Check out the location and projected movement of the sun and park accordingly
 - Find out where the Exercise Area is and let your dog have a toilet break
 - Don't let your dog run around too much – you don't want him worn out before he has to work
 - Cover your vehicle

- **Booking In**
 - Best to leave your dog in the car to book in
 - Take a pen and any running order to check which part of the class you are in
 - Look at the ring plan and locate all parts of your class
 - Some shows provide written ring numbers, others have cards and a pen for you to write your own. Write in big numbers as the judge and stay stewards will need to be able to read it
 - If written out, your ring number will be at your lowest scheduled class. Explain. Plus see secretary if cannot find number
 - Explain Booking in sheet and need to tick against your number to book in
 - Explain what happens if you don't book in
 - Do not tick on score sheet
 - Make a note of class and part, stay time, judges lunch time
 - Repeat for other classes
 - Wear number when competing
 - Have to book in by an hour after judging commences. If arrive late or forget to book in need to speak to Chief Obedience Steward.
 - Explain if cannot find dogs name on booking in sheet but check all parts first.
 - Collect Catalogue from Show Secretary if ordered

- **Running Orders**
 - Bear in mind not everyone will turn up on the day so keep an eye on the booking in sheet
 - Also some competitors train so may only do some of the exercises and be out quicker than you expect
 - You have to work in the order of the running order. It is useful to find out which team are in before you so you know when to start getting ready

- **Competing**

Before your Turn

 - Watch the round
 - Training rounds – politely ask the judge
 - Dogs on lead around the rings
 - Where to leave titbits, toys and dumbbells
 - Warming up
 - If no running order you decide when to work. Sometimes quieter to work if other rings are at lunch.
 - Sometimes there is a sheet on the desk for you to put when you want to work, sometimes the scoreboard steward holds the list. NEVER write your number on the scoreboard. Check how many competitors are before you so you have time to get your dog and know who you are following.
 - Keep an eye on how many competitors are left to work in the class – don't keep the judge waiting if you are last to work.
 - Watch how long judge spends talking to each competitor after the round – don't be ready too soon.

Now it's your Turn

 - Usually asked for number and perhaps your name and dogs name – maybe be scoreboard steward or judge who asks for this
 - If you are hard of hearing you can ask the ring steward to speak up (importance of watching round)
 - Be aware of where you are going to be setting up and keep your dog's attention all the way to that spot

- Watch if the ring steward sets you up and then gives you instructions about the round ('nice loose lead' etc) You can politely ask them to tell you before you go in the ring so you can just set up and be ready to go.
 - You will be nervous but take your time and try and relax you and your dog. Don't say you are ready if you are not. When asked if you are ready, you don't need to look at the steward to say yes, stay focused on your dog and clearly nod or say yes.
 - Try to keep your focus on your dog between exercises, so knowing where each exercise starts will help.
 - Don't judge the round yourself ('oh that wasn't very good!') – the judge may not have noticed!
 - At the end of the round clip your lead back on and thank the judge and steward. The judge may want to give you some feedback – thank them and accept anything that is said in good grace even if you don't agree with it.
 - Thank the scoreboard steward as you leave – they have given up their time too.
 - Reward your dog away from the ring and other competitors preparing to work.
- **Stays**
 - Find out early in the day where the stay ring is and give yourself plenty of time to toilet your dog and get to the ring
 - Time stated is 'last command'
 - Arrive at least 5 mins beforehand
 - Check you are in the right stays for your class
 - Leave titbits and toys well away from the ring – ideally out of view from your dog
 - Check sun won't be in dogs eyes
 - You will be asked for your number and breed of dog – say them clearly – don't expect steward to guess your dog's breed (especially Border Collie (BC) or Working Sheepdog (WS))
 - Often a wait until set up
 - If told to set up and asked if ready – shout clearly if you aren't.
 - Check with steward after both sets of stays if your dog was clear.
 - Thank the steward.
- **Checking your Score**
 - The scores from your round will be put on the scoreboard after you have worked, or sometimes after a few dogs have worked. It is best to reward your dog and put him back in the car before going to check the scores, otherwise you may be in the way of others about to work
 - All judges mark differently so don't compare your score with what you had last week, compare it to all the others on the board
 - If you feel you have been harshly marked, notch it up to experience and walk away. Don't demand to see your score sheet. A judge may be happy to talk through your score sheet at the end of the day but ask politely and be aware they cannot interrupt their judging for you.
 - Keep a check on the scoreboard during the day. You may not think you have worked well, but you may still end up with a place. Check how many places rosettes go down to.
 - Always wait until everyone has worked and the final places are written on the scoreboard before celebrating a place.
 - Ask for a Certificate of Merit if you want one
- **Run Offs**

- If two or more competitors end up with the same marks, there will be a run off for that place
 - Explain Run offs for first place
 - Explain Run offs for other places – usually an exercise where the marks are closest
 - If you have already won out of the class it is standard etiquette to decline the run off
 - Don't keep judge waiting
 - Results not usually given until the presentation
- **The Presentation**
 - Little bit of waiting around to complete paperwork and wait for gap in working on other rings
 - Sometimes a separate area
 - Don't keep judge waiting
 - Called 1st to 6th (or however many rosettes)
 - Polite clapping only – no loud cheering as others working
 - Those placed will line up in the middle of the ring. The 'line up' should run in descending order from left to right as you look at it, so if you are second, stand on the left hand side of the winner.
 - It is standard etiquette to shake the hand of the winner and those placed above you before taking your place in the line up
 - Sometimes there is a photographer available to take a photo of the line up which is usually displayed on Obedience UK website
 - Thank the judge again before you leave the presentation
- **Other Show Etiquette**
 - Not rewarding straight outside the ring
 - Awareness of others competing in adjacent rings
 - Not complaining about the judge or steward
 - Not criticising other competitors or allowing your friends to
 - Keeping your dog under control at all times
- **Watching the more experienced handlers**
 - As you learn about the sport, a show is a useful opportunity to watch other more experienced competitors in the higher classes as this is what you aspire to.
 - Don't get despondent thinking 'I'll never be able to do that', you will just perhaps not with your first obedience dog
- **Getting to know other Competitors**
 - As you compete at more shows, you will get to see familiar faces amongst the competitors and hopefully strike up some friendships
 - This camaraderie is a great support as you will end up supporting each other through the highs and lows of your show experiences

8. After the show

- Never end the day annoyed with yourself or your dog
- Learn from each experience and work on the areas you need to improve ready for the next show
- Decide whether you want to compete or just do training rounds at the next show

- If you have done well, celebrate the moment but don't rest on your laurels and be aware that usually you become more competitive at the next show which can put more pressure on you and your dog. It is rare to win week in week out.
- If your friend wins, it is nice to send a 'Congratulations' card so they can keep a lovely record of the day.

9. Helping at Shows

- Once you become a regular competitor it is nice to give something back to the sport
- Shows are always looking for helpers so don't be afraid to offer your services
- You can start by Stay Stewarding or being a Scoreboard Steward so you can still work your dog as well
- Eventually you may feel confident enough to give up your day to Ring Steward. Clubs can only run shows because people willingly give up their day to Steward or Judge
- Start to offer to help at your own club or with people you know – it usually involves a good lunch and tea and cakes at the end of the day!

10. Where to go for more Information

- The Kennel Club
- Obedience UK Website
- Obedience UK Facebook
- Dog Training Weekly

11. Enjoy Yourself!

- Summary of the Guide and positive final message

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