



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

COMPETING IN OBEDIENCE TRIALS

- **Know your rules.** Make sure you have a copy of the obedience rule book and read it (especially the information that relates to the class you will be competing in).
- To compete in official trials, you must be a member of DogsNSW and your dog must be either a registered purebred dog **or** registered on the Associate Register or Sporting Register. Talk to your instructor about how to organise this paperwork.
- You will then need to complete an entry form (available at the club house sign-on desk) and send it off to the Trial Secretary a minimum of 3 weeks before the trial date (these details will be in the trial schedule published in the DogsNSW Journal).
- Get to the trial early for vetting (often only entire bitches are vetted – although some trials require **all** dogs to be vetted). You will need to present your official competitor number card for signature by the vetting team. Vetting time and trial starting times will also be advertised in the trial schedule. Even if you don't need to have your dog vetted you will still need to report to the vetting area so club officials know you are present.
- After vetting, find which ring you will be trialing in and check the catalogue for the order of judging. After vetting has finished, check if there are any dogs absent, in case you get called into the ring sooner than expected.
- You are not permitted to take your clicker, food treats or other motivators (toys etc) into the ring. You also must not wear your bum bag or treat bag in the ring.
- Remember to wear your official competitor number into the ring (remember to pack a safety pin to attach the number to your shirt/top).
- Wear practical clothing and shoes. Avoid flapping dresses, trousers or tops as they distract your dog and obscure his vision. Wear comfortable non-slip shoes such as joggers or similar. When trialing at night wear light coloured clothing – your dog will be able to see you better when left for the recall and stays and this is reassuring for him.
- Don't hesitate to ask the judge to clarify any points you aren't sure of – either before you start or between exercises (judges are people too!)
- A common error is to do lots of practise before you go into the ring, which results in the dog being bored by the time you want him to start working. Give him just enough work to get him concentrating then go into the ring while he's fresh and interested.
- In hot weather keep your dog in the shade before you trial, damp him down if necessary (pads of feet, arm pits, belly, inside back legs, ears and base of ears) or have him lie on a damp towel or chill down mat. You are only in the ring for a few minutes and you will be finished before he has time to get hot. Cool him down when you have finished so that he will be cool again for the long sits and drops (.... and remember to put some non-irritating insect repellent on your dog so the flies don't annoy him).



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- Give clear verbal cues but do not exaggerate (points will be deducted for drawn out cues/commands).
 - Give precise signals (again points will be deducted for exaggerated or drawn out signals).
 - Walk in straight lines (use the ring ropes and pegs, a tree, or parked cars as a guide if necessary).
 - Make precise turns, about turns and stops. However, keep your actions smooth, and avoid starting, stopping and turning too abruptly as this makes it difficult for your dog to position himself correctly.
 - Pay particular attention that you use the same voice (pitch, volume) in the trial ring that you use in training. Also pay attention that you move in the same way when trialing as you do in training (speed, posture, body language). If you carefully observe your normal voice and body movement when training, then you can take extra care to maintain these in the trial ring. **Using a different voice and body language in the trial ring to that used in training would be responsible for more failed tests than all the other reasons put together!** To find himself in the trial ring with a handler who is suddenly and inexplicably speaking in an unrecognisable voice and with completely “foreign” body language is extremely distressing for the dog and as he is trying to figure out what is wrong with his handler he completely forgets what he is meant to be doing.
 - **Don't make excuses:** if you fail because “it rained, it was windy, the ring was too wet, grass too long, too many distractions, another dog fouled the ring, there must have been a bitch in season ‘somewhere’, there were people too close to the ring, or your dog didn't like the judge (or her coat or hat) etc, etc.” it may be a **reason** but it is **no excuse**. If your dog was truly reliable he would have **worked regardless**.
 - Learn from your failures so that you can rectify your mistakes before the next trial. It may be a good idea to discuss your test with the judge (after the trial is over) as he may be able to suggest ways to improve your work. Always be willing to learn.
 - However, like us, dogs have good and bad days – they are not robots. If your dog has a bad day and fails his test in spite of you being well prepared, just accept it – we all have bad days sometimes.
 - **Finally** - but most importantly – never forget that you set out to trial for pleasure. You have put a lot of hard work into your training, so enjoy yourself. After all you're there to show off just how good your dog is and you have every reason to be proud of him.

..... **HAPPY TRIALING!**

Carole Bryant©