



RANDOM LITTLE TIDBITS (# 2)

Below is the next installment of Random Little Tidbits of information (from me) in regards to the AKC Obedience Regulations. Knowledge of the Regulations provides you the power for...

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Today's Random Little Tidbit - Examining Foundation Exercises as Building Blocks.

In general terms, let's examine an obedience exercise and see how they work as every titling and non-titling class has a series of them. First, we must look at what is referred to as the foundation exercises. A foundation exercise is an exercise where an element of training skill first appears in the Regulations. The advanced exercises in the advanced classes are built on Regular Novice foundation exercises. Picture it as a house building project, Novice is the foundation, Open is the next level and Utility is the penthouse. Before the upper levels are added to the structure, one must first have a foundation. Having knowledge of this structure will help you understand how an exercise is looked upon from a performance angle and from a judging angle.

The first of the foundation exercises show up in the Novice obedience class--the basics of obedience skills dating back to 1936 with a few tweaks over the last 8+ decades. The next level of foundation exercises are found at the Open level. The Utility class is the highest level of skills with the exercises built upon Novice and Open. When reading the scoring sections of Open exercises, the last sentence most likely will have these words, "All applicable penalties listed under the Novice *.....* shall apply." The Utility exercises refer back to foundation exercises in Open and Novice for guidance in performance, judging and scoring: "All applicable penalties listed under the Novice *.....* and Open *.....* shall apply."

An excellent example of a foundation exercise is the Novice Recall, a foundation exercise for many of the Open and Utility exercises. Here is how one may look at exercises being built upon a foundation exercise:

1) The Novice Recall description, "The principal features of this exercise are that the dog stay where left until called by the handler, and that the dog responds promptly to the handler's command or signal to come. Orders are "Leave your dog," "Call your dog," and "Finish." On order from the judge, the handler may give a command and/or signal to the dog to stay in the sit position. The handler will then walk forward to the other end of the ring, turn to face the dog, and stand with the arms and hands hanging naturally. On the judge's order or signal, the handler will either command or signal the dog to come. The dog must come directly, at a brisk trot or gallop and sit straight, centered in front of the handler. The dog must be close enough to its handler so that the handler could touch its head without excessive bending, stretching or moving either foot. On the judge's order, the handler will give a command or signal to finish. The dog must go smartly to heel position and sit. The manner in which the dog finishes will be optional provided it is prompt and that the dog sits straight at heel."

2) The above description sets the structure of the Recall and spells out what is required by the dog and handler for a basic recall as performed in the Novice class.

3) The first sentence states the "principal features" of this exercise. The principal features are the minimum requirements which must be met for a qualifying performance in an exercise.

4) In addition, the Finish is *first* addressed in the Novice Recall so this exercise becomes the foundation exercise for the Finish, too.

5) The Novice Recall scoring section (scoring sections follow the description sections) is where one learns what is required in regards to the scoring of the exercise for a qualifying score vs. a non-qualify score. **Note:** the Finish is not addressed in the NQ verbiage in the scoring section: "A dog must receive a non-qualifying (NQ) score if it is given an additional command and/or signal to stay, if it fails to come on the first command or signal, if it moves from the place it was left before being called or signaled to come, or if it does not sit close enough to its handler so that the handler could touch its head without excessive bending, stretching or moving either foot." Errors in regards to the Finish are listed under the list of deductions, from substantial deductions to minor deductions. The Finish is not a "principal feature" of the Recall exercise; therefore, not required for a qualifying score. If the dog does not Finish and the principal features of the exercise were successfully performed the lack of a Finish is only points off.

6) Now let's build upon this Novice Recall as a foundation exercise and go to the next levels of our structure. Case in point, the Open Retrieve on Flat (ROF) is at the next level with an added retrieve skill element. This exercise now becomes the foundation exercise for all retrieves as the retrieve skill is *first* described in the ROF description. One way to look at retrieves in Open or Utility is they are basically two Novice Recalls with the added element of retrieving. The dog is performing a recall to the dumbbell (so-to-speak), retrieving (a new principal feature of this exercise), and then a recall back to the handler. In the scoring section of the ROF, it mentions applicable penalties from the Novice Recall apply.

These would be:

- a. Handler standing with arms and hands hanging naturally.
- b. Dog must come directly, at a brisk trot or gallop and sit straight, centered in front of the handler. This would also apply to going to the dumbbell – going directly, brisk trot or gallop.
- c. The dog must be close enough to its handler so that the handler could touch its head without excessive bending, stretching or moving either foot.
- d. On the judge's order, the handler will give a command or signal to finish. The dog must go smartly to heel position and sit. The manner in which the dog finishes will be optional, provided it is prompt and that the dog sits straight at heel.

Instead of repeating all the applicable penalties under each exercise the regulations merely refer back to the foundation exercise where they are listed in detail.

7) Next case in point, Scent Discrimination in Utility is the next advanced level of the Retrieve on Flat. The Novice Recall and the Retrieve on Flat are the foundation exercises, with a new added principal feature for Scent Discrimination; "The principal features of these exercises are the selection of the handler's article from among the other articles by scent alone and the prompt delivery of the correct article to the handler." Once again, the description of the exercise goes into detail for the performance and the scoring section details the scoring; which will reflect back to the foundation exercises with the verbiage, "All applicable penalties listed under the Heel Free, Novice Recall and the Retrieve on Flat will apply." The Heel Free applicable penalties would apply to the team during the "After a Sit" option where the handler and dog turn to face the articles. In reading the Novice Heel Free scoring section it will refer back to the foundation exercise which would be the Novice Heel on Leash and Figure Eight. There one would find the most common penalties listed in detail that would apply to this exercise.

The Novice Recall also plays a role as a foundation exercise in many other non-retrieve exercises, such as the Drop on Recall, Broad Jump, Signal exercise, Moving Stand and Examination, Directed Jumping, plus any exercise with a Front and/or Finish. And this just covers the Regular classes. There are different variations of exercises in the Optional and Preferred titling classes which will also refer back to the Regular Novice and Open foundation exercises.

In reviewing the entire Novice exercises one can learn the basic foundation exercises for all other classes in obedience. Open is the next level of the *advanced* foundation exercises which will come into play for all Open and Utility exercises. The various scoring sections will always refer back to the applicable foundation exercises. Having this knowledge should provide the information needed in how an exercise (whatever level or optional track) is performed, judged and scored.

There are a few more factors in an exercise in regards to a qualifying score:

1) Chapter 2, Section 3, Qualifying Performance. "A qualifying score must never be awarded to a dog whose performance has not met the minimum requirements, to a dog that shows fear or resentment, or to a dog that relieves itself at any time while in the ring for judging. Handlers who carry or offer food in the ring or discipline or abuse their dogs in the ring must receive a non-qualifying (NQ) score. In deciding whether a faulty performance of an exercise warrants a qualifying score, the judge will consider whether the awarding of an obedience title would be justified if all dogs in the class performed the exercise in a similar manner. The judge must not give a qualifying score for the exercise if they decide that it would be contrary to the best interests of the sport if all dogs in the class were to perform in the same way."

2) Chapter 2, Section 15, Qualifying Score. "A qualifying score means that the dog has earned more than 50 percent of the points for each exercise with a total score of at least 170 points. This score must be earned in a regular or optional titling class at a licensed or member obedience trial. There is no minimum number of dogs necessary in any class to earn a qualifying score toward a title."

3) Chapter 2, Section 24, Orders and Minimum Penalties. "The lists of faults are not intended to be complete, but minimum penalties are specified for most of the more common and serious faults. There is no maximum limit on penalties. A dog that makes none of the errors listed may still receive a non-qualifying (NQ) score for other reasons."

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