

Below is the next in a series of Random 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 – What to do with your arms and hands while in the ring?

Before entering the obedience ring serious thought should be given to the exercises you (*not your dog*) will be performing, and where your arms and hands will need to be during a particular exercise. The correct arm and hand positions can save some BIG points in your Final Score if done correctly. So what are the correct positions of the arms and hands during the different exercises? Where can one find out this information? Since we are playing the game of Obedience with our best friend in this “team” sport, let's look into the “Rule Book” (official name, AKC Obedience Regulations). This book can also be amongst a list of one's best friends! Just like any other sport, it is best to know the rules and regulations for what is to be expected. Knowledge gives one the power to up their game plan beforehand. Experience and mistakes will factor in (such is life), but if mistakes can be avoided from the start of the game the outcome will be more positive in meeting and obtaining goals.

Depending on the class entered and the exercises performed in that class, arm and hand positions do vary. Let's have a quick review the Obedience Regulations and try to get a handle on this subject. The following are from the Regulations, but sometimes it helps to just pull out one topic and study it all in one place. It may seem complicated when reading, but an instructor or one who has been in the sport can demonstrate giving visuals. Practice also helps to a better understanding of excellent arm and hand positions during exercises.

I. Purpose

A handler is to be **smooth** and **natural**. Keep these words in the back of your mind. The Glossary of Obedience Terms defines **natural**: "not artificial; free of affectation; what is customarily expected in the home or public places."

II. Chapter 2, Section 2. Standard of Perfection

A handler is to also show **gentleness**. Use the arms and hands with a look of gentleness.

III. Chapter 2, Section 19

In all exercises where the dog is required to heel free, **one** of these options should be followed:

- * **(1)** When the handler is in motion, the **arms and hands must move naturally at the sides and must hang naturally at the sides when stopped.**
- * **(2)** The ***right hand*** and arm **must move naturally** at the side, while the ***left hand*** **must** be held **against the front of the body, centered in the area of the waist**, with the ***left forearm*** **carried against the body**. *Editor's note: As opposed to the elbow sticking straight out from the handler's side looking like a Colonel Sander's chicken wing. Aren't visuals 🍗 wonderful to make a point! 😊*
- * In either of the above situations, the **arms and hands may be adjusted during the fast** portion of an exercise in order to maintain balance.
- * There **will be a substantial deduction** if the arms and hands are not carried in one of the positions stated above. A substantial is defined as a deduction of **3 or more** points.
- * In **any** exercise that requires a dog to **sit in front**, the handler's arms and hands **must hang naturally** at the sides **until** the dog has sat in front. *Hands pressed against one's sides like a soldier at attention, or hands held together in front or behind are subject to a substantial penalty. And saluting the Judge during an exercise will not be of any benefit to your Final Score, IMO. 😊*

Read every exercise **Description** for details for the class(es) entered, and remember Chapter 2, Section 19. If the dog is to **sit in front** be aware of the position of the arms and hands, and where they will need to be when setting up for the exercise. During the exercise the handler **must receive a substantial deduction** for arms and hands not being correct.



* This now includes Beginner Novice.

* **Any** movement of the handler's arms or hands **from the time** the dog sits in front **and prior** to the dog returning to the heel position **will be considered** an additional signal or command and will be penalized **unless** such movement is otherwise permitted by these regulations.

* *The Utility Moving Stand and Examination does not require the handler's arms and hands hang from their sides as the dog is not required to **sit in front**, but to go **directly to the heel position**. If the handler were to give a signal (when calling their dog) with the arm and hand returning to the waist, as in a heel free hand position, this action would not be subject to a penalty.*

IV. Chapter 2, Section 20

If a signal is used by the handler:

* When a signal is permitted, it **must be a single gesture with one arm and hand only**, and the **arm and hand must immediately be returned to a natural position**. A handler may bend their body and knees to bring their hand level with the dog's eyes while giving a signal to a dog in heel position.

* **Signals must be inaudible**, and the handler must not touch the dog.

* **Any unusual noise or motion may be considered to be a signal. Position of the arms and hands and movements of the head and/or body that aid the dog** will be considered additional signals.

* Signaling a correction to a dog is forbidden and will be penalized.

* If an exercise states the handler may use a command and/or signal, the command and signal must be given **simultaneously**.

V. Chapter 3, Section 5

Heel on Leash and Figure Eight:

* The leash may be **held in either hand or in both hands**, but the hands must be held in a natural position.

VI. Exercises where the dog is required to sit in front the arms and hands must hang naturally at the sides until the dog has sat in front:

* **Regular classes** - the foundation classes for the alternative and optional titling classes.

* **Novice** - Recall

* **Open** - Drop on Recall, Retrieve on Flat, Retrieve Over High Jump, Broad Jump

* **Utility** - Signal Exercise, Scent Discrimination, Directed Retrieve, Directed Jumping

VII. Exercises where arms and hands are not required to be hanging naturally at the sides:

* **Regular classes** – the foundation classes for the alternative and optional titling classes.

* **Novice** - Heel on leash & Figure Eight, Heel Free (**see above, III.**), Stand for Examination and Group.

* **Open** - Heel Free (**see above, III.**)

* **Utility** - Moving Stand and Examination (To Finish a dog *in this exercise*, a command **and/or** signal is given. If the handler were to use a signal, then the arm and hand may be brought up to the waist **or** left hanging naturally without a penalty.)

VIII. The Finish (a non-principal feature of an exercise)

The finish is not a principal feature of any exercise. Therefore, failure to finish or extra commands or signals to finish do not require a non-qualifying (NQ) score for any exercise. Keep in mind to finish a dog a command **OR** signal may be used, not both (*only exception is the Utility Moving Stand and Examination*). If a verbal command is used and the handler proceeds to bring their arm or hand up to their waist (as in the heel free), a penalty will occur. That motion is judged as an additional signal to the given verbal command. If the handler were to use a signal only, then the arm and hand may be brought up to the waist or left hanging naturally without a penalty.

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