



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 – The Grandfather of Performance - Obedience

(An introduction to what takes place in the Novice Obedience Class)

Preface: There are those newbies entering our Sport of Dogs who may not have a complete understanding of the importance of what we label “obedience,” or what is involved in earning a Novice obedience title. The goal and objective of this article is to enlighten you on what takes place in the AKC Novice obedience ring, and for you to set a goal of titling your dog to a Companion Dog (CD) title. The sport tends to be looked upon as a lot of work in this day and age of the instant gratification society we have become. In reality, setting aside a few minutes a day for training is all it takes. *Teaching your dog manners is the basics of what we call obedience!* Who doesn't want a well-mannered dog? **Print this article to use as a guide or as a handout.** I also have more **Random Little Tidbits** and other articles on the sport of obedience to explore in your learning process. Visit our Library at: <https://saintbernardarchive.com/library/> What fun to have a new goal!

Yes, the basic AKC Novice obedience levels are really nothing more than teaching your dog good manners and to behave and pay attention to you in public places. Once those skills are learned one can venture out into other venues (conformation included) knowing your dog can behave, and perform the taught skills with confidence. To digress a bit, back in the 1970s in my breed (Saint Bernard), over 100 CDs were earned a year, twice as many as championships. Now we are lucky if there are two to three CDs compared to 100 championships per year. And this is a WORKING breed. What changed in our ideology to no longer wanting to train a dog to the Novice level of obedience, a basic level for good manners? The answers are many, and many are excuses. Bottom line, if we want something we WILL make the time and put forth the effort.

Let's get back on track and look at the basic AKC CD level of obedience in the Regular Novice class. This class is a class designed for handlers to demonstrate the dog's good manners in a public arena, and see where their training has progressed. The rewards of the qualifying score goes well beyond the ring. It benefits the dog, the owner, and the public in a well-behaved companion in regards to the daily routines of *everyday* life. Time so well spent!

Examining the Basic 6 Regular Novice Exercises For Earning a CD - You Can Do This!

Reading the Obedience Regulations in the Regular Novice section will give you an idea of the basics and what will take place. Here they are in a nutshell.

1. Heel on leash and Figure Eight. *“The principal feature of this exercise is the ability of the dog and handler to work as a team.”* The handler will enter the ring with the dog on a loose leash and stand with the dog sitting in the heel position in a place designated by the judge. The judge will ask “Are you ready?” before giving the first order. The handler may give a command **or** signal to heel and will walk briskly and naturally with the dog on a loose leash. The dog should walk close to the handler's left side without swinging wide, lagging, forging or crowding. The dog must not interfere with the handler's freedom of motion at any time. At each order to halt, the handler will stop. The dog shall sit straight and promptly in the heel position without command or signal and shall not move until the handler again moves forward on the judge's order. After each halt, it is permissible for the handler to give a command **or** signal to heel before moving forward again. The judge will say ‘Exercise finished’ after this portion of the exercise.

“For the Figure Eight, the handler will stand and the dog will sit in heel position facing the judge, midway between the two stewards, who will stand 8 feet apart. The Figure Eight in the Novice classes will be done on leash; the handler may go around either steward first. The judge will ask ‘Are you ready?’ before giving the first order. The handler and dog will walk briskly around and between the two stewards twice. There will be no about turn, fast or slow, but the judge must order at least one halt during this exercise and another halt at the end.” **(40 points)**

2. Stand For Examination. *“The principal feature of this exercise is that the dog stand in position before and during the examination without displaying resentment.* Prior to the start of the exercise the handler will remove the leash and give it to a steward, who will place it on the judge’s table or other designated place. The handler will take their dog to the place indicated by the judge. The judge will ask ‘Are you ready?’ before giving the first order. On the judge’s order, the handler will stand/pose the dog by the method of the handler’s choice, taking any reasonable time if they choose to pose the dog as in the show ring. The handler will then stand with the dog in the heel position, and **may give** the command **and/or** signal to stay, walk straight forward about 6 feet, and then turn and face the dog.

“The judge will approach the dog from the front. Using the fingers and palm of one hand, the judge will touch the dog’s head, body and hindquarters. On the order ‘Back to your dog,’ the handler will walk around behind the dog and return to the heel position. The dog must remain standing until the judge has said “Exercise finished.” **(30 points)**

3. Heel Free. “This exercise will be performed as in the Heel on Leash but without either the leash or the Figure Eight. The scoring and orders will be the same.” **(40 points)**

4. Recall. *“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.* The orders are: ‘Leave your dog,’ ‘Call your dog,’ and ‘Finish.’ The handler will stand with the dog sitting in the heel position in a place designated by the judge. The judge will ask ‘Are you ready?’ before giving the first order. On the judge’s order, 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.” **(30 points)**

5. Sit Stay – Get Your Leash. *“The principal feature of this exercise is that the dog remains in the sit position.* The orders are: ‘Sit your dog,’ ‘Leave your dog to get your leash,’ and ‘Back to your dog.’ The handler will stand with the dog sitting in heel position in a place designated by the judge. The judge will ask ‘Are you ready?’ before giving the first order. On the judge’s order the handler **may** command **and/or** signal the dog to sit without touching either the dog or the dog’s collar. On further order to ‘Leave your dog to get your leash,’ the handler **may** give a command **and/or** signal to stay and will walk forward immediately to the place designated by the judge for the leash, pick up the leash, turn, and face the dog. The judge will give the order ‘Back to your dog.’ The handler must return directly, walking around and in back of the dog to heel position. The dog must not move from the sitting position until after the judge has said ‘Exercise finished.’ The judge will tell the handler ‘Clip your leash to the collar and maintain control of your dog.’ The handler is required to exit the ring with the dog under control and without jumping, pulling or tugging on the leash.” **(30 points)**

6. Group Exercise. *“The principal feature of this exercise is that the dog remains in the sitting or down position, whichever is required at the time.* This exercise must be performed with the dog on a 6-foot leash. The leash will remain clipped to the dog’s collar and the handler will hold on to the leash throughout the entire exercise. The armband will remain on the handler’s left arm. The dogs will be lined up in judging program order. Prior to beginning the exercise, the judge will instruct the handlers to remove their dog if it starts to move out of position. The judge will ask ‘Are you ready?’ before giving the first order. On the judge’s order, the handlers **will** command **and/or** signal their dogs to sit without touching either the dog or the dog’s collar. On further order to ‘Leave your dogs,’ the handlers **may** give a command **and/or** signal to stay and will walk forward immediately to the end of the leash, without jerking or tightening the leash, turn, and face their dogs. The leash must remain loose with slack throughout the entire exercise.

“After one minute from the time the judge ordered the handlers to leave their dogs, the judge will give the order ‘Back to your dogs.’ The handlers must return directly, walking around and in back of their own dog to heel position. The dogs must not move from the sitting position until after the judge has said ‘Exercise finished.’ This order will not be given until the handlers are back in heel position. The dogs must remain under control between this two-part exercise.

“Before starting the Down Stay portion of this exercise the judge will ask ‘Are you ready?’ On the judge’s order, the handlers **will** command **and/or** signal their dog to down without touching either the dog or the dog’s collar. On further order to ‘Leave your dogs,’ the handlers **may** give a command **and/or** signal to stay and will walk forward immediately to

the end of the leash, without jerking or tightening the leash, turn, and face their dogs. The leash must remain loose with slack throughout the entire exercise.

“After one minute from the time the judge ordered the handlers to leave their dogs, the judge will give the order, ‘Back to your dogs.’ The handlers must return directly, walking around and in back of their own dog to heel position. The dogs must not move from the down position until after the judge has said ‘Exercise finished.’ This order will not be given until the handlers are back in heel position. The judge will tell the exhibitors ‘Maintain control of your dogs.’ The handlers are required to exit the ring with their dogs under control and without jumping, pulling or tugging on the leash.” **(30 points)**

There you have it; exercises in basic manners that you can apply to real life living. Remember, dogs have a pecking order in their world and like to know their place in that order. **YOU** are to be the hierarchy in that order, the dog will learn through its training to look to you for guidance and comfort.

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 out of a possible 200 points. This score must be earned in a regular, alternative, or optional titling class at a licensed or member obedience trial. As you can see, there is plenty of wiggle-room in each exercise to qualify; it does not have to be perfect! Some relate this to earning 85% on an exam.

A Qualifying Performance in the Ring. An obedience title is intended to evoke admiration. To be worthy of this admiration, the title must be based on performances that fully meet the requirements of the Obedience Regulations. A qualifying score in the judge’s book is certification that the dog has performed all the required exercises according to these regulations and justifies the awarding of the obedience title associated with the particular class.

Scores for each exercise must be amply justified by the performance of dog and handler. The owner of any dog that receives a deserved score of 190, out of a possible 200 points has reason to be very proud of the dog. A score of 170 points should indicate a very creditable performance and fully justify the awarding of a title.

Find an Instructor and Start Teaching. Check in your area for an instructor for a private lesson or a class. One way to find one is to go to a dog show and sit outside the obedience rings. Ask for assistance in understanding what is happening and where and who may be teaching. Check the AKC (www.akc.org) website and download the Obedience Regulations to your computer *and* phone for getting a handle on the Sport. <http://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RO2999.pdf>

There are also other classes in Obedience you may want to try before entering Regular Novice - Classes designed to build skills for both the dog and handler. For example, there is a **Beginner Novice** class where all the exercises (except the Recall) are on leash. The handler follows signs (like in Rally) which replace the judge’s orders in the heeling exercise. Plus, a handler may offer a one-time word of encouragement during most exercises. Further details are in the Obedience Regulations.

Then there is the **Preferred Novice** obedience class. It is basically the same as the Regular Novice class with one exception there is no Group exercise. A Sit (or Down) stay is performed as the handler walks around the perimeter of the ring then returning to their dog. Further details are in the Obedience Regulations.

Also check out **Wild-Card Novice**. This is a non-regular (non-titling) class sometimes offered at trials. A great class for ring exposure with added incentives for enhancing the ring experience. Further details are in the Obedience Regulations.

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