



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 – Don't Overlook the Devil in the Details

Obedience is an interesting sport in dogs, and has been around since 1936. In reality, in my opinion, it is a sport for teaching one's dog basic manners: sit, stay, come, walk under control, accept an examination by a stranger, plus staying in a sit or down position around other dogs. Real values in everyday life, to say nothing of it could result in saving the dog's life knowing those basic skills. Other advanced classes in this sport exhibit additional skill levels, such as jumping, retrieving, scent discrimination, stopping a recall while the dog is in motion, and responding to directions by signals only.

Oh yes, one hears the "parrots" saying it is too rigid and not any "fun." Guard against those naysayers and Debbie Downers as this sport has LOTS of wiggle room and **fun** for everyone who enters. It is a sport where many different goals may be achieved, albeit a qualifying score in a range from 170 through 200 (30 points to play with!). It is also a sport where there are exemplary challenges if one wants those challenges. Challenges may range from a goal of earning a 200 perfect score or a 170 qualifying score, both viewed as GREAT accomplishments and memories to be proud of. Scores are not published on the title certificate; they only reflect the performance on a given day. Most of the dogs in this world are not so fortunate to have the human bonding experience that obedience training provides.

Obedience has a set of regulations outlining how it is to be played as do other games or sports. There is room for everyone to play the game to meet *their* chosen challenges. A judge uses the Regulations, Judging Procedures, and Guidelines to evaluate the teams through the process of *scoring*. Their job is to qualify the teams that qualified, non-qualify the teams not meeting the minimum standards, and placing the top four and other qualifying scores in order. When reading the Regulations, it defines the various exercises in the "description section" of an exercise, plus defines faults which may occur in the "scoring section" of that exercise.

Details! Details! Details! Yes, the scoring of obedience exercises may tend to be confusing at times. Let's try to unravel and understand how scoring works. A first step would be to *read in full Chapter 2* in the Obedience Regulations. Doing so will enlighten one that not all scoring of an exercise is listed in the exercise scoring sections. In fact, **Section 24** states, "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." The sections in Chapter 2 apply to all classes so there is no need to repeat them once again in all the different exercise scoring sections.

Let's peruse a few sections in Chapter 2 that relate to scoring which may not be listed in each exercise scoring section. These sections do play an important role in scoring, and having a better understanding will make "playing the obedience game" fun and challenging.

Saving Withdrawals from Your 200 Account. As with any game or sport, it is good to know the Rules and Regulations beforehand.

Chapter 2 snippets of the sections to be aware of in regards to scoring:

1. Section 2. Standard of Perfection. "This perfect picture must comply with these regulations and shall combine the utmost in willingness, enjoyment and precision on the part of the dog with naturalness, gentleness and smoothness on the part of the handler. *The Obedience Regulations place emphasis on handling that appears natural. A judge is expected to penalize a handler if, in the judge's opinion, the handler's manner or handling is unnatural.*" The Glossary of Obedience Terms defines many of the words used.

2. Section 3. Qualifying Performance.

- a. "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."
- b. "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."

3. Section 6. Judging of Classes and Different Breeds. "The same methods and standards will be used for judging and scoring the regular, preferred, optional titling and non-regular classes and in judging and scoring the work of dogs of different breeds, including dogs listed with AKC Canine Partners."

4. Section 7. Interference and Double Handling. "A judge who is aware of any assistance, interference, or attempts to control a dog from outside the ring must act promptly to stop such double handling or interference and must penalize the dog substantially. If the judge feels the circumstances warrant, the dog will receive a non-qualifying (NQ) score for the exercise during which the aid was received."

5. Section 13. Compliance with Regulations and Standards. “In accordance with the certification on the entry form, the handler of each dog and the person signing each entry form will be familiar with the AKC Obedience Regulations applicable to the class in which the dog is entered.”

6. Physically Challenged Handlers.

- a. “Judges may modify specific requirements of these regulations so that physically challenged handlers may compete.”
- b. “Dogs handled by such handlers will be required to perform all parts of all exercises as described in these regulations and will be penalized for failure to perform any part of an exercise.”

7. Explanations and Errors. “...it is appropriate for the judge to discuss an individual dog’s performance with the handler if the handler requests this information. Judges are not required to explain their scoring and should never continue a conversation with an angry or aggressive person.”

8. Section 16. Use of Leash. “Leashes must be clipped to the collar when dogs are brought in for classes requiring an on-leash exercise, a group exercise and awards. In a class where a leash is not required for the performance of the individual exercises, the dog may be brought into and taken out of the ring on a leash that slips/attaches through the dog’s collar.” Here is an example of explaining the use of a leash. If it is not followed, it then becomes a scorable handler error under Miscellaneous Penalties. Keep in mind this is an important safety issue for all at a dog show and why we have this regulation.

9. Section 18. Heel Position. “The dog should be at the handler’s left side straight in line with the direction the handler is facing. The area from the dog’s head to shoulder is to be in line with the handler’s left hip. The dog should be close to but not crowding its handler so that the handler has freedom of motion at all times.” Five (5) faults of heeling are, crowd, lag, forge, wide, and not straight in line with the direction of the handler.

10. Hands and Arms. “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; or (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. There will be a substantial deduction if the hands and arms are not carried in one of these positions. The hands and arms may be adjusted during the fast portion of an exercise in order to maintain balance.”

11. Commands and Signals. This section is long and detailed! Read it carefully to fully understand and ask for help if needed. Listed below are a few key points:

- a. Excessively loud commands will be penalized substantially.
- b. The dog’s name may be used once immediately before any verbal command or before a verbal command and signal when these regulations permit command and/or signal.
- c. 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.
- d. Position of the arms and hands and movements of the head and/or body that aid the dog will be considered additional signals.
- e. When these regulations mention a command or signal, only a single command or signal may be given. When these regulations specify command and/or signal, the handler may give either one or the other or both command and signal simultaneously.
- f. Lack of prompt response by the dog to a command or signal is subject to a penalty. Delay in following a judge’s order to give a command or signal must be penalized, unless the judge directs the delay.

25. Misbehavior. The handler is required to enter and exit the ring with the dog under control and without jumping or pulling on the leash.

Now let’s look at a few exercise “description sections” vs. the “scoring sections”.

Keep in mind, when reading the Regulations it defines the various exercises in the “description section” of an exercise. Following the description section, the “scoring section” defines faults which may occur in that exercise. The scoring section is not complete as it would be near impossible to list everything (Chapter 2, Section 24). In the advanced class exercises (beyond the foundation exercises--Novice) the scoring section may read, “All applicable penalties under the ‘_____’ will apply.” The reader will then flip back to that section for more details on applicable scoring, plus review the description of that applicable exercise(s).

The devil in the details and scoring may not always be found in the scoring sections. The reader needs to also read the description of the exercise to fully understand how it is to be performed. One will then find words such as “**will**” and “**must**.” If the “**will**” and “**must**” are not followed, then a penalty may apply from a minor fault up to a non-qualifying (NQ) score, depending on the principal feature of the exercise.

A few examples of why it is important to also read the exercise description sections in regards to scoring:

1. Novice Recall: Nowhere in the *scoring section* does it mention scoring for lack of directness while the dog is coming in on the Recall. But in the *exercise description*, it states, the dog **must** come directly. A dog that veers off course (not direct) while coming in to the handler is subject to a penalty, as it did not perform the exercise as stated in the *description*. In most cases it is still qualifying, but not at the level of a “perfect” score for that exercise as defined. Remember, scoring is the method used to evaluate the different performances of the teams.

2. Open Stand Stay Get Your Leash: Nowhere in the *scoring section* does it mention scoring the handler who does not wait for the judge's order, "Back to your dog," or returning directly, or going around behind the dog when returning to heel position. But in the *exercise description*, it states, "The handler **will** pick up the leash, **re-enter** the ring, **stop and wait** for the judge's order 'Back to your dog'. The handler **must return directly, walking around and in back of the dog to heel position.**"

3. Utility Scent Discrimination: Nowhere in the *scoring section* does it mention scoring a handler who talks to their dog while leaving the dog to take an article off the chair. It does mention not talking to the dog as the judge is taking the article to the pile. It also mentions scoring an additional command to Stay while the handler is going to take an article. But in the *exercise description*, it does state, the handler may talk to the dog **when in Heel Position while scenting the article**. The handler who talks to their dog after leaving to take an article is not following the specifics in the *exercise description*; therefore, they would be subject to a handler error penalty. This is not a non-qualifying (NQ) fault, as the action is not a part of the principal feature of the exercise. Having knowledge of what is stated in the description will save unnecessary points being lost in one's performance.

Summary:

In learning the processes of scoring and how it works, always refer to Chapter 2, the individual exercise description section for how it is to be performed, the exercise scoring sections, plus the applicable penalties.

The AKC blog will also help in scoring clarifications, plus the AKC You Tube channel for visuals.

Blog Address: <https://akcbedrlyjudges.wordpress.com/about/> Sign up to receive updates.

YouTube Address: AKC YouTube Novice Obedience: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpkaTxdGkv1PHaLrDIURVYnzUmnEnZGg>

AKC YouTube Open Obedience: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpkaTxdGkv18nf4XKYezD-9Z_3YaCkBD

The following Random Little Tidbits articles cover:

Principal Features of an exercise, #31, #32, #33 & #79

Applicable Penalties, #91

Acquiring a handle on the obedience scoring can be a bit daunting at first, as with anything new. Even with a seasoned exhibitor, or judge, it is a continuing learning process of nuances. View scoring as a valuable learning experience. This includes if things were not up to your expectations. It is still a learning tool! Don't overlook that fact! Scoring of a performance gives one an insight of what might be in need of a bit of tweaking. Or what has worked well from a result of your past training sessions. It is ALL positive **IF** you make it that way. Pure and simple, enjoy the journey and keep up on the learning process with your buddies. Your only competition in the ring is between you and the Regulations and the 200 score. You are competing to earn a qualifying score to the best of your ability, and accomplishing that goal you had in mind. In further competitions you may want to increase your goals and hone your team skills even more. The challenges and goals are up to you. Remember, there are 30-points of wiggle room for a qualifying score to be earned which makes this sport open and obtainable for everyone to meet set goals.

If you are new to the sport or new to advancing through the classes, there are additional articles on what a judge is looking for in a performance based upon the Regulations. Log on to: <https://saintbernardarchive.com/library/> The **Dog-Talk** articles will provide helpful tips. You might want to also check out the **index** of the **Random Little Tidbits** articles for other topics which may help in your journey of gaining knowledge of this valuable fun sport.