

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 – Honing In On One's Judging Skills In Open

I think we all can agree on one thing: there is always room for improvement. Improvements may come in the form of a "tweak," overhaul, or a new judge traveling around a new learning curve. Judging AKC Obedience is a prime example in keeping an open mind for learning new ways to hone one's skills. Judging is a skill that requires a great deal of thought and having the mindset there *may always be room for improvement*.

To learn a new skill or sharpen a skill already learned:

1. Having and reviewing one's knowledge of the job requirements:
 - a. Always reviewing the AKC Obedience Regulations & Obedience Judging Guidelines pertaining to your skill level.
 - b. Engaging in conversations with other judges, exhibitors, instructors and spectators.
2. Keying in on how to efficiently run an obedience ring:
 - a. Sit at ringside observing a judge's ring time management. How can time and steps be saved? **See Tidbit #44**
 - b. Watching videos of dogs being judged (**focusing in on the judge**) to learn do's and don'ts. Check out **YouTube**
 - c. **Have yourself videoed in the ring judging**, watching for ways to improve your efficiently. **Just do it and have a look!** 😊
 - d. Observing judging positions. Correct use of judge's orders. Ring layouts with minimum but effective movements.

A sample guide for observing yourself and other judges. Let's review the different Open exercises in regard to judging procedures, judging positions, exercise requirements and items to be aware of while judging.

Open Exercise	Judging Procedures	Judging Position	Exercise Requirements	Observations
Heel Free & Figure Eight	<p>*In scoring this exercise, judges shall accompany the handler at a discreet distance so that they can observe any signals or commands given by the handler to the dog. The judge must do so without interfering with either dog or handler.</p> <p>*The judge must determine whether the dog should receive a non-qualifying (NQ) score for heeling based on the overall performance of the dog and handler during the <u>entire exercise</u>.</p>	<p>*The judge should attempt to be in a position during the course of the exercise so that the dog and the handler may be observed from the rear, front, and side.</p> <p>*When viewing the dog and handler from the side, <u>try to observe from the dog's side without the handler between you and the dog.</u></p> <p>*All teams are to be judged from the same relative position.</p> <p>*Move around on the Figure Eight, don't stand in the same spot.</p> <p>*The wider the angles and distance from the handler (within reason), the better for overall viewing.</p>	<p>*The principal feature of this exercise is the ability of the dog and handler to work as a team.</p> <p>*Left turn, Right turn, About turn, *Fast, Slow, Halt.</p> <p>*Fast – <u>significant</u> length?</p> <p>*Slow – <u>significant</u> length?</p> <p>*Figure Eight Cones are to be 17" to 37" high and no more than 15" wide at the base.</p> <p>+Measure 8' distance from inside base to inside base.</p>	<p>*Performed as the Novice Heel on Leash and Figure Eight, except no leash.</p> <p>*Pattern has a nice flow?</p> <p>*Is the pattern choppy?</p> <p>*Is the pattern fair to all breeds, large & small?</p> <p>*Is the pattern away from the entrance and/or table?</p> <p>*Does timing of the judge's orders allow the team time to react and not being too close to ring enclosures?</p>
Command Discrimination	<p>*This exercise may be performed in an area of the ring that is at least 40 feet in length.</p> <p>*The 15-foot distances must be clearly marked.</p>	<p>*The judge must be positioned so that both the dog and handler are under <u>continuous observation during the entire exercise</u>.</p> <p>*An excellent position for judging this exercise is at an adequate distance to the side and <u>slightly to the rear</u> of the dog.</p>	<p>*The principal features of this exercise are the dog's correct response to the handler's first commands and/or signals and that the dog stays until the handler returns to heel position.</p> <p>*On the judge's specific orders, the handler will walk forward 15 feet, turn, and face the dog, and then follow the judge's orders for the second position change. This is then repeated for the third position change.</p> <p>*After three position changes, the handler returns around the dog to heel position.</p>	<p>*Is the judge in a position to fully watch <u>both the dog and handler at all times</u>?</p> <p>*Is the judge in position to observe heel position when the handler returned?</p> <p>*Is the <u>dog</u> away from the table, gating or entrance for the start of the exercise?</p> <p>*Did the judge keep their attention on the handler during the giving of the command and or signal?</p>

<p>Drop on Recall</p>	<p>*The handler will stand with the dog sitting in the heel position in a place designated by the judge.</p> <p>*The handler will walk forward to the other end of the ring, then turn, face the dog, and stand naturally.</p> <p>*The dog must come directly at a brisk trot or gallop. The dog must drop <u>immediately</u> to a complete down position.</p> <p>*The dog must remain down until the handler gives the command or signal to come.</p> <p>*The dog completes the exercise as in the Novice Recall.</p>	<p>*To have both dog and handler under constant observation in this exercise, a judge should take a position in line and slightly to the rear of the dog, facing the handler but at an adequate distance to one side.</p> <p>*The front and finish is to be judged from a position in front of the handler.</p>	<p>*The principal features of this exercise, in addition to those listed under the Novice Recall, are the <u>dog's prompt response to the handler's command or signal</u> to drop and the dog's remaining in the down position until again called or signaled to come. <u>The dog will be judged on the promptness of its response to the command or signal.</u></p> <p>*The Finish - dog must go smartly to heel position and sit.</p>	<p>*Is the judge in a position to fully watch <u>both the dog and handler at all times</u>?</p> <p>*Is the <u>dog</u> away from the table or gate for the start the exercise?</p> <p>*Was the judge's order timed well so the dog did not end up near the handler before being dropped?</p> <p>*Was the front and finish judged from a position in front of the handler?</p> <p>*All applicable penalties listed under the <u>Novice Recall</u> shall apply.</p>
<p>Retrieve on Flat</p>	<p>*A judge should not place a dumbbell that is improperly thrown but should require the handler to throw the dumbbell again.</p> <p>*A judge will not ask the handler's opinion when deciding whether a dumbbell is to be thrown again or not; it is the judge's sole responsibility to make this decision. Once the decision is made, the judge or steward will retrieve the dumbbell.</p> <p>*Under no circumstances should the handler be penalized for a bad throw.</p> <p>*Requiring the handler to re-throw the dumbbell signifies that the exercise is being restarted; therefore, the handler may pet, praise, and reposition the dog without penalty before the exercise is begun again.</p> <p>*The dog completes the exercise as in the Novice Recall.</p>	<p>*The judge should be positioned so that both the dog and handler are under <u>continuous observation during the entire exercise.</u></p> <p>*The front and finish is to be judged from a position in front of the handler.</p>	<p>*The principal feature of this exercise is that the dog retrieve promptly.</p> <p>*The dumbbell is to be thrown at least 20 feet.</p> <p>*The dog must go and return directly, at a brisk trot or gallop and sit straight, centered in front of the handler.</p> <p>*The dog must be close to its handler so that the handler could touch its head without excessive bending, stretching or moving either foot.</p> <p>*The retrieve, including the pickup, must be brisk and without hesitation.</p> <p>*<u>Once the exercise begins</u>, the handler may not adjust their feet or position.</p> <p>*Finish - dog must go smartly to heel position and sit.</p>	<p>*Is the judge in a position to fully watch <u>both the dog and handler at all times</u>?</p> <p>*Is the <u>dog</u> away from the table or gate for the start of the exercise?</p> <p>*Was the front and finish judged from a position in front of the handler?</p> <p>*The judge will require the dumbbell to be thrown again before the dog is sent if it is thrown less than 20 feet, too far to one side or too close to the ring's edge. Was this done?</p> <p>*Did the handler move their feet during the exercise?</p> <p>*All applicable penalties listed under the <u>Novice Recall</u> shall apply.</p>
<p>Retrieve Over High Jump</p>	<p>*A judge should not place a dumbbell that is improperly thrown but should require the handler to throw the dumbbell again.</p> <p>*A judge will not ask the handler's opinion when deciding whether a dumbbell is to be thrown again or not; it is the judge's sole responsibility to make this decision. Once the decision is made, the judge or steward will retrieve the dumbbell.</p> <p>*Under no circumstances should the handler be penalized for a bad throw.</p> <p>*Requiring the handler to re-throw the dumbbell signifies that the exercise is being restarted; therefore, the handler may pet, praise, and reposition the dog without penalty.</p>	<p>*The judge should be positioned so that both the dog and handler are under <u>continuous observation during the entire exercise.</u></p> <p>*During this exercise a judge must stand clear of both the handler and the dog in order to prevent any interference with the dog's performance.</p> <p>*The front and finish is to be judged from a position in front of the handler.</p>	<p>*The principal features of this exercise are that the dog go out over the jump, pick up the dumbbell and promptly return with it over the jump.</p> <p>*Dog sitting in heel position, must be at least 8 feet in front of the jump or any reasonable distance beyond 8 feet.</p> <p>*It is the judge's responsibility to see that the handler complies.</p> <p>*<u>Once the exercise begins</u>, the handler may not adjust their feet or position.</p> <p>*Dumbbell is proportionate to the size of the dog. It is not to be hollowed out.</p>	<p>*Were the dog's withers verified vs. the jumps when the team entered the ring?</p> <p>*Is the judge in a position to fully watch <u>both the dog and handler at all times</u>?</p> <p>*Is the <u>dog</u> away from the table or gate for the start of the exercise?</p> <p>*Were the required marks for the 8 feet in the ring?</p> <p>*Dumbbell is required to be thrown again if it is thrown too far to one side or too close to the ring's edge.</p> <p>*Did the handler move their feet during the exercise?</p>
<p>Broad Jump</p>	<p>*In setting up the broad jump, the judge should make every effort to <u>avoid having the dog jump toward the open gate or close to the table</u>, and ensure that adequate room is allowed from all sides of the jump for the take-off, jumping and on the far side for landing and turning. The hurdles are to be positioned so the dog will be turning away from the ring barrier after landing.</p> <p>*This exercise is a Novice Recall, except for the jump and the position of the handler.</p>	<p>*The judge must be positioned so that both the dog and the handler are under <u>continuous observation during the entire exercise.</u></p> <p>*The judge must stand clear of the handler and the dog in order to prevent any interference with the dog's performance.</p> <p>*The front and finish is to be judged from a position in front of the handler.</p>	<p>*The principal features of this exercise are that the dog stay where left until directed to jump, that the dog clear the jump on a single command or signal, and that the dog return to its handler after it has jumped.</p> <p>*The dog and handler must be at least 8 feet in front of the first edge of the jump. It is the judge's responsibility to see that the handler complies before the exercise begins.</p>	<p>*Is the judge in a position to fully watch <u>both the dog and handler at all times</u>?</p> <p>*Is the <u>dog</u> away from the table or gate?</p> <p>*Was the handler about 2 feet from the hurdles side?</p> <p>*Was the front and finish judged from a position in front of the handler?</p> <p>*Was the required mark for the 8 feet in the ring?</p> <p>*All applicable penalties listed under the <u>Novice Recall</u> shall apply.</p>

Stand Stay Get Your Leash

*Prior to the start of judging, the judge will instruct the steward where to place the leash after the team enters the ring.

*The leash will be placed outside the ring near the gate entrance on a chair or similar leash holder.

*The handler and dog will be positioned at **approximately 15 feet** from and facing the direction of the gate entrance.

*The handler will take the dog to the place indicated by the judge.

*A judge is to have both dog and handler under constant view in this exercise.

*Be in a location to view the handler returning to judge heel position.

*The judge must be in position to watch the dog and handler throughout the exercise, including exiting the ring.

* The principal features of this exercise is that the dog stand on the handlers first command and/or signal and stay in position until the handler has returned to heel position.

*The handler will walk to the place outside the ring gate designated by the judge for the leash.

*The handler will pick up the leash, re-enter the ring, stop and wait for the judge's order.

*The handler returns walking around and in back of the dog to heel position. The dog must remain standing until the judge has said "Exercise finished."

*The judge will tell the handler "Attach your leash to the collar and maintain control of your dog."

*Is the judge in a position to fully watch both the dog and handler at all times?

*Is the judge in position to observe heel position when the handler returned?

*When the exercise was over, did the judge inform the handler to attach the leash to the collar and maintain control when leaving the ring?

*Did the judge inform the handler they had qualified?

*Did the judge watch the dog exiting the ring?

** 10 Miscellaneous Notes of Interest From the Obedience Guidelines to Always Keep In Mind **

- Judges are expected to be friendly and courteous to all who enter the ring. Without exhibitors, there would be no trials. For every experienced exhibitor there are many newcomers.
- A judge's comments, other than orders to the handler of a dog, shall be limited to a brief greeting, instructions on positioning the dog, and instructions covering the group exercise.
- The actual judging procedure may vary from judge to judge, but performance requirements must remain the same.
- All judges shall wear business attire (weather permitting). It is important for a judge to maintain a proper and professional appearance. The judge is in the ring to do a job, not to be the center of attention because of outlandish dress or bizarre behavior.
- Spectators form their opinion of the sport through seeing the actions of the judge, the handler and the dog. Care must be taken to avoid any action that might reflect poorly on the sport. Judges should work to maintain spectator appeal in the sport while keeping foremost in mind the welfare and convenience of the exhibitor and the dog.
- A judge must demonstrate sound judging procedure and ring control, plus a thorough knowledge of the AKC Obedience Regulations and the Obedience Judges' Guidelines. Good procedure is essential. With it, a judge will inspire the confidence of exhibitors and spectators.
- Impartiality. It is essential that exhibitors have full faith in the impartiality and competence of judges. There is no room for even the suggestion that anything other than the work of the dogs in the ring is involved in your decisions.
- Positioning is important for two reasons: first, to establish consistency of judging in the minds of exhibitors and spectators and, second, to properly evaluate the dog and handler the entire time they are in the ring. In determining a position for each exercise choose one that allows you to see both dog and handler without having to turn away to see one or the other. Being in the right position to observe a dog's performance is essential. There is no perfect position, but this does not mean that some positions are not better than others.
- Judges are often singled out for critical observation by exhibitors. Keep in mind that a perfectly innocent action or discussion can be misconstrued. Remember, you don't get in trouble for what you don't say.
- There will be other "gray areas" that could cause problems. Ask your- self if whatever is happening, however innocent, maintains an outward appearance of propriety. The rule of thumb is to ask yourself, "Would I be getting this treatment if I were not a judge?"

** Other Observations to Make When Watching Obedience Judging – to Mention a Few **

- Did the judge check the ring size for the class being judged?
- Where is the table placed so not to interfere with the teams when in the ring?
- Where will each exercise be performed? Were they efficient in saving steps and time?
- When one exercise ends, is the location of the next exercise nearby?
- Did the judge check the armband #, collar and leash, give a general review of the dog, no sutures or bandages, 6-foot leash for the Group exercise?
- Is the judge using the "exact" Judge's Orders in quotes in the Regulations?
- Does the judge watch the team at ALL TIMES when they enter the ring until they leave the ring?
- Is the judge efficient at the table between dogs - time wasted at the table while the next team is waiting for a long period of time?
- If there were runoffs, were the four prize winners pulled out (and stayed) so the spectators could clearly see the prize winners?
- Did the judge speak up to be heard and address the spectators during the prize ceremony?
- Did the judge have the *required* marks in the ring?
- Were the required ring postings visible and easily understood?
- Was the heeling pattern posted, demonstrated or told to the first handler?
- Was #13 ^ also done for the class in case of a runoff?
- Did it appear the stewards had good instructions and were working efficiently?
- Were there quick movements by the judge that may have interfered with the team working?
- Were the various exercises performed away from the ring entrance and/or table?
- Paying attention to the dogs while lining up outside the ring to come in for the Group exercise, watching for signs of aggression, etc.?
- Watching all the teams exit the ring, being in control and not pulling on the leash?
- Turned in the book after the class ended, or having the Obedience Chairman take it to the Show Secretary or Supertendent.

For complete details refer to the AKC Obedience Regulations. <https://images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RO2999.pdf>

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Today's Random Little Tidbit – [Tips on Saving Time and Managing a Ring.](#)

Planning on becoming a Judge down the line? Are you now a Judge planning on advancing to the next level? Do you have all levels? Not a Judge but participates in judging matches or practice sessions? Regardless of your answer, it never hurts to review your time and ring management skills to insure a peak performance with the utmost in efficiency. A good way to begin is video tape *your* performance *now* while judging. Take a good hard look at that video (with an open mind) observing the ring and time management skills, or lack of. Another suggestion is to sit outside a ring and watch other Judges. There are lessons to be learned during those observations, good ideas (and maybe some not so good) which may help you in the process of honing your own skills.

[Listed below are a variety of tips to help in saving time with ring management:](#)



Novice Classes:

- ✓ *Make it a point* to be at your ring 45-minutes before the class is to start to check your ring, make modifications (if needed), plus posting the required materials and placing marks in your ring. You may need to *plan ahead* back at the hotel to arrange the needed transportation to accomplish this task.
- ✓ Provide good instructions to your stewards covering all points for their duties; they are there to assist but need your guidance.
- ✓ Have laminated written instructions for your stewards so no points will be overlooked, plus they can refer to them later, if needed.
- ✓ Is the gate & table (outside the ring) where you want it? Can it be changed easily to suit you in regards to your heeling pattern(s) and ring flow?
- ✓ Is the Figure Eight close to where the heeling exercise began or ended to save steps?
- ✓ Avoid long conversations with the exhibitor when they enter the ring or when leaving after the last exercise. Be friendly but brief.
- ✓ Show the heeling pattern prior to the start of the class, start judging on time with the first exhibitor entering the ring.
- ✓ Have some marks to indicate where the handler should set up for heeling and/or the Recall. This will prevent having to reposition handlers, which ends up wasting time.
- ✓ As the handler is lined up for an exercise there is NO need to tell them what exercise is about to commence. For example, as they are standing midway between two cones why mention, "This is the Figure Eight exercise." HELLO, what else is it? Consider the ramifications. Doing this type of announcement before each exercise (5 *individual* exercises in Novice) in a class of forty, as an example, equals **two-hundred** needless time-wasting announcements! This is not helping the handler; but it creates dead time between exercises. Also, there is no need to tell them they may go in either direction.
- ✓ Plan to have the next exercise start near the area where the previous exercise ended.
- ✓ When returning to the table to record scores in the Judge's Book, do it without interruptions thus avoiding mistakes in the judge's book.
- ✓ Make conversations at the table with stewards or exhibitors brief so you can get on with judging the next dog that is waiting ringside.
- ✓ Avoid sitting down to enter scores in the Judge's Book, or having the book in an area where you would need to do extra walking.
- ✓ Just prior to the last team entering the ring, remind stewards to have the Group sheet ready and start lining up the qualifying dogs for the Group exercise. The steward can also remind the handlers to have a **6-foot leash** which must be clipped to the collar.
- ✓ Have your Group timing device out of your case, set and ready, preferably before the class has started to save time.
- ✓ Have the Table steward make sure the needed ribbons and awards are at the table and ready to go.
- ✓ During the awards ceremony, be brief while congratulating, and avoid teams lingering in the ring when the awards are concluded. They can do their chatting outside the ring while you are getting ready for the next class, if there is one. The next class will appreciate your efficiency for being on time.



Open Classes:

- ✓ **All applicable check marks above in Novice will also apply for the Open classes.**
- ✓ Check the jumps and make sure all boards are available for the High Jump, and all hurdles for the Broad Jump, so the class can start on time.
- ✓ The extra boards and hurdles *not being used keep* close to the proximity of the jump(s), but well out of the way of the jumps. Make use of a chair to hold the extra boards and hurdles just outside making it faster and easier on the stewards to change the jumps.
- ✓ Develop an efficient routine with the stewards for dumbbell duties, plus check the dumbbell before the handler enters the ring. If a dumbbell does not conform to the Regulations, it can be then corrected before the handler enters, thus saving time.
- ✓ Designate a place for the leash outside, but near, the ring entrance.
- ✓ As a dog is about to enter the ring, look at the dog *then* the jumps to confirm if set correctly before they enter.



Utility Classes:

- ✓ **All applicable check marks above in Novice and Open will also apply for the Utility classes.**
- ✓ Check the Bar to make sure it has the weight of wood; if not, get it corrected *before* the starting time of the class.
- ✓ Develop an efficient routine with the stewards for Scent Discrimination, Directed Retrieve and Moving Stand and Examination duties, plus develop a routine to check the articles and gloves before the handler enters the ring. If either does not conform to the Regulations, or items are missing, it can be then corrected before the handler enters.
- ✓ Inform the steward to be aware of the last exercise in the class so they can have the leash ready.



A few helpful charts to help your stewards save time and be accurate can be requested at the email address below:

Summary:

Giving advanced forethought to running your ring in an efficient manner will save you, the stewards and exhibitors valuable time. Plus, the day will move along at a good pace making your job more pleasant. I suggest you now get busy as there are a lot of classes and variations in each class to be prepared for when it is **SHOWTIME!** Examples of class variations to ponder:

- 1 Novice
- 1 Preferred Novice
- 1 Graduate Novice
- 1 Graduate Open
- 6 Open and 6 Preferred Open class variations
- 6 Utility and 6 Preferred Utility class variations
- 12 Versatility class variations, remember in this class you can arrange your order of exercises for flow. It does *not* have to be 2 Novice followed by 2 Open and then 2 Utility exercises, in that order.

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