

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 Utility

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 Utility exercises in regard to judging procedures, judging positions, exercise requirements and items to be aware of while judging.

Utility Exercise	Judging Procedures	Judging Position	Exercise Requirements	Observations
Signal Exercise	<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 Obedience Regulations, Chapter 5, Section 6, requires the judge to have the handler leave the dog at one end of the ring on the stand position, and then proceed in the judge's order to the other end of the ring. <u>This should place the handler about 3 to 4 feet from the opposite end of the ring.</u></p>	<p>*An excellent position for judging the stand, drop, sit, and come parts of this exercise is at an <u>adequate distance to the side and slightly to the rear of the dog</u> when the dog is in the stand-stay position.</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>*Are all teams are to be judged from the same relative position.</p> <p>*The wider the angles and distance from the handler (within reason) the better for overall viewing.</p>	<p>*The principal features of this exercise are the ability of dog and handler to work as a team while heeling and the dog's correct response to the signals to stand, stay, down, sit and come.</p> <p>*Judges note that heeling is considered a principal part of this exercise.</p> <p>*A dog may non-qualify in the heeling portion <u>using the same standards as in the Novice Heel on Leash and Figure Eight.</u></p> <p>*A judge should bear in mind that only during the stand, stay, drop, sit, and come parts of this exercise is it required to non-qualify (NQ) a dog for receiving a verbal command or audible signal. It is possible for the dog to receive a passing score if given a command or audible signal during other parts of the exercise.</p>	<p>*Were the dog's withers verified vs. the jumps when the team entered the ring?</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> <p>*Were signals held?</p> <p>*Were signals a <u>continuous motion</u> with the arm and hand returning to a natural position?</p> <p>*Were signals audible?</p> <p>*Did the judge keep their attention on the handler during the signals?</p> <p>*Were there motions of the body to aid the dog.</p>
Scent Discrimination	<p>*The judge should be certain that the handler and dog are in position to observe the placement of the articles should they choose to do so.</p> <p>*The judge must take the necessary precautions to ensure the articles to be used by the handler are not fouled by the judge or any other scent.</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 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.</p> <p>*Refer to Chapter 5, Section 8 for article requirements.</p>	<p>*All applicable penalties listed under the <u>Heel Free, Novice Recall and the Retrieve on Flat</u> will apply.</p> <p>*Refer to Tidbits 102 & 103 for details on observations for those exercises.</p>

<p>Directed Retrieve</p>	<p>*The judge should be certain the gloves are visible to the smallest and largest dogs.</p> <p>*The judge may point to the designated glove <u>at the same time</u> they give the order.</p> <p>*The direction the handler turns is at the option of the handler, no matter which glove is designated, but the dog should <u>maintain heel position throughout the turn</u> and sit at heel when the turn is completed.</p>	<p>*To have both dog and handler under constant observation in this exercise and in a position to hear if the handler gave the <u>required</u> verbal command.</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 until directed to retrieve and that it complete the retrieve of the designated glove.</p> <p>*Giving the direction to the dog must be done with a single motion.</p> <p>*When the motion stops, the direction is completed.</p> <p>*A <u>verbal command to retrieve is required</u> in this exercise during or immediately following the giving of the direction.</p> <p>*Finishes are required to be executed promptly, smartly, and straight. This applies to faults in all exercises where the dog returns to heel position. The finish is not a principal part of any exercise.</p>	<p>*Is the judge in a position to fully watch both the dog and handler at all times?</p> <p>*Did the dog go directly to the glove?</p> <p>*Was giving the direction to the dog done with a single motion along with the <u>required verbal command</u>?</p> <p>*When the motion stops, the direction is completed.</p> <p>*All applicable penalties listed under the <u>Heel Free, Novice Recall and the Retrieve on Flat</u> will apply.</p> <p>*Refer to Tidbits 102 & 103 for details on observations for those exercises.</p> <p>*Was the front and finish judged from a position in front of the handler?</p>
<p>Moving Stand & Examination</p>	<p>*The handler will stand with the dog sitting in heel position in a place designated by the judge.</p> <p>*On the judge's order the handler may command or signal the dog to heel. After the handler has proceeded about 10 feet, the judge will order "Stand your dog." Without pausing, the handler will command and/or signal the dog to stand and continue forward about 10 to 12 feet.</p> <p>*The handler will then turn either to the right or left to face the dog, which must stand and stay in position.</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 judge will approach the dog <u>from the front</u> to examine it. The exam will consist of the judge gently using both hands in a single smooth motion beginning at the sides of the dog's neck, then proceeding along the body ending at the dog's croup. The exam will not include the head, teeth, legs, testicles, or tail.</p> <p>*The finish is to be judged from a position in front of the handler.</p>	<p>*The principal features of the exercise are that the dog heel, stand and stay as the handler moves away, accept the examination without shyness or resentment, and return to the handler on command.</p> <p>*Finishes are required to be executed promptly, smartly, and straight. This applies to faults in all exercises where the dog returns to heel position. The finish is not a principal part of any exercise.</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 finish judged from a position in front of the handler?</p> <p>*All appropriate penalties of the <u>Novice Heel Free, Stand for Examination and Recall</u> exercises will apply.</p> <p>*Refer to Tidbits 102 & 103 for details on observations for those exercises.</p>
<p>Directed Jumping</p>	<p>*The judge should determine the 10-foot distance before beginning the class.</p> <p>*The same sequence of jumps should be used for each dog.</p> <p>*The judge should not place a mark 20 feet beyond the jumps. The reference to 20 feet beyond the jumps is to require the sit command be given prior to the dog reaching the ring barrier so that the dog may be evaluated on its ability to stop and sit on command.</p> <p>*When scoring the Directed Jumping exercise, large variations in the performance may occur and there is not a great deal of time to consider how far from perfect each variation is.</p> <p>*As an aid to maintaining some consistency in the manner in which all dogs in the class are scored, there should be no question that some type of system needs to be adopted in advance of the class. Check out the Obedience Guidelines: A grid is based on the premise that the closer to perfection, the smaller the deduction.</p>	<p>*An excellent position for judging this exercise is <u>on the side of the ring of the designated jump</u>, parallel to and slightly to the rear of the handler and dog.</p> <p>*The wider the angles and distance from the handler the better for overall viewing.</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 goes away from the handler to the opposite end of the ring, stop, jump as directed, and return as in the Novice Recall.</p> <p>*The handler should give the command to sit when the dog is about 20 feet beyond the jumps.</p> <p>*The key is that the dog stops and sits on command. The dog should not stop and sit without a command from the handler or stop and/or sit when it arrives at the ring barrier simply because it can go no further. If the dog does either of these, points are deducted because the handler's command did not cause the dog to stop and sit.</p> <p>*Finishes are required to be executed promptly, smartly, and straight. This applies to faults in all exercises where the dog returns to heel position. The finish is not a principal part of any exercise.</p>	<p>*There are several key points that require your attention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dog must move at a brisk trot or gallop until commanded to sit. The dog must go out about 20 feet beyond the jumps. Did the handler give the command to sit when the dog is about 20 feet beyond the jumps? The dog must stop and sit promptly on command. <p>*All applicable penalties of the <u>Novice Recall</u> exercises will apply.</p> <p>*Did the judge keep their attention on the handler during the signals?</p> <p>*Refer to Tidbits 102 for details on observations for the Novice Recall exercise.</p>

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

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. The actual judging procedure may vary from judge to judge, but performance requirements must remain the same.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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 ****

1. Did the judge check the ring size for the class being judged?
2. Where is the table placed so not to interfere with the teams when in the ring?
3. Where will each exercise be performed? Were they efficient in saving steps and time?
4. When one exercise ends, is the location of the next exercise nearby?
5. 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?
6. Is the judge using the "exact" Judge's Orders in quotes in the Regulations?
7. Does the judge watch the team at ALL TIMES when they enter the ring until they leave the ring?
8. 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?
9. If there were runoffs, were the four prize winners pulled out (and stayed) so the spectators could clearly see the prize winners?
10. Did the judge speak up to be heard and address the spectators during the prize ceremony to be heard?
11. Did the judge have the *required* marks in the ring?
12. Were the required ring postings visible and easily understood?
13. Was the heeling pattern posted, demonstrated or told to the first handler?
14. Was #13 ^ also done for the class in case of a runoff?
15. Did it appear the stewards had good instructions and were working efficiently?
16. Were there quick movements by the judge that may have interfered with the team working?
17. Were the various exercises performed away from the ring entrance and/or table?
18. Paying attention to the dogs while lining up outside the ring to come in for the Group exercise, watching for signs of aggression, etc.?
19. Watching all the teams exit the ring, being in control and not pulling on the leash?
20. Turned in the book after the class ended, or having the Obedience Chairman take it to the Secretary or Superintendent.

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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