



# COMPETING IN AGILITY

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[www.nutterdogs.co.uk](http://www.nutterdogs.co.uk)

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## BEFORE YOU START

### ARE YOU READY?

Before you start competing, it is important to have an honest conversation about whether or not you and your dog are ready to compete. It's not about whether or not you're *good enough* but whether you both will have a positive experience - and how much you're willing to put in to ensure that happens.

Often experienced handlers will enter younger dogs for all classes they are eligible for but only work on a small section of the course; nobody wants to do is set themselves and their dog up for failure. Most experienced handlers will also have taken their younger dogs (well before they are able to compete) along to shows to work on general training in the show atmosphere. Shows are a *lot* - there are tons of people; barking & sometimes lunging dogs; tannoy announcements; and more. And that's before we even enter the ring!

You don't need to wait until your dog is absolutely perfect before you enter a show - if that was the case, none of us would enter! But you do need to ensure that your goals for the show are achievable and realistic *for your dog*.

With the exception of UKA nursery classes (which allow dogs to compete from 16 months), remember that your dog has to be 18 months old in order to compete.

### THE MAIN PLAYERS

The KENNEL CLUB licenses shows across the country, and also organises the likes of Crufts and Olympia if you're aiming high! KC shows are the most common in the country, but aren't always the best option for inexperienced dogs. There is a lot to sort out before you ever enter a show too with registering your dog for comps.

Then there is UK AGILITY. UKA shows are more frequent in the midlands and further south, but there is a growing contingent of northern shows. UKA has their own qualifiers and finals, and have a few small but key differences in rules from Kennel Club. They also allow for you to run Not For Competition or NFC, meaning that you can reward your dog in the ring with a toy. This is hugely valuable - especially for inexperienced dogs!



Photo by Amy Finn Photography

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## KENNEL CLUB SHOWS



Photo by Horses for Courses Photography

### MEASURING

Your dog needs to be measured, to assess which category they will fit in for their jump heights - these are based on the dog's height at the withers:

**LARGE** 50cm and over  
(jump height 60cm)

**INTERMEDIATE** over 43 - under 50cm  
(jump height 50cm)

**MEDIUM** over 35 - under 43cm  
(jump height 40cm)

**SMALL** under 35cm  
(jump height 30cm)

The only dogs who don't *need* to be measured are "obviously large" dogs. You can still get your Great Dane measured, but it's likely to be a waste of money!

Measuring sessions are held at most shows, and often also outside of shows at training venues across the country. Two people will place hoop(s) over your dog, depending on which height they think your dog is likely to be.

The idea behind measuring (and especially behind having two measurers present) is that it is fair, accurate and appropriate - but they can only measure what is in front of them on the day. It is important that your dog is familiar with the process and happy for a stranger to place something over them. If your dog won't stand still or cringes away under the hoop then they can't be measured and can't compete.

### REGISTRATION

To compete at KC shows, your dog has to be registered with the Kennel Club.

If your dog is a KC registered pedigree, you're all good to go and skip this first step. But if not, if your dog has no papers, is a rescue, or a mixed breed, you will need to register them with the ACTIVITY REGISTER - more info on this can be found on the KC website at:

[www.thekennelclub.org.uk/events-and-activities/activity-register](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/events-and-activities/activity-register)

Your dog will need a *fancy* name, which has to be distinct from every other dog in their registry. These are often either include or are inspired by your dog's name.

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## UKA SHOWS

### REGISTRATION

You will need to register *separately* for UKA shows - whether or not your dog is on Kennel Club Breed or Activity Registers is entirely irrelevant. With UKA you have to register both yourself as a handler (setting up your account) and then your dog(s). It is all online and much quicker and less painful than the Kennel Club registration method - but as they are separate entities, likewise your UKA registration has no bearing on your ability to enter KC shows.

[www.compete.ukagility.com](http://www.compete.ukagility.com)

### MEASURING

Just like for KC shows, your dog will need to be *measured* for UKA shows. UKA is a little bit more relaxed in this - measures are usually done on your first day of a show, and may actually be *after* your first run. You should enter the show with the height you *think* your dog is - be honest with yourself here, and ask your trainer if in doubt! (You may get some funny looks if you enter a Great Dane as a Toy dog...)

UKA height categories are:

Maxi - over 50cm

Standard - over 44 - under 50cm

Midi - over 38 - under 44cm

Toy - over 32 - under 38cm

Micro - under 32cm

### JUMP HEIGHTS

At UKA you can opt to jump *any* height that is *higher* than your dog's measured height. You can also opt to jump *one* height lower in the new UKA "Select" height - which gives the same opportunities to progress as their "Regular" height.

Maxi - Reg 60cm, Sel 50cm

Standard - Reg 50cm, Sel 40cm

Midi - Reg 40cm, Sel 30cm

Toy - Reg 30cm, Sel 25cm

Micro - Reg 25cm, Sel 20cm

The height you enter your dog for can be different from one day of a show to the next - and you can choose a different height for the "Performance" (Agility, Jumping and Games) classes versus the "Steeplechase" classes.



Photo by  
Yellow Hound  
Photography

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## TYPES OF CLASSES

### AGILITY & JUMPING

Agility classes can include any combination of equipment, but must include all three contacts (a frame, dog walk and seesaw) and weaves. Jumping classes are the same *except* no contacts are permitted - weaves will still be there!

At UKA shows, Agility, Jumping & Games classes all form part of their Performance progression (separate to Steeplechase).

### STEEPLECHASE (& HELTER SKELTER)

Steeplechase classes have their own progression system within UKA.

In KC shows Steeplechase and/or Helter Skelter may be offered as "special" classes, meaning they don't count for progression.

These classes contain just jumps and tunnels and should be fast and flowing - they're usually perfect for beginner dogs!



### GAMES

All shows used to offer "games" classes as standard, which allowed handlers to try out different skills and employ both strategy and course planning to win. UKA still require points in Games classes in order to progress in their Performance programme. Some KC shows still offer these but they are "special" (i.e. non-progressive) classes only nowadays.

For more info on Games classes at UKA, please visit their website at: [www.ukagility.com/about/classes](http://www.ukagility.com/about/classes)

### OTHER CLASSES

The other types of classes typically on offer are:

- ABC (Anything But Collie) - "special" classes open only to dogs who are not border collies, working sheepdogs or crosses
- Anysize or All Sorts & Veterans - "special" KC classes where dogs jump lower than their measured height - these may or may not include contacts but never includes weaves or seesaw; typically tied in with Veterans (for older dogs). The UKA "equivalent" is Nursery (for young dogs) and Casual (which includes seesaw & weaves).

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## ENTERING A SHOW

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

Firstly you need to decide what kind of show you'll want to enter - Kennel Club, UK Agility or Independent - and/or how far you're willing to travel for it. Most shows between April to September (the primary show season) run over multiple days, meaning those further away shows become more viable. Not everyone is lucky enough to have shows less than an hour away, unfortunately!

Once you've decided, you can use the postcode checker on Agilitynet to find shows roughly within your radius:  
[www.agilitynet.co.uk/clutch/shows.htm](http://www.agilitynet.co.uk/clutch/shows.htm)

From this page you can also find how to enter shows. Most shows now offer both paper and online entries, the latter of which also mean you need to be registered with that *show processor*. Online entries offer convenience for both the competitor and show management; it is just important that you thoroughly read the *schedule* before you start entering classes to ensure you pick the right ones!



Photo by Agilityfoto

### THE BASIC INFORMATION

A show schedule will contain the following information:

- Show name & location - usually also including directions to the venue as postcodes aren't always reliable at getting you to the farm fields in the middle of nowhere where shows tend to be held!
- Show secretary & show manager - these are the people to speak with if there's any queries with entering the show (secretary) or any issues on the day (manager)
- Closing date for entries

### CLASS SCHEDULE

Information on classes will also be in the schedule, including:

- The height of the class
- The type of class - e.g. agility or jumping.
- Whether the class is *graded* or *combined* - e.g. a G1-3 will have a set of results for Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3; whereas C1-3 will have one set of results for all three grades. (Combined classes are more common where smaller class numbers are anticipated.)

Award info should also be here, e.g. whether clear round rosettes are available, and what the show will place to (often 10% of entries).

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## PREPARATION FOR THE SHOW

### SO YOU'VE FILLED YOUR ENTRY & PAID THE FEES... NOW WHAT?

Most shows will close 6 to 8 weeks before the big day; giving you lots of time to prepare! (One thing to note is that once shows have closed, you will not be able to edit your entry or be refunded; the only thing you can do is advise of a grade change if your dog *wins up* at another show before then.)

Whether you're *day tripping* or *camping* at the show, there are certain things you should bring - which you may not think of!

### THE MUST HAVES

- Comfortable running shoes with good grip. Most shows are held on grass or sand, so both you and your dog need to be used to running on these surfaces before a show!
- Your running orders, which are usually available 1-2 weeks before the show.
- Food and/or money for food vans!
- Plenty of water for you & dog.
- Spare socks, warm layers, a coat for you and for your dog, sunscreen, lip balm & waterproofs - in the UK it often doesn't follow the forecast!
- Dog treats, poo bags and your dog's favourite toy(s) to work for!

### IT MIGHT BE OBVIOUS...

But make sure you know *when* the show is and *where* it is - venues can be tricky to find, and it is quite important that you show up for the correct weekend and on the correct day if you've only entered one day of a multi day show!

And make sure you don't forget your dog! I know people who have... but it's hard to compete without them...



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## THE BIG DAY ITSELF

### WHEN, WHERE, WHAT...?

You should receive a *ring plan* in advance of the show - typically 1-2 weeks before. This gives the order that classes will run in in each ring, and from this you can work out when you need to arrive. Make sure you check beforehand what time judging commences (this should be on the ring plan and/or schedule). Typically the first classes of the day will be set up and ready for *course walking* at least half an hour before judging begins, so if you have a class first thing you should aim to arrive at least half an hour before then at the least.

If you don't have a class first thing in any of the rings, you can work out *roughly* how long it'll be before your class by going by the rule of 1 minute per dog. This is a very generous time and does typically allow for roughly 20% of dogs entered in a class not running in that class - always err on the cautious side if you're not certain though as you don't want to miss course walking!

For instance if your first class is the second one in ring three, and there's forty dogs in the first class, you *should* be safe to arrive between 30-40 mins after judging begins.

Quite often there will be clashes where you are due to be in different rings at the same sort of time. Don't panic!!! All you need to do is mark yourself in late with the *ring party* (who are working on the ring) and get to each run as soon as you can.

### COURSE WALKING

Before your class, you will have opportunity to walk your course - similar to how you should be doing whilst at training. Most people will walk multiple times - to see where the numbers are; to consider handling options and what cues are needed/when to give these; and to walk additionally to really cement these in your mind. Remember that once the class begins you can't walk the course again, so take as long as you need!

### BEFORE YOU RUN

On your ring plan will be your running number for each class. When the classes begin, they will call up to a certain amount of dogs - usually e.g. the first 20 dogs. If you are within this bracket you should make your way to the ring.

You will then need to join the queue, which can be quite stressful for your dog (with lots of other dogs nearby, often barking toward the ring), so try to focus on them and give them plenty of space from other dogs. Playing with & feeding them are good ways to keep them engaged with you before you go.

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## THE RUN

### STEPPING UP TO RUN

As you approach the front of the queue, you'll typically be *booked in* to run in a set order. Make sure you don't go for a nervous wee break at this point or you'll confuse everyone in the ring!

You want to make sure you're ready to go for your turn, so on the last few dogs get yours and your dog's coats off, get your bumbag off, and get in the zone!

Remember that you can't have anything in your hand while you run (including a toy or lead - with the exception of *NFC* runs at UKA and independent shows). Your dog can only wear a single, close fitting collar; no dangly tags or multiple collars, and no harnesses allowed. At KC shows you can have food and/or your toy in your pocket, but you can't give any food to your dog whatsoever in the ring (even on the start line), and can't touch your toy or play with your dog once you've been asked to begin.

Always attack the course as best you can. Both you and your dog are likely to be nervous for the first few runs, or the first few shows. I still get nervous for my first run at a show and I've been competing since 2015! All you can do is try your best & enjoy your time in the ring with your best friend - and make sure to celebrate with and reward them for their effort when you come out of the ring!

### ALWAYS REMEMBER...

You chose to do agility - your dog didn't ask to do it.

If something goes wrong (and often things do go wrong!), 9/10 times it's because *your* handling was off or *your* training didn't cover a particular eventuality. Your dog will never "try to make you look bad" so don't blame them!

Try not to get caught up in the "what ifs" and "maybes", but celebrate every achievements - however big or small they are!

**Photo by Amy Finn  
Photography**



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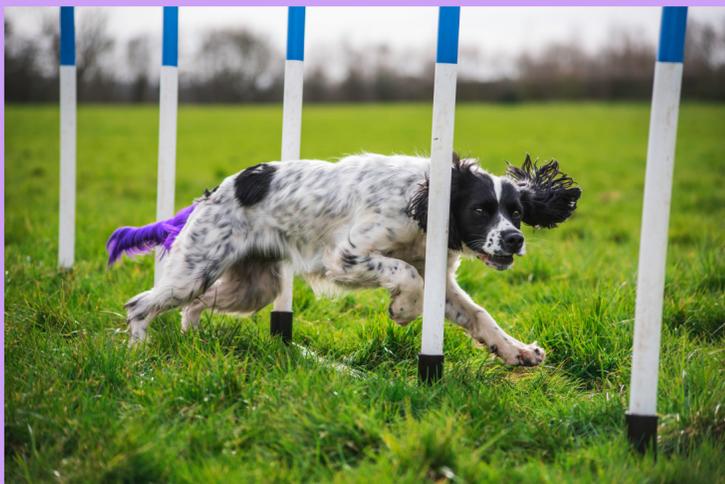
## REFLECTING ON THE SHOW

### CAUGHT THE BUG?

It doesn't take long! The show atmosphere is second to none, and I personally love the buzz of tackling a judge's course with my dog, testing our skills and teamwork over 30-40 seconds. Sometimes it all comes together; sometimes we have incredible "almost" runs which feel even more amazing than the clear rounds; and sometimes we look like we've never done agility before. It's all part of the fun!

Once you've done one show, it becomes much less daunting to enter others. Quite often the distance you're happy to travel will stretch - maybe you start out with a strict 1hr limit for your first two or three, then there's a show you want to do nearly 1.5hr away, then a camping show just under 2hr away... then you're upgrading your tent, and suddenly you have more dogs, and your year revolves around agility.

No matter where you are in your agility journey, always remember that your dog is doing this for you. Love them for it!



Photos by Nutter Dogs



# READY TO START COMPETING - BUT NEED MORE ADVICE?

Feel free to get in touch with us via:

- 07383 012653 •
  - [info@nutterdogs.co.uk](mailto:info@nutterdogs.co.uk) •
  - [www.nutterdogs.co.uk](http://www.nutterdogs.co.uk) •
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