



Competing In Agility

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Before You Start

ARE YOU READY?

Before you start competing, it is important to have an honest conversation (with yourself and/or your trainer) 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 of the show environment.

Experienced handlers may enter their young dogs for all classes they are eligible for, but only work on small sections of the course - ensuring success and boosting confidence. Experienced handlers will also have taken their younger dogs along to shows to work on general training in the show atmosphere, almost from the start. 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*.

For most classes, your dog must be 18 months in order to take part. But remember it isn't a race - just because they *can*, doesn't mean they *should*.

THE MAIN PLAYERS

The KENNEL CLUB licenses shows across the country, and also organises the likes of Crufts 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 competition.

Then there is AGILITY 4 ALL. A4A shows are more frequent in the midlands and further south, but there is a growing contingent of northern shows. A4A have 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 officially measured by approved Kennel Club measurers, to assess which category they will fit in for their jump heights - these are based on the dog's height at the withers.

Up to date height classifications can be found on the Kennel Club website:

<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/events-and-activities/agility/new-to-agility/agility-measuring>

All dogs must be measured before competing at Kennel Club shows.

Measuring sessions are held at many KC shows, and often at some training venues across the country. Although some shows offer early morning measuring before the show begins for dogs who haven't been measured before, be very careful of this if your dog is 'borderline' - i.e. may be on the cusp of different measures. It unfortunately happens that dogs may measure higher than anticipated, and if your dog measures higher they will have to jump that height on the day; which may be something they've never done before!

It is important that your dog is familiar with the measuring process and happy for a stranger to place something over them (KC shows use measuring hoops). 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

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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Agility 4 All Shows

REGISTRATION

As A4A is an entirely separate organisation from the Kennel Club, you will need to register both yourself and your dog(s) separately for their shows.

This can be done via the A4A website at:
www.agility4all.co.uk

MEASURING

Just like for KC shows, your dog will need to be officially measured for A4A shows, unless they are 'obviously' eligible for the 600 height.

The A4A measuring process is generally a more relaxed affair. Measuring sessions are offered in the morning before the show begins, at all shows. 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 300 height dog...)

Up to date height classifications can be found on the Agility 4 All website:
<https://agility4all.co.uk/measuring>

The Select height can really be useful here, if a dog measures higher than expected; often meaning that the dog can run at their anticipated height instead.

JUMP HEIGHTS

At A4A you can opt to jump *any* height that is *higher* than your dog's measured height. This is usually used when a dog measures a different height at A4A versus another organisation; ensuring consistency for the dog during the competing season.

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.

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.



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**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 A4A 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 A4A.

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. A4A still offer Games classes at most shows, which can be used to progress in Performance. Some KC shows still offer these but they are "special" classes only nowadays.

For more info on Games classes at A4A, please visit their website at: 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 A4A "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, Agility 4 All or Independent - and/or how far you're willing to travel for it. The main show season runs from April to September, with many shows offering multiple days in a row, typically outdoors in the sun - or rain! Single day shows are more common in the winter months.

Once you've decided, you can use the postcode checker on Agilitynet to find shows within your radius:

www.agilitynet.co.uk/clutch/shows.htm

From this page you can also find how to enter shows. Most shows now only accept online entries, which means you need to be registered with the *show processor* for that show. 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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Preparing For A 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 or level change if your dog wins up or collects enough points to move 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 one week 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, suncream, 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!

Above all, make sure you don't forget your dog! It's quite hard to compete without them...



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It's Show Time!

WHEN, WHERE, WHAT...?

You should receive a *ring plan* in advance of the show - typically a week 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.

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 (plus, at KC, ten minutes for each course or height change). 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! Note that A4A shows don't allow walking between heights; so you need to be there at the start of your class, *not* at the start of your height!

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

At KC shows, you will have a *running order* - a number allocated to you in the class. At smaller shows this number is mostly used to identify you; at larger shows they may only 'call to' a certain number, e.g. only allowing dogs up to #20 to book in. You will likely need to know your number to book into the queue.

Queues can be quite stressful for your dog, with lots of other things going on around them, so try to focus on them, play with or feed them, or even do simple tricks to keep them engaged with you.

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Your First 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 at this point or you'll confuse everyone in the ring!

You should make sure you're ready to go for your turn, so be sure to get yours and your dog's coats off, remove your bumbag or backpack, and get in the zone before you go into the ring!

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 A4A 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 once you start you can't get your toy out until you finish. In A4A shows food is not permitted in the ring at all.

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?*

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