

Volunteering at Agility Trials



(Photo Credits: Jorge Arcas)

Note the ring crew volunteer on the left. Her job is to reset this broad jump if the dog knocks part of it over

We encourage all agility students to volunteer when they go watch an agility trial. For one thing, you can't beat the view of the action! But Working a class or two at an agility trial can help calm many of the nerves you might have about competing in the future. Seeing experienced competitors in the Masters or Excellent ring make mistakes is comforting, and watching young dogs start their agility careers in the Novice or Starters ring gives a realistic idea of what to expect you're your own dogs when you enter trials in the future.

There are certain jobs at agility trials that are easier than others. For students to have a low-stress, fun introduction to agility trials, expecting them to act as a scribe or a timer at their first or second trial is a bit much.

First, a primer: To sign up, ask an exhibitor where you can find the person manning the Volunteer Board. When you sign up to work at an agility trial, it is typically for one class, such as Novice FAST, or Masters Standard 16". Each class takes anywhere from approximately 30 minutes to 90 minutes depending on how many dogs are entered, and what type of class it is (Jumpers runs are faster than Standard runs, for example).

Here are some of the newbie-friendly, easier jobs at agility trials.

Ring Crew: Bars don't reset themselves, you know! Each ring needs 3-6 ring crew volunteers who are responsible for resetting bars if a dog knocks one off, and straightening the chute after each dog goes through it. Additionally, the ring crew change the heights of the jumps, table, tire, and sometimes the A-frame, when the jump height changes. You sit on a chair inside the ring and watch each dog run. If a dog knocks a bar or otherwise displaces an obstacle, you wait until the dog is no longer running in your area of the course, and fix the obstacle.

Volunteering can seem a little daunting, and novice exhibitors often cry, "What if I mess something up!?" Remember, it's an agility trial, not a life-or-death scenario! Let the judge know that you're new to this, and he or she will be sure to double-check your work. Even very experienced exhibitors make mistakes or get distracted and forget to reset a jump properly.

Leash Runner: It's simple, it's good exercise, and you get to see each dog's run from start to finish. As the leash runner, you are expected to pick up the dog's leash once they have started the course, and drop it off at a pre-determined spot near the exit so it is waiting for the competitor as they finish their run. Your goal as a volunteer is to be as unobtrusive as possible. Some handlers will hand you their dog's leash, others will throw it towards you (stay alert, leash clips can be painful!), and many just drop it behind them.



Unless the handler gives you the dog's leash, wait until the dog has started running the course before picking it up.

It is important to wait until after the dog has begun running to pick up their leash, as you want to avoid inadvertently distracting the dog. You should also keep an eye on the dog while it is running in case something happens to terminate the run, such as the dog eliminating in the ring or the handler asking to be excused. In those cases, you will want to bring the leash directly to the competitor or meet them right by the exit.

Scribe Sheet Runner: This task is a bit easier on your body than leash running is — you get to sit for much of the time. Each dog's faults and time (the score) are written down on a piece of paper. This piece of paper needs to make its way from the score table in the ring to wherever the trial secretary/scoring area is set-up, and that's where you come in! You get to stand or sit in a chair behind the scoring table. (That's where the timer, the scribe, and the assistant scribe sit. They watch the judge and make sure the timing equipment is running properly, and record all of that data.) After each run, the assistant scribe will pass you that dog's score sheet. After every three or four runs, you take these score sheets from the ring to the trial secretary so the dogs' runs can be processed. This allows the results to be processed as they happen, not all together at the end of the class, making final results available to the competitors much sooner.