

RCO Achievement Levels

(Revision: 1/10/2016)

Even with the plethora of classes that has been added to the AKC Obedience program in the last several years, it still requires a considerable amount of training to have a dog ready for the lowest level class, Beginner Novice. I wanted to make this training seem less daunting and give students intermediate goals to work through to provide a sense of progress and motivation. Therefore I have created a series of progressively more advanced levels of achievement that will lead the student and her dog to first master initial Foundations skills, then build on those skills to prepare for Beginner Novice, and then for Novice.

I am currently in the process of creating a separate workbook for each level which will lay out the teaching of these skills in detail, and help the student to structure her training sessions and record her dog's progress. Each workbook also includes topics in basic learning theory for the education of the trainer.

On the next pages, I have listed the skills included at each achievement level, and what the dog needs to be able to do to master or "pass" that level.

Keep in mind that while much of this program is organizing methods and techniques that I have been using for years into a coherent, integrated, and structured set of materials, it is still very much a work in progress. I expect to be making many tweaks and modifications over the next long while, and the exact content of both the workbooks and even what skills are included at each level is subject to change.

Foundations 1 Test

Slow Cookie

Dog will sit or stand with all four feet on the floor while the handler slowly lowers a cookie from above its head. The dog may watch the cookie approach, but will not move its nose towards the cookie in any way. When the cookie is within a couple of inches of the dog's nose, the handler may give the dog the cookie and the dog will take it nicely without hurting fingers.

Eye Contact

Dog will maintain continuous eye contact with the handler for a slow count of 10 while the handler holds a cookie out to one side at arm's length.

Leave It

Handler can present a cookie to the dog with an open hand. The dog will wait politely without trying to take the cookie until the handler gives it to him.

Sit

Dog can do a proper tuck sit from a stand when the handler makes a swooping hand motion. There cannot be any food in the hand that is making the motion.

Down

Dog can do a proper fold back down from a stand with the handler pointing to the floor. There cannot be any food in the hand that is pointing.

Stand

Dog can do a kickback stand with no forward movement of the front feet when the handler lightly touches its flank. Optionally, the handler may also hold the dog's collar or chest with the other hand. There cannot be any food in either hand.

Come

Handler can present a log demonstrating that the dog has recalled successfully from at least 10 feet away and been rewarded for it in at least 5 different situations (e.g. at home in the house, at home in the yard, at class, on a long line in the park, at different training buildings, at a friends' houses, etc.) for a total of at least 300 rewarded recalls. The handler may have food in a pocket or bait bag, but should not get it out before calling the dog, or otherwise try to entice the dog by pretending to have food in a hand or waving a favorite toy, or by any other trickery.

Heeling Setup

Dog can come to heel position when it starts facing the handler (i.e. do a setup) with only a hand motion. There cannot be any food in the hand that makes the motion. When it gets to heel position it will stand and rest its chin in the handler's cupped fingers of the left hand, or for small dogs in the loop of a training aid.

Learning Theory

Handler can pass an oral quiz about luring, as well as the definitions and advantages of positive reinforcement and primary and secondary reinforcers.

Foundations 2 Test

Eye Contact

Dog will maintain continuous eye contact with the handler for a slow count of 10 while the handler holds a cookie out to one side at arm's length when there is a non-threatening motion or sound made to distract the dog.

Sit

Dog will do a proper tuck sit from a stand on a verbal cue only.

Down

Dog will do a proper fold back down from a stand behind a barrier on a verbal cue only when the handler is sitting, kneeling, or squatting.

Stand

Dog will do a kickback stand from a sit in heel position with no forward movement of the front feet on a verbal cue and/or hand signal. No flank touch is allowed.

Come

Handler can present a log demonstrating that the dog has recalled successfully from at least 20 feet away and been rewarded for it in at least 10 different situations (e.g. at home in the house, at home in the yard, at class, on a long line in the park, at different training buildings, at a friends' houses, etc.) for a total of at least 200 additional rewarded recalls since Foundations 1. In addition, the dog will come to the handler when called from 10 feet away when it is being distracted by another person who is either petting it or offering food.

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can heel for 10 steps with perfect attention and position with guidance from the handler's left hand (no food in it) or a training aid.

Stay

Dog can do a sit stay while the handler walks around the dog up close.

Front

Dog can do a chair front from a few feet away onto a platform when the handler's hands are held against the hips or hanging naturally.

Learning Theory

Handler can pass an oral quiz about the process of positive reinforcement.

Foundations 3 Test

Down

Dog will do a proper fold back down from a stand behind a barrier on a verbal cue only (no hand or body motion) when the handler is standing.

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can do one heeling set from group 5 with guidance from the handler's left hand (no food in it) without any errors.

Stay

Dog can do a sit stay while the handler walks 20 feet away and then returns.

Front

Dog can do a chair front from 20 feet away onto a platform when the handler's hands are held against the hips or hanging naturally.

Exam

Dog can do a sit stay with the handler very close while an examiner touches the top of its head.

Left Turn

Dog can do a stationary left pivot (90°) with no cue other than the handler pivoting. The dog ends up completely parallel to the direction the handler is facing. It does not need to sit, but it is OK if it does.

Right Turn

Dog can do a stationary right pivot with no cue other than the handler pivoting. The dog ends up completely parallel to the direction the handler is facing, not with its rear end out. It does not need to sit, but it is OK if it does.

Learning Theory

Handler can pass an oral quiz about classical conditioning and generalization.

Beginner Novice 1 Test

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can do one heeling set from group 9 without any errors with the handler's left hand in its final intended on-leash heeling position.

Stay

Dog can do a sit stay while the handler walks around the perimeter of a ring sized space.

Front

Dog can do a front onto a platform from a few feet away with the handler standing up and hands hanging naturally at his or her sides.

Left Turn

Dog can do a left turn after several steps of straight line heeling and continue for several steps after without losing attention or position.

Right Turn

Dog can do a right turn after several steps of straight line heeling and continue for several steps after without losing attention or position.

About Turn

Dog can do a slow motion about turn, and the handler can stop on any step in the turn and the dog will stop in correct heel position.

Pace Changes

Dog can do the first three phases of Hurry Drills without falling behind.

Halts

Dog can do phases 1 through 4 of Ready Sit Drills.

Learning Theory

Handler can pass an oral quiz about punishment and extinction.

Beginner Novice 2 Test

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can do one heeling set from group 12 without any errors with the handler's left hand in its final intended on-leash heeling position.

Front

Dog can do a front onto a platform from 20 feet away.

Heeling segments

Dog can do 2 of the longer heeling segments randomly selected from the BN2 list. Handler may use verbal cues as needed for each element.

About Turn

Dog can do an about turn after several steps of straight line heeling and continue for several steps after without losing attention or position.

Pace Changes

Dog can do all four phases of Hurry Drills.

Halts

Dog can do Phases 1 through 7 of Ready Sit Drills.

Figure 8

Dog can do a figure 8 with the handler going slower on the inside post and faster on the outside post, and extra verbal encouragement, especially on the outside post.

Learning Theory

Handler can pass an oral quiz about sequencing of behaviors and behavior economics.

Beginner Novice 3 Test

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can do the longest rep from group 15 without any errors with the handler's left hand in its final intended on leash heeling position. There is no food on the handler. At the end, the handler will use a pre-determined phrase to tell the dog that a jackpot is coming, then leave the dog in a sit stay to go and get the jackpot for the dog.

Heel pattern segments

Dog can do 1 of the longer heeling segments randomly selected from the BN3 list with no more than 2 verbal encouragements during each segment.

Front

Dog can do a front with no platform from 20 feet away.

Stay

Dog can do a one minute group sit stay on a 6 foot leash.

Figure 8

Dog can do a figure 8 with the handler walking at normal speed. An extra command to hurry on the outside post can be used.

Ring Entrances

Dog and handler can be called into a ring by a "judge". The handler will use a pre-determined phrase to tell the dog that the performance process has begun. The tem will then enter the ring and move to the setup point for heeling with the dog's attention continuously on the handler. When the judge walks up and asks "Are you ready?" the dog may glance at the judge but should return attention quickly to the handler. Handler can also present a log demonstrating that the dog has done a ring entrance and been rewarded at one of 4 possible points at least 50 times.

Learning Theory

Handler can pass an oral quiz about fluency and ring readiness.

Novice 1 Test

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can do one heeling set off leash from group 5 without any errors with the handler's left hand in its final intended off leash heeling position.

Heel pattern segments

Dog can do 1 of the longer heeling segments randomly selected from the N1 list on leash without any extra verbal encouragement or commands.

Front

Dog can do a front onto a platform from 40 feet away.

Stand

Dog can do a stand stay and resist light, steady pressure from the handler at 8 points.

Stay

Dog can do a one minute group sit stay and one minute group down stay on a six foot leash.

Figure 8

Dog can do a normal figure 8 without any extra verbal encouragement.

Finish

Dog can do an around finish.

Between exercises

Handler can state what the dog's phrase is for moving between exercises. Handler can also present a log demonstrating that the dog has been moved from one location to a new setup location 5 to 10 feet away using the between exercises phrase and then rewarded for setting up and looking at the handler at least 50 times.

Novice 2 Test

Heeling in a straight line

Dog can do one heeling set off leash from group 11 without any errors with the handler's left hand in its final intended off leash heeling position.

Heel pattern segments

Dog can do 1 of the longer heeling segments randomly selected from the N2 list on leash without any extra verbal encouragement or commands.

Front

Dog can do a front onto a platform from 40 feet away with the handler standing at various angles.

Stand for exam

Dog can do a Novice stand for exam exercise.

Stay

Dog can do a one minute group sit stay and three minute group down stay on a six foot leash and resist distractions such as offered food from a few feet away or a tossed toy.

Finish

Dog can do a swing (left) finish.

Between exercises

Handler can state what the dog's phrase is for moving between exercises. Handler can also present a log demonstrating that the dog has been moved from the end of any exercise to a new setup location using the between exercises phrase and then rewarded for setting up and looking at the handler at least 50 times.

Novice 3 Test

Heeling

Dog can do 2 of the longer heeling segments randomly selected from the N3 list, one on leash and one off leash. There is no food on the handler. At the end of each pattern, the handler will use a pre-determined phrase to tell the dog that a jackpot is coming, then leave the dog in a sit stay to go and get the jackpot for the dog.

Front

Dog can do the regulation Novice recall exercise.

Stand for exam

Dog can do a stand stay and resist light, steady pressure from the examiner at 8 points.

Stay

Dog can do regulation Novice group sits and downs.

Ring Preparation

Handler can present a log demonstrating that the dog has done at least 12 Novice run throughs or matches in at least 4 different locations that provide distraction with quality of performances that meet the handler's goals. 6 of these run throughs should have been done with no food or toys on the handler, and 3 of the 6 should have been done with no rewards until a jackpot at the end. In the other three, the handler may go and get rewards for the dog that are left near the ring or have them delivered by a helper.