

JUDGES SEMINAR MARCH 2010 by Karen de Wit

Attendance: Karen de Wit, Peter de Wit, Danny Gotlieb, Lyn Sayers, Mike Butler, Kirsten Graves, Rebecca Sidwell, Sharon Wagener, Jan Koortse, Fiona Ferrar, Rod Pearce, Keri Nielsen.

Summary and comments.

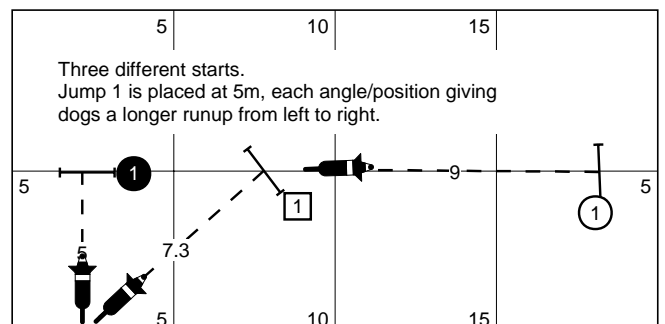
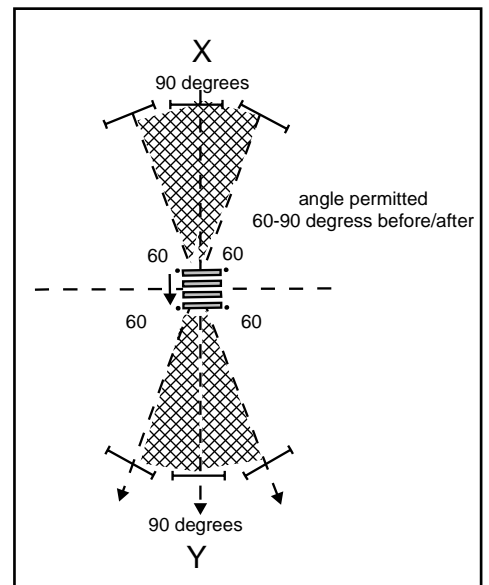
Karen began by referring to an article about balanced course design. A course may become unbalanced by having poor flow for the level it is intended, repetitive challenges, where the challenges only exist for a particular type of dog, or only suit one type of handler, or where the judge goes crazy with their favourite exercise or pattern eg. Serpentine. Participants were reminded that a course may be terrific to run, with the perfect balance of challenges (number and type) but be dreadful to judge or unsafe, and these other aspects also need to be taken into account.

Discussion then moved to the type of challenges that can be used and the ways that they can be made easier or harder, enabling the judge to cater for the different levels. Reference was made to the book **Course design-fundamentals of course design for dog agility by Stuart Mah** as well as to the NZKCAC **Jumpers guidelines**. Participants then discussed how the table relating challenges (number and type) to Jumpers class levels could be easily modified to create a guide for agility classes.

Participants then discussed an agility course, noting the number and types of challenges, that the handler and judge's path coincided in some places, as well as other issues that made the course less than perfect! The meeting concluded with some Helpful advice for judges from accepting contracts to judging a class.

In addition the following points were noted:-

1. The approach to spread jumps and the long jump. It was agreed this should not be on a corner. The dog should not have to wrap a long jump or spread. This is a safety issue, to ensure dogs do not land and turn after completing a challenging obstacle. Some Judges do not follow the spirit of the regulation and set these up on corners, and it was suggested that the regulations might need to be modified so it is clearer. If the dog cannot complete the sequence $X \rightarrow$ Long jump (spread) $\rightarrow Y$ in a straight line, then it is turning a corner. The diagram in the Jumpers regulations was referred to, and it was agreed that an angle of 60 degrees up to 90 degrees (hatched area on diagram) should be used.
2. Placement of collapsible tunnels was discussed, with reference to it being an obstacle that blinds the dog so care should be taken placing other obstacles close to it. It was agreed that placing a collapsible tunnel under contact equipment can be dangerous. The dog cannot see where they are going, and often tunnels are very loose and the dog can come out at a variety of angles.
3. The regulated 6m run up to spreads and long jumps was discussed. As most dogs cannot take a normal stride in that gap it creates problems, and a longer gap is more appropriate especially at lower classes.
4. The regulated 5m runup at the start line was discussed. This is a minimum and can be a little tight for big dogs. However dogs can be given the opportunity for a longer runup if the first jump is placed at an angle to the edge of the ring. (see diagram). Some judges like to constrain dogs and handlers at the start, and 5m is a handy distance to ensure success at the first obstacle. Also you don't need more than 5m before the first obstacle if it is a tunnel. If a regulation requiring more than 5m was brought in bigger rings would be needed.



Participants all received a copy of the following seminar notes.

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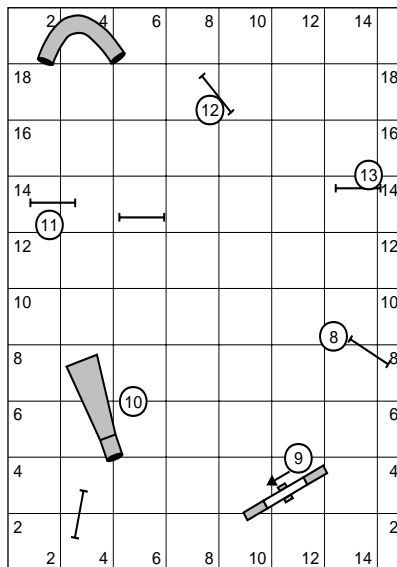
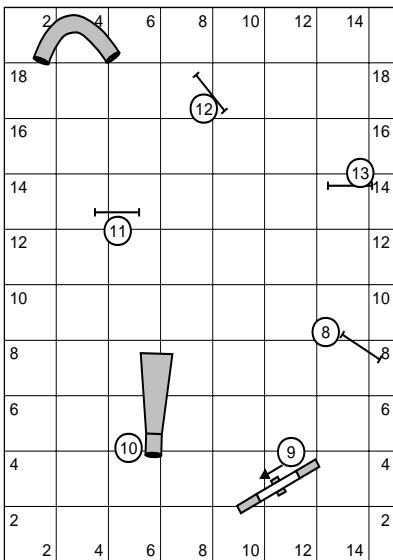
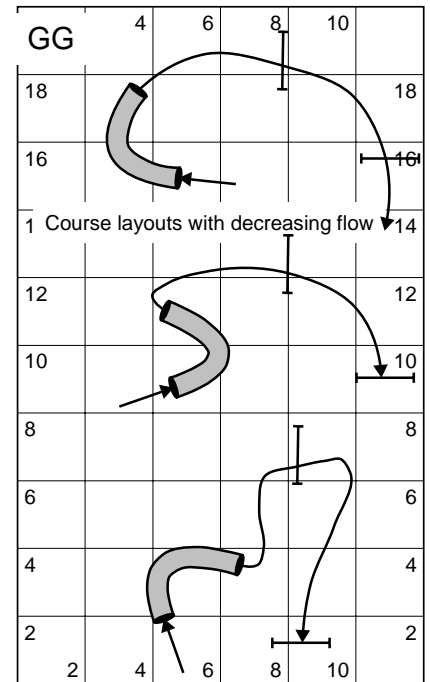
Balanced course design (refer article in Clean Run, March 2007, Page 42)

This refers to

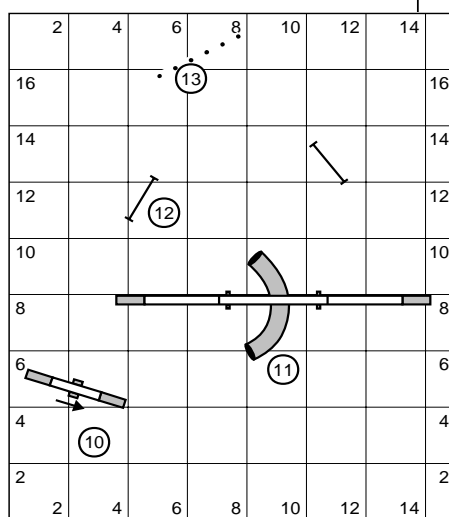
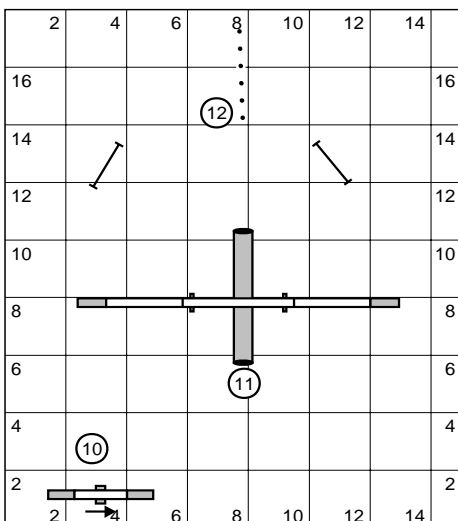
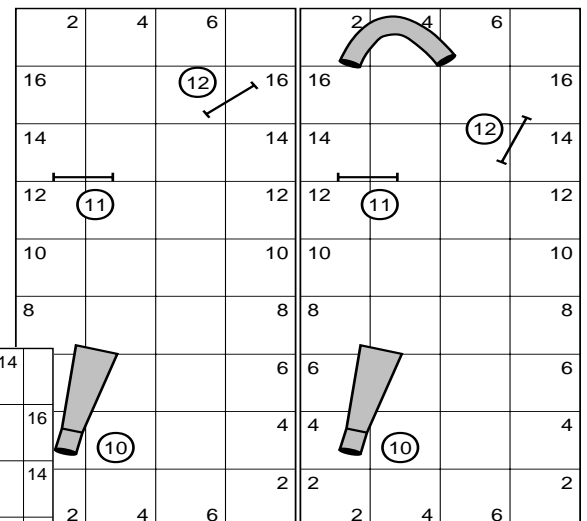
1. Appropriate to the level of the class.
2. Flow- sections balanced with sections requiring some handling. The flow sections tend to favour dogs that will work away from the handler whilst dogs that work close may take obstacles they should not because they are close to the handler. The handling sections will favour dogs that can work close and tight to the handler.

Flow is an important consideration when designing courses. The ultimate flow is created by straight lines. Turns and presenting lots of options in a small space break up the flow and the dogs will go much slower, or the handlers will tighten up control over them. (see examples). Jumpers C, Starters and Novice should have maximum flow.

3. Different challenges - ideally should not just repeat the SAME challenge. Eg. A course with 3 callofs is unbalanced cf a course that has one directional problem, a spacing problem and a obstacle discrimination problem. (See seesaw course examples)
4. Balance between small and large dogs. See two examples of 270s below where big dogs would almost land in the tunnel vs problems for all as they will be going faster and can still turn too tight or overrun the second jump.
5. Balance between different handling manoeuvres. Unfair to design a course that only an extreme handler could cope with. (see tunnel under dogwalk example below)

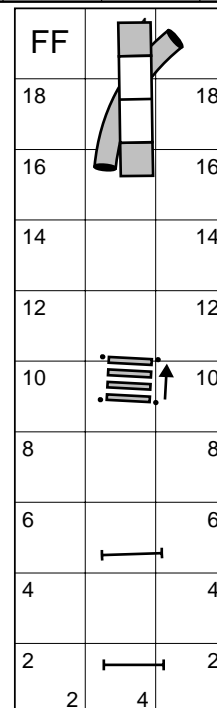
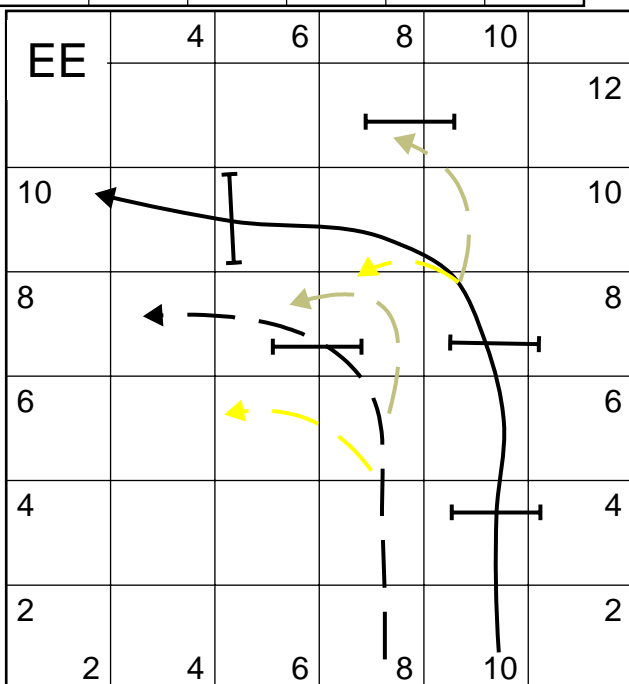
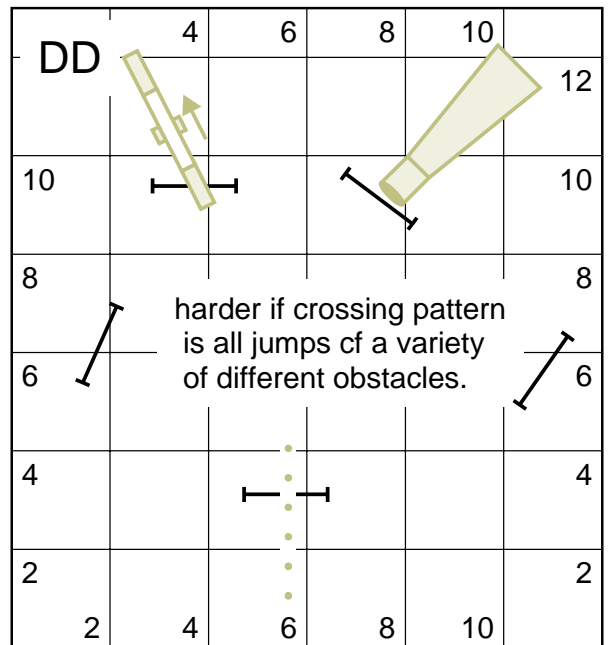
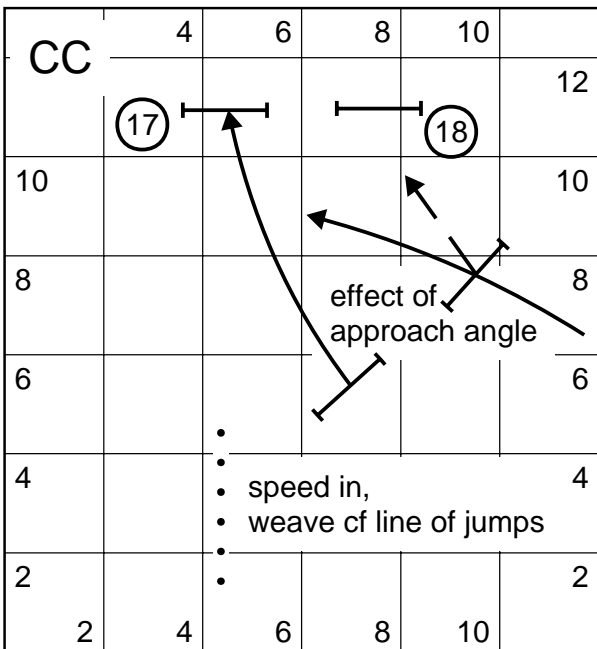
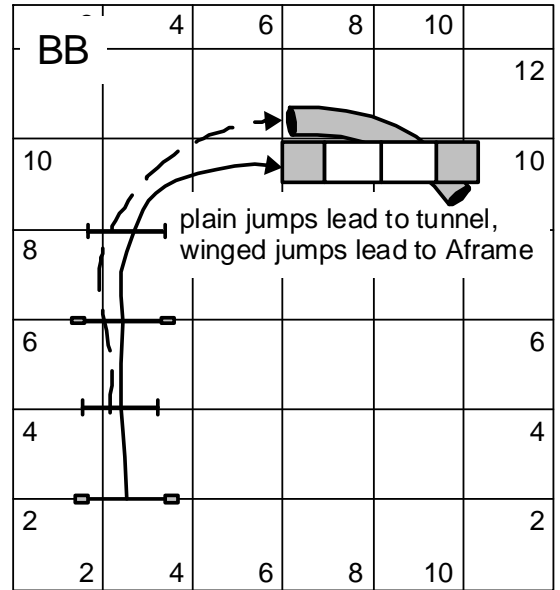
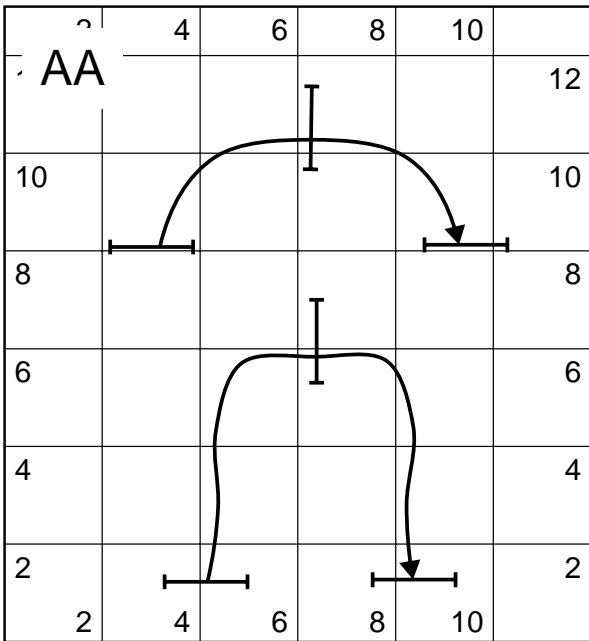


6. course vs training exercise. An overuse of a particular type of exercise such as pullthrus does not produce a balanced course.



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Course design challenges			<i>Reference: Course design- fundamentals of course design for dog agility by Stuart Mah.</i>
spacing and distance variations	A variety of jump spacing. Type of jump influences difficulty eg. Long jump in a sequence vs all hurdles	Other obstacles eg, collapsible tunnel/contacts as dog cannot see jump till late, esp if single bar or tyre.	Close together or varied distance more appropriate for higher levels cf, nice even flow for lower classes.
angles and approaches, wraps, serpentines, pullthrus etc	Refer to recommendations for jumping levels. Straight approaches easier than angled. Regs prohibit LJ and spreads on angles (be aware how approach can affect this) also tyre	Angled approaches to contacts for higher classes as harder for dog to get up. More chance of slipping. Beware in poor weather. Consider angle of approach from previous obstacle.	90 degree turns can easy or hard depending an angle where dog has to go out to do jump in pinwheel etc. (AA) Can create straight lines out of angled obstacles.
discrimination problems - obstacle discrimination	Difference between lower and higher level classes as requires considerable handler control vs dog doing what is in front of them	Obstacles can be placed Very close or further apart, and often the ones further apart can be just as challenging as handlers become inattentive.	Difficulty depends on type of obstacles used, obstacles leading up to challenge, speed and angle into discrimination. (BB) Same obstacles are confusing as same verbals used.
discrimination problems - directional discrimination	Where obstacles are close and the handler must communicate correct direction eg. Box setup, turns off a straight line, two entries into a tunnel.	Easier or harder depending on speed into, angle towards or distance from the challenge. (CC)	Remembering that dogs will usually curl back towards their handlers
changes of side/crosses	Where a course changes direction on itself, it presents problems for new handlers, dogs will twist/refuse/put the jump down, get Disq	More changes of direction and less straight lines in higher classes. Speed, spacing, obstacle, angles affect performance of crosses	Crosses easier at tunnels as dog cant see, harder at weaves as dog can pull out.
crossing patterns	Part of the course where the dog goes through 2 or more times, eg. Box, often confusing the handler as much as the dog!	One crossing pattern at lower levels, more in higher classes. Harder when obstacles close and speed into it is high as reactions have to be quicker. Harder where choices are the same obstacle eg. all jumps	Difficulty created by speed into cross, direction of approach, distance choices placed apart, types of obstacles used, shape of pattern and number of obstacles in that pattern, number of passes through the crossing pattern (DD)
handler restrictions,	Section of course where obstacles force handler to be closer or further way from dog than they would like.	Take care it is not dangerous. Usually in higher classes. Jumping equipment carries 5f penalty. Layering (obstacle between handler and required obstacle)	Tunnels under contacts force handlers further away from their dogs. Two wing jumps or other obstacles placed side by side so handler cannot pass between them. Obstacle placed in normal handler path (EE)
leadout advantage	Where a handling challenge is close to the start of the course so running with the dog would be a disadvantage	Eg. Line of jumps (incl LJ) to a discrimination.	Within the course can pin the handlers to an obstacle eg. Contact or weave and then present a similar challenge. Can they handle these from a distance?



Guideline for Jumpers Course Standards (reference:- NZKCAG files)

Jumpers courses will encourage dogs to move faster, and as such, safety is of particular concern. While it is important that courses are of the correct degree of difficulty for their grade, it is also essential that courses are not overly tight and inviting for dogs to attempt equipment at dangerous angles. Judges are reminded that the safety of dogs is paramount, and this rule applies to jumpers courses as well.

Jumpers courses should be designed such that a clear round is achievable by a significant proportion of the class within the SCT that is set by the Judge within the relevant maximum and minimum rates for the grade.

Course Design Standards– Grade C

Course design at this level shall take the inexperience of the dog into account when designing obstacle placement.

*There should be no attempt at trick distances between jumps and the correct obstacle should be the one most obvious to the dog from the previous one. Courses should be **flowing** and invite the dogs to move at speed with good distances between obstacles.*

Grade C handlers should be able to demonstrate “basic” or “fundamental” handling techniques only. The Grade C handler should be given plenty of manoeuvring room around and between the obstacles.

Note that a **handler who has previously titled another dog (or this dog in another venue) may excel** at this or a higher level because of their past experience. This possibility should not influence the design of a course.

The course designer should take into consideration that a delayed response by the dog to a handler command may risk injury to the dog on approach to some of the obstacles. The orientation of the obstacles should be such that the flow of the course shall present the dog with Open Approaches to the entry plane of the obstacles.

Grade C may include **leading out at the start, switching sides of the dog while moving or sending the dog ahead**. Other challenges may be employed in a limited way, but care should be taken not to place handling capabilities above the goal of testing basic obstacle performance.

Course Challenges: Grade C should include 2-3 challenges.

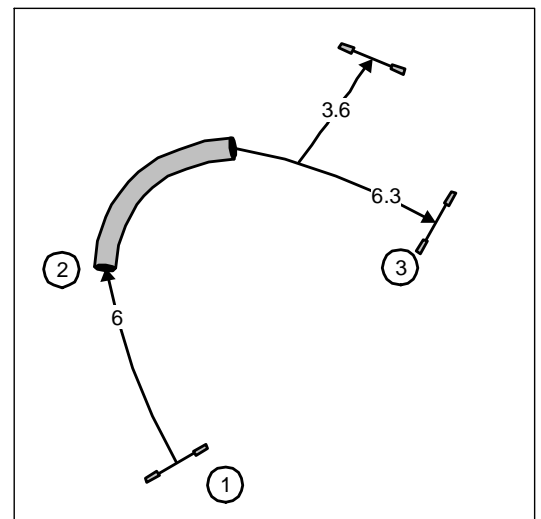
Obstacle Discrimination - the placement of two or more obstacles in close proximity such that to the dog either obstacle may appear to be the next correct obstacle, is permitted, but this should be set no closer than 2m from closest edge of one obstacle to the closest edge of the other. The intent of this minimum distance requirement is to permit a starter handler some **reaction time to issue a command** to direct the dog to the correct obstacle, given the “loose control” of the starter dog.

Wrong Course Potential – (Crossing Patterns), – the placement of two or more obstacles such that either obstacle appears to be in flow, or the wrong obstacle appears to be in flow, where used, should be loosely spaced. Wrong Course obstacles should generally require that the dog deviate more than 3m off the course flow.

Changes of Side

Changes of side are permitted. Changes of Side should not generally be combined with other challenge types such that a Timing Sequence challenge is inadvertently created.

Wraps – the positioning of a single obstacle such that a dog must be directed around the exit plane of the obstacle immediately after performing it.



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The obstacle to be wrapped should not be so close to another obstacle that a pull through type challenge is inadvertently created.

Other Challenges

All other challenges are NOT encouraged. However, any course may include a challenge type that might normally be indicative of challenges from the next higher level in order to educate and prepare competitors for the next level.

When this is done however, the challenge should be presented in such a way that skills learned in the present level could be utilized to successfully accomplish the challenge, even though a more advanced handling strategy might enable the challenge to be performed more readily.

Course Design Standards– Grade B

Course design at this level shall begin to shift emphasis toward Directional Control through utilisation of fundamental handling skills to progress fluidly through the course while working with greater speed than at the previous level. Better Response Control is more apparent, but still not necessarily strong.

Dogs should be able to demonstrate increased confidence and speed on the obstacles without incurring a fault while moving within the natural flow of a course which utilises moderate-length flowing lines between challenges.

As with the Grade C courses, it may happen that a handler who has previously titled another dog (or this dog in another venue) may excel at this or a higher level because of their past experience. This possibility shall not influence the design of courses for this level.

Course Challenges: Grade B should include 3-4 challenges.

Obstacle Discrimination is permitted but should be set no closer than 1.5m from closest edge of one obstacle to the closest edge of the other. The intent of the reduction of the minimum distance requirement is to reflect the expected improvement in handler's reactions, as well as improved training to achieve better Response Control and the dog's recognition of the obstacles.

Wrong Course Potential is permitted- wrong course obstacles should generally require that the dog deviate more than 3m off the course flow.

Changes of Side are encouraged - the course design should include multiple changes of side while moving, including some changes of direction within Crossing Patterns.

Spacing Variations are permitted - the space between obstacles throughout the majority of the course should be in the range of 5m to 7m. Unusually short or long approach distances outside of this range can create a challenge of their own both in the performance of individual obstacles, speed and in the timing and control of other challenge types.

This challenge should appear at this level primarily to test single obstacle performance. The design should avoid the use of spacing variations to create issues involving Timing Sequences and Refusal Potential.

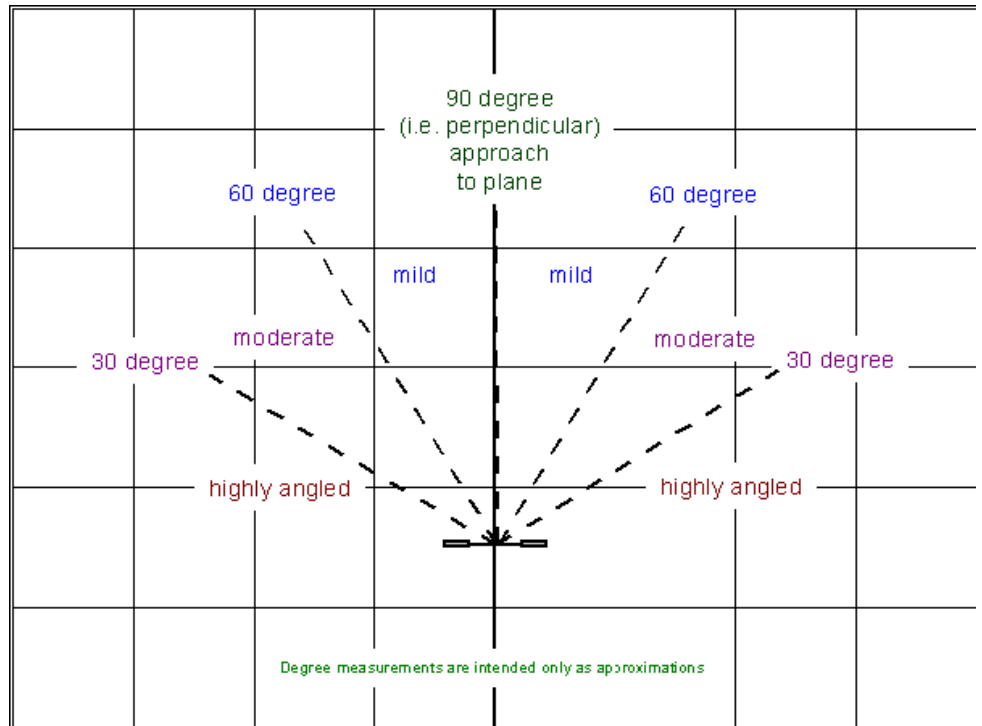
Serpentines are permitted - Obstacles used in a serpentine at this level should have no more than moderately-closed approaches.

Pull Throughs - this challenge is a type of wrap where an adjacent obstacle is in close proximity. The dog must then be directed around or between these obstacles in order to perform the next obstacle in sequence. Pull Throughs with a moderate gap between the obstacles are permitted.

Layering – the placement of an obstacle such that the handler path is separated from the dog’s path, is permitted.

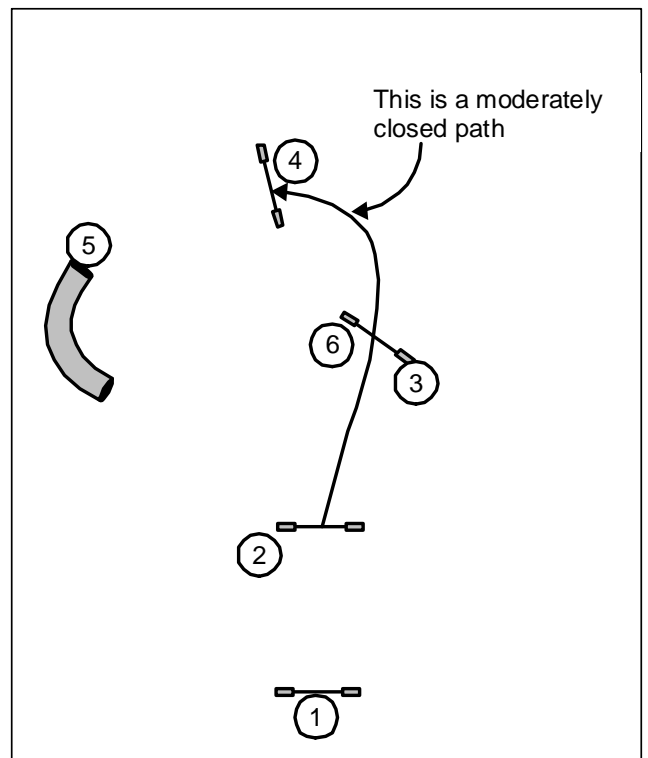
Moderate Handler Constraint - the blockage of the direct handler path either through alignment of the obstacles. Moderate handler constraints are permitted. Obstacles placed in a manner that present a handler constraint shall be carefully considered. Handler paths through a sequence should not be constricted in such a manner to generally require an unnatural handling position.

Closed Approach - a moderate to highly angled approach to the next obstacle in sequence with the entry point to the obstacle in view, no matter how slight. Normally this means that the dog approaches the front plane of the obstacle from an acute angle, but the approach side of the obstacle is not in question. The diagram compares the range of approaches to a Jump varying from Open Approaches (perpendicular to mild) and Closed Approaches (moderate to highly angled).



Less than perpendicular approaches to the entry plane of the obstacles are appropriate for this level, however the orientation of the obstacles shall still present the dog with a natural flow to the next obstacle. Strong Closed Approach positions that deliberately encourage refusals or that require the dog to “seek out” the front plane of the obstacle should generally be avoided.

Less than perpendicular approaches to the entry plane of the obstacles are appropriate for this level, however the orientation of the obstacles shall still present the dog with a natural flow to the next obstacle. Strong Closed Approach positions that deliberately encourage refusals or that require the dog to “seek out” the front plane of the obstacle should generally be avoided.



Course Design Standards– Grade A

Course design shall emphasize accomplished training for efficient Response and Directional Control, complemented with refined handling skills to encourage faster rates of speed while progressing fluidly through the course.

Although the Grade A level is expected to contain multiple challenges, a course should never be so loaded with challenges that it creates an excessively stressful round.

The overall effect should be a balance of control and fluidity A well handled suitable level Grade A Jumpers run should still look flowing, fluid and enjoyable for handler and dog.

A handler who has titled their dog at this level and continues to compete may excel beyond the minimum requirements of the course design due to their increasing experience. This possibility shall not influence the design of a course.

Course Challenges: Grade A should include 5-8 challenges.

All challenges defined in grade C and B are appropriate at this level. In addition the following challenges are permitted.

Managed Approach – obstacle placement such that the handler must send or escort the dog to a point that the front plane of obstacle comes into the dog's view.

Refusal Potential – A combination of obstacle placement and expected approach speed that may increase the risk of refusal. A Closed Approach to an obstacle is a typical characteristic that leads to increased Refusal Potential. These combined with design challenges involving Response Control, Wrong Course Potential or Obstacle Discrimination can further raise the level of difficulty of this form of challenge.

Timing Sequences – a sequence of the course where the handler must execute two or more commands or manoeuvres in succession or concurrently, with correct timing of each individual manoeuvre being a key element in accomplishing the full sequence. An inherent characteristic is that the level of difficulty increases dramatically with speed, which often means a higher degree of “Response Control” is also required.

Compound Challenges with Timing Sequences are encouraged

Challenges should include compound challenges, such as Changes of Side to effect a change of direction while moving through crossing patterns where the timing of command and/or movement may create a refusal or off course condition.

Designing Courses Appropriately to the Level

Table 1 Challenge Types by Level , including suggestions for agility classes

Challenge Type	Grade Cs	Starters	Grade B	Novice/Int	Grade A	Senior
Obstacle Discrimination	Yes*	Y	Yes*	Y	Yes	Y
Wrong Course Potential	Yes*	Y	Yes*	Y	Yes	Y
Change of Sides	Yes*	Y	Yes*	Y	Yes	Y
Wrap	Yes	Y	Yes	Y	Yes	Y
Closed Approach			Yes*	Y	Yes	Y
Spacing Variations			Yes*	Y	Yes	Y
Pull/Push Through			Yes	Y	Yes	Y
Serpentine			Yes	Y	Yes	Y
Handler Constraint			Yes*	Y	Yes	Y
Layering			Yes	Y	Yes	Y
Managed Approach					Yes	Y
Refusal Potential					Yes	Y
Timing Sequences					Yes	Y
TOTAL CHALLENGES TO BE USED	2-3	2-3	3-4	3-4	5-8	5-8

**Further criteria for these challenge types are discussed in the relevant sections for each Grade.*

In assessing whether or not a challenge is appropriate for a level, consider that these are only guidelines rather than a standard to be strictly adhered to. In particular, because Grade C is a “developmental” level that includes both newcomers and seasoned competitors (with new dogs), the following principle applies:

Any course may include a challenge type that might normally be indicative of challenges from the next higher level in order to educate and prepare competitors for the next level.

When this is done however, the challenge should be presented in such a way that skills learned in the present level could be utilized to successfully accomplish the challenge, even though a more advanced handling strategy might enable the challenge to be performed more readily.

Other considerations

1. Judeability

There is NO POINT in designing a nice course with lovely challenges and flow if it is impossible to Judge!!

Obstacles listed from hardest to judge to easiest to judge:

dogwalk	Difficulty due to length and have to judge both ends. Stand 4-5m from contacts *
crossover	Handler often in the way. Stand 4-5m from contacts *
Aframe	Stand 4-5m from contacts
seesaw	Need to be able to see the down end when the dog dismounts. No more than 8-10m away *
Long jump	need to see that the dog has cleared the length and not jumped on diagonal. Corner poles help. Dog jumps towards or away from judge. No more than 8-10m away *
weave	need to be able to see refusal line (2 nd pole) and if handler touches dog. No more than 8-10m away *
solid jumps	need to be able to see takeoff side (refusals)
hoop	Dog jumps towards or away from judge.
spreads	need to see that the dog has cleared the length and not jumped on diagonal. Dog jumps towards or away from judge.
single bar jump	Need to see that dog has cleared the height.
tunnels.	The entrance must be within line of sight. Must be able to see potential off-courses.

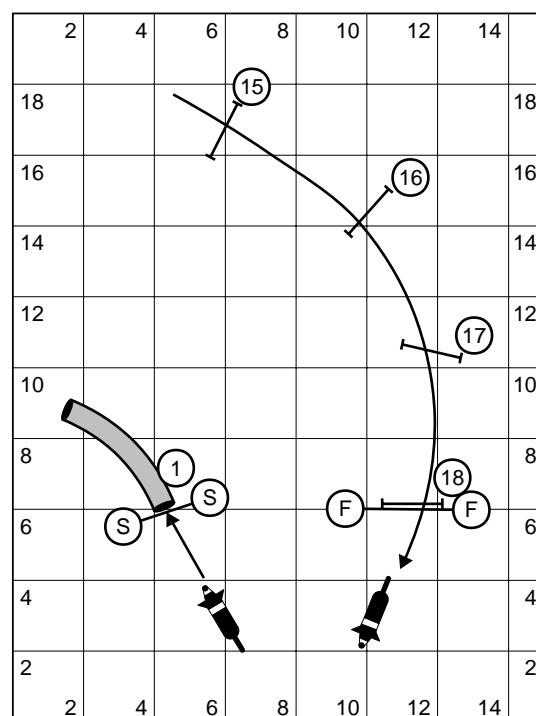
* USDAA recommendations

2. Safety

- ground surface conditions -be prepared to make alterations to your plan to keep dogs and handlers safe. There may be obstructions (holes in ground, sprinklers, slopes that mean equipment has to be moved.
- approach angles. Take care especially with beginner dogs or in bad weather conditions, rubber surface or not. Where a course has been nested the track for the weave may need to be moved.
- seesaw – consider what happens when the seesaw goes down and also where it is when in down position. You could easily create a handler hazard. Also where handlers are encouraged to step over ramps and tunnel flaps.
- collapsible tunnel – there is always some movement at the end (and often flexis too) Be aware that some dogs are taller than others and the tunnel might move so that the dog might bang its head on the ramps as they go through the tunnels (esp collapsible ones)
- be careful how close you place obstacles after the collapsible tunnel as dogs come out blinded. Eg. Collapsible tunnel → flexitunnel could be dangerous.
- Jumps/tunnels close to ring standards, close to contacts can all be safety issues as dog could jump off A-frame on to jump/tunnel, or jump/run towards ring standard.
- Start/finish areas – check the flow of people and dogs in and out of the ring. May need to lower ring rope and move standards to facilitate this and also ensure safety.

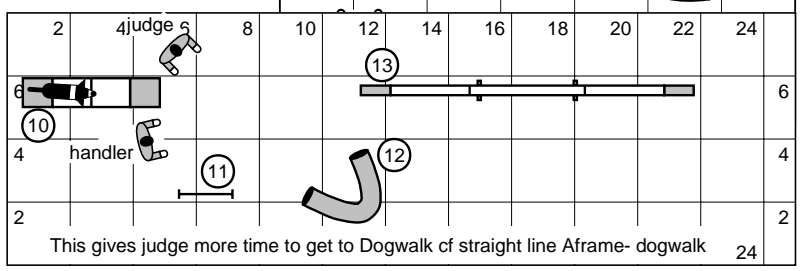
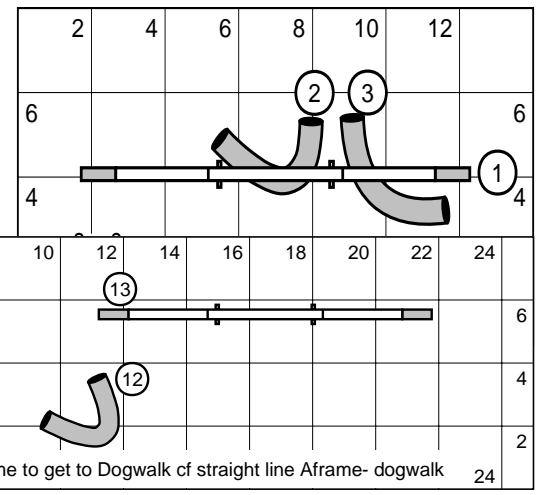
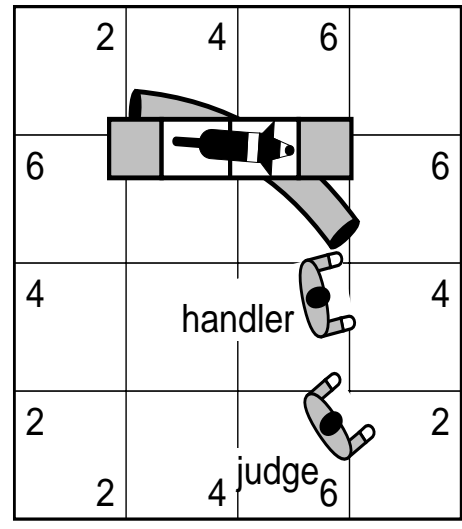
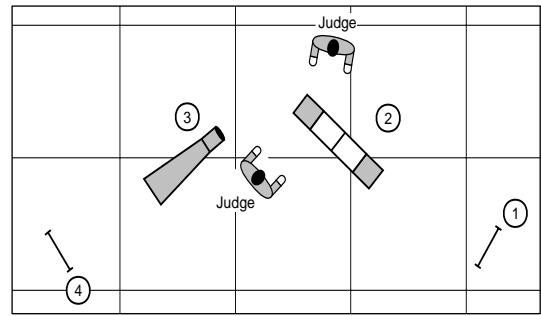
A few hints about keeping out of trouble as an agility Judge.

- Design course with correct number and type of obstacles eg. Weave in Starters.
- Check with event secretary re what equipment is available (eg. Number of tunnels) and what side of the ring the start/finish needs to be (assembly ring setup)
- Check ring staff before the class starts. Ensure scrimer is correctly placed, usually lose to start line.
- Start/finish obstacles. For efficient ring management avoid designing courses that come back to the start on the last few obstacles as handlers will not want to come to the start. Also angling the first/last obstacle can make a big difference.



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- checking equipment – don't assume all the gear has been pegged.
- Timers – ensure these are ready to go b4 first dog is ready and checked.
- They do NOT need to be turned off between classes.
- Hoops – Consider not using them as the first or last obstacle because a) if it is windy they can blow around and trigger the timers, and b) dogs seem to misjudge them badly when they are the first obstacle and they knock themselves silly!!
- Long jump - same as above. It is difficult to know where to put the beams as the dogs will be at quite different heights when going over them.
- Collapsible tunnel – Reconsider using this at the end as sometimes the dog/person will interfere with them as there is a balance between putting the eyes wide enough so the tail of the tunnel wont interfere, and then close enough so the dog wont whip around or the person whip inside.
- Timers - understand where the limits of the beams are and set the height accordingly. I have often seen the timers set too high for the mini dogs and no time achieved, so I tend to put them lower now.
- Timers - Be careful having them on an obstacle that is repeated many times, especially if that obstacle is on a corner. There have been a number of occasions where dogs tails have turned timers off as they corner into tunnels.
- Correct distances between obstacles eg hurdles, spreads, long jump.
- Judging path. Ideally you should design your course so the judges path is completely different to the handler path. When you have designed your course draw the handler path and draw the judge path. They should not be the same! When judging contacts ensure you don't get in the way of handlers turning dogs off contacts, Ideally you should design courses so its easy to get to the contacts, and the handlers are unlikely to run that path. The handler is not going to obscure your view of the contact, so removes any doubts. Ideally end of judging path should be close to start of judging path! . See Aframe tunnel example for worst scenario!
- Tunnels under contact gear. Consider height of tunnels and placement as you still need to see the ramps and this may be difficult if you are (a) short or (b) judging from far way
- Never have contacts in sequence as very hard to keep up and judge. (See dogwalk-Aframe)
- Ensure you can see all tunnel entry/exits. Particularly ensure you can see any potential off-course tunnel or contact options! (See dogwalk with two tunnels under it)
- Take care with placing jumps behind contacts or tunnels. Vision may not be too good. Behind tunnels you may not see the minis jump/refuse an obstacle.
- First and last obstacles. There are regulations for these that you must follow. However the angle at which these are placed will also determine whether a handler will be keen or not to set their dog up while the previous dog runs/finishes. This affects ring efficiencies, and potentially dog safety.
- Contracts – read all the conditions, back and front, before signing. If not mentioned, seek answers to questions such as can I run my dog? . what equipment the club will have available (especially number of tunnels)and what side of the ring the start and finish will be. This saves so much grief compared with turning up at an event and finding you have to do a last minute jiggle of your course to fit around what the club has organised.



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PRACTICAL.

Identify the challenges on this course. What level do you think?

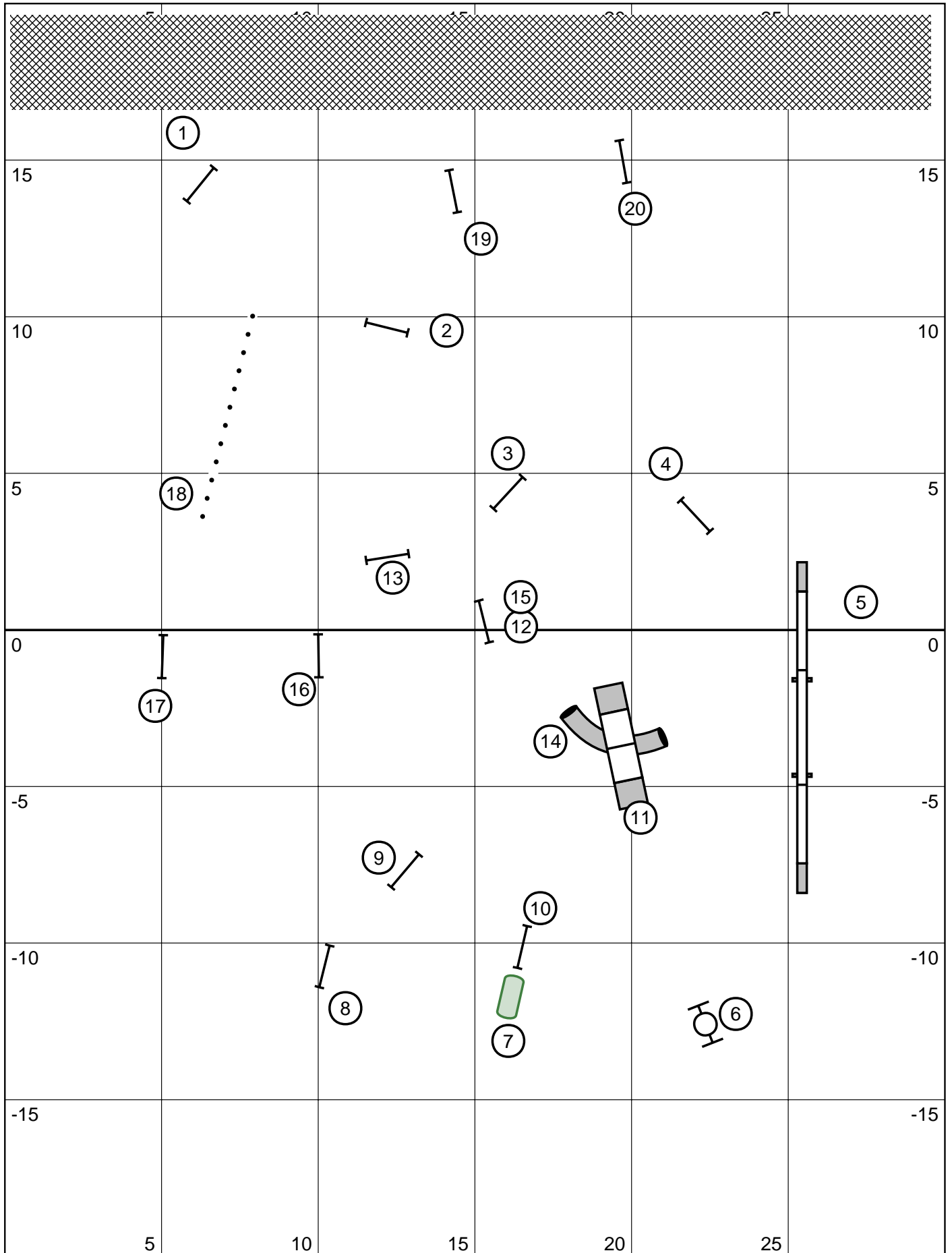
Draw handler and Judge path – are you happy with the Judges path?

Identify any other considerations the Judge should have looked at/changed eg. Start/finish, safety etc.

Course design challenges

Reference: Course design- fundamentals of course design for dog agility by Stuart Mah.

spacing and distance			
angles and approaches			
discrimination problems - obstacle			
discrimination problems - directional			
changes of side/crosses			
crossing patterns			
handler restrictions			
leadout advantage			
OTHER			
Placement of first/last obstacles			
View of obstacles.			
Safety issues			
Balance – jump spacing			
Balance – flow			
Balance – different challenges			
Balance - challenges for small and large dogs			
Balance - different handling manoeuvres			
Overuse of a certain type of challenge?			



TRY the same exercise at home on the Jumpers course