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Nail Down Your Weave Entries

By Rachel Sanders

Over time humans have discovered that continual repetitive behaviors are an open invitation for physical problems. For dogs, continually drilling weave poles can bring about the same kind of physical injuries. Therefore, once the weave poles are trained and the dog can confidently and accurately complete 12 poles on both my right side and left side, my focus turns to entry training.

During entry training I only use six poles (I occasionally use four poles if I am working with a dog that is struggling and I want to build more confidence by increasing his success rate). By cutting the number of weave poles the dog has to perform in half, I am able to train his entry and his ability to stay in the poles at speed without excessive repetitions.

Many dogs are able to hit the weave pole entry if they are handled into the poles. This requires that the handler shape the dog's path to the entry; so in reality, the dog is only entering the weave poles from a limited angle of approach. To me this is just a "slice of the pie"; I want the whole pie. See Figures 1 through 3.

Although I have been using the training method described in this article for several years, I altered the recall and send parts of the method several months ago with great results. My thanks must go to Ali Roukas for these improved pieces.

1

Here the handler has "shaped the line" and is behind the plane of pole #1. The dog is successful entering as long as the angle of approach is within the "slice of pie" he is used to.

2

If the handler doesn't shape the dog's approach and is in front of the plane of pole #1, the dog is unable to alter his approach himself. The dog enters the poles within his "slice of pie" comfort zone and misses the entry.

3

My goal is to have my dog successfully enter the weave poles from anywhere within the shaded area -- the whole pie -- with a minimum of handling.

Exercise 1

Depending on your dog's level of training, you can start from a couple of positions: You can start either from a sit 12'-15' from the first weave pole, or from behind a jump placed 12'-15' from the first weave pole. Most of my students start with a jump. Pick whichever position seems to be a comfortable starting point for your dog—not so easy that every exercise is perfect, but not so difficult that he is unable to be successful at all.

Let's call this starting point "location 0" as shown in **Figure 4**. From this location,

train the following seven maneuvers into the entry. I do not move to a new location until the dog is proficient at all seven.

1. Recall
2. Run past—dog on left
3. Run past—dog on right
4. Rear cross—dog from left to right
5. Rear cross—dog from right to left
6. Send—dog on left
7. Send—dog on right

Recall

Stand behind pole #6 and attempt to call your dog into the weave poles as shown in **Figure 5**.

If your dog's attempt at the recall entry is unsuccessful, then place yourself between poles #3 and #4 as shown in **Figure 6**. Recall your dog again and if he is successful reward with food, keeping the dog in the poles as you reward.

Once your dog is successful a few times with you between poles #3 and #4, move backward so you are standing between poles #4 and #5. Continue this until you are standing behind pole #6.

On rare occasions I have found it necessary to stand between poles #2 and #3, but since this leaves little decision-making for the dog, I make sure I only stay at this position for one or two repetitions.

It is not necessary to return to pole #6 by the end of the first training session. Take your time and make sure your dog is confident at each stage before moving on. The next day start where you finished the previous session's training—do not go back to an easier level unless there has been a break in training for several days.

Run Past

Lead out so that you are slightly ahead of the dog as shown in **Figure 7**. Move forward as soon as the dog moves to maintain your distance ahead of him as he weaves.

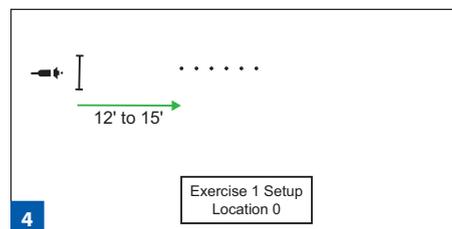
Increase the distance of your lead-out until you can be at least four poles ahead of the dog when he enters the poles and you can maintain this distance until he finishes the weaves as shown in **Figure 8**.

To encourage your dog to stay in the poles while you are in front of him, reward your dog by throwing his toy back to the base of the last pole, just before he exits the weaves. If he is a little cautious in his approach to weaving, however, mix it up and sometimes throw the toy forward as he finishes the poles. If you constantly reward your dog at your side, you will increase

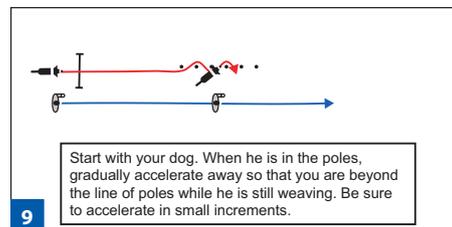
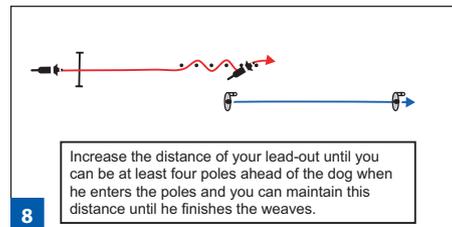
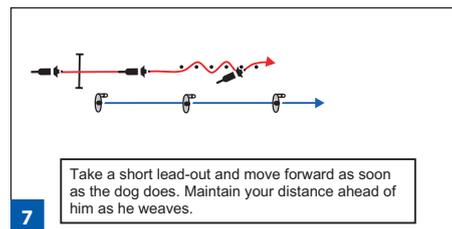
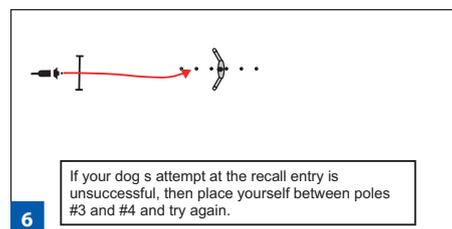
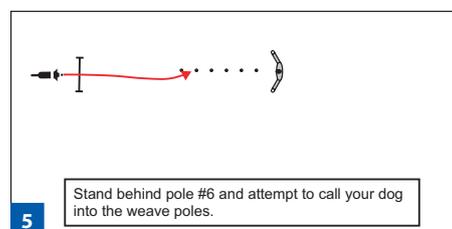
his desire to reach you, not to continue weaving.

Once you are able to start and remain at least four poles ahead of your dog, start to accelerate away. This time start with your dog (no lead-out). When he is in the poles, gradually accelerate away so that you are beyond the line of poles while he is still weaving as shown in **Figure 9**. When you first attempt this maneuver, be careful to accelerate in small increments. If you run ahead too suddenly, your dog may try to race you, and in doing so, pop out of the poles.

Remember to work with the dog on both sides so that you can run past the poles while the dog is weaving, regardless of whether he is on your left or right side.



It is not necessary to have a perfect recall into the weave poles before you work on running past or rear crosses. Work on each of the seven maneuvers a little at a time during the same session.

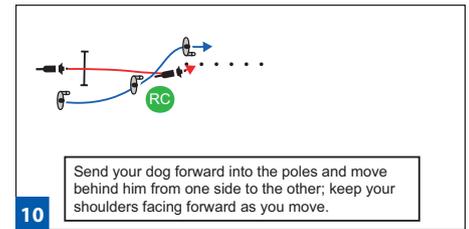


Rear Cross

For some dogs the rear cross done while they are in the weave poles poses no problem and they accept your moving behind them as seen in **Figure 10**. For others you will need to train the maneuver in small increments. Here are two methods you can use:

- Send your dog forward into the poles and surreptitiously move behind him from one side to the other; remember to keep your shoulders facing forward as you cross behind him. Gradually shorten the distance between you and your dog until you are able to cross immediately behind him.

- If the dog is comfortable being handled by his collar, hold the dog by the collar with the hand closest to him. Your hand should be at the back of his head with your palm facing forward. Guide the dog gently into the first pole and cross behind him. As you cross, switch hands so that you are now holding your dog with the other hand, but still the hand closest to the dog. Let go of his collar and allow your dog to complete the poles. I have found that I only need to do this once or twice and the dog is comfortable when I cross behind the poles.



Remember to work with the dog on both sides so that you can do a rear cross moving the dog from your left side to your right side and also from your right side to your left side.

Send

For many dogs this maneuver is the hardest to accomplish.

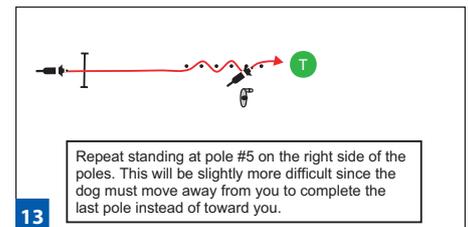
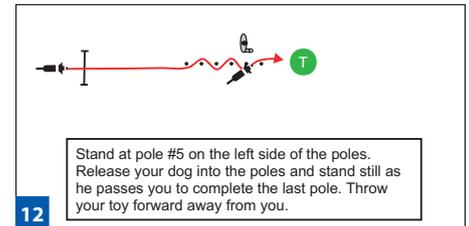
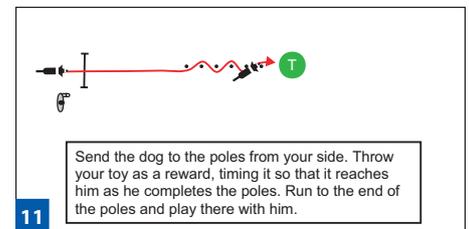
Attempt to send the dog from your side and see if he completes all of the poles as shown in **Figure 11**. If he does, then throw his toy to him. Try to time your throw so that it reaches him as he completes the poles. Don't encourage your dog to run back to you with his toy; instead run up and join him for a game of tug. By rewarding in this manner you are continuing to reward your dog for working away from you, not for returning to you.

If your dog is not successful then change position and stand at pole #5. Release your dog into the poles and stand still as he passes you to complete the last pole. Reward by throwing your toy forward away from you as seen in **Figure 12**.

Initially it may be better to stand on the left side of the poles so that the dog can complete the last pole by coming toward you. Then repeat the drill with your standing on the right side of the poles; this is a little harder since the dog must move away from you to complete the last pole as seen in **Figure 13**.

Gradually move back to pole #4, then pole #3, and so on until you have backchained yourself to a starting position beside your dog as in Figure 11.

Remember to work with the dog on both sides so that you can send the dog ahead through the poles, regardless of whether he is on your left or right side.



Changing Locations

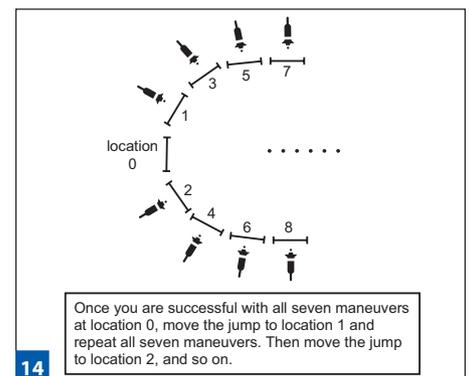
Once your dog is able to hit the entry and weave from location 0 with your attempting all seven maneuvers, then it is time to move to location 1.

Note: If you chose to start at location 0 with your dog in a sit instead of using a jump, then you need to repeat all seven maneuvers working with the jump before moving to location 1.

Once you are successful doing all seven maneuvers starting from location 1, move the jump to location 2. When you are successful there with all seven maneuvers, move the jump to location 3. Continue in

this manner to each location illustrated in **Figure 14**.

During this training do not return to a previously completed location, but continue to progress to new locations until you have reached your desired weave pole performance. You may wish to change your starting obstacle and work through the locations again. For example, use a straight tunnel or a collapsed tunnel before the poles. Once you've done all seven maneuvers from each starting location, add a jump between the tunnel and poles to increase the speed on approach and work through the locations again. You may



also wish to work through the locations while increasing your distance from the dog or while changing the distance between the first pole and the preceding obstacle.

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A Class Lesson Plan for Training Weave Poles

The September 2003 issue of Clean Run (V9, #9) is more like a book than a magazine. It focuses on one of the most difficult agility obstacles to teach—the weave poles. This information-packed, 112-page special collector's edition includes step-by-step instructions for teaching your dog to weave using a variety of methods: the FlashPaws offset weave pole method, the channel method, channels and guides, the weave pole "dance," the slanted channel method, and the Weave-A-Matic.

It also discusses why the weave poles are such a difficult obstacle, pros and cons of different training techniques, proofing weave pole performance, health issues regarding weaving, teaching weave poles in a class situation, troubleshooting entries with the 2x2 method, and more!

Contributing authors include Marquand Cheek, Susan Garrett, Janet Gauntt, Nancy Gyes, Kathie Leggett, Stacy Peardot-Goudy, Monica Percival, Jo Sermon, Jane Simmons-Moake, Terry Smorch, and more!

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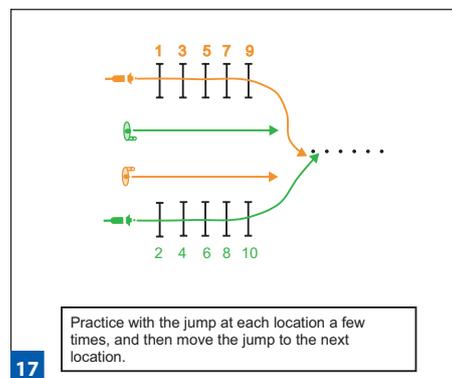
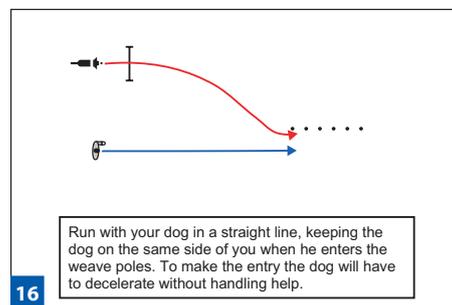
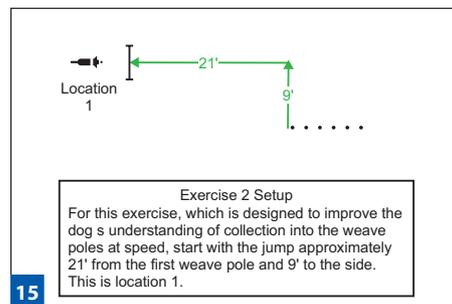
Exercise 2

This exercise is designed to improve the dog's understanding of collection into the weave poles at speed. I add this exercise to my weekly training once I have made some progress with Exercise 1.

Start with the jump approximately 21' from the first weave pole and 9' to the side as shown in Figure 15. This is location 1. Run with your dog in a straight line, keeping the dog on the same side of you when he enters the weave poles. To make the correct entry into the weave poles the dog will have to decelerate without handling help from you as shown in Figure 16.

Practice with the jump at location 1 a few times. Then move the jump to location 2 so that you work the mirror image of the approach with the dog on your right side. Then move on to the next location as shown in Figure 17. Each location is 3' closer to the poles: locations 3 and 4 are 18' from the poles, locations 5 and 6 are 15' from the poles, locations 7 and 8 are 12' from the poles, and locations 9 and 10 are 9' from the poles.

Once you have worked through all of the locations, you can change the starting obstacle(s) to increase the dog's speed of approach to the weave poles.



Maintenance Entry Training

Once the dog is successful at all seven maneuvers from all locations in Exercise 1, I only work on the most difficult entries from that exercise. For example, I keep the jump at locations 7 and 8 (see Figure 14) and work that angle with all seven maneuvers a couple of times a month.

I randomly work the entry angles from Exercise 2, depending on what I think the dog needs to brush up on. For example, if I want more control at speed into the poles I will have the jump further away from the poles (locations 1 and 2). If I want to get my dogs really working hard to find the entry, I will work with the jump closer to the poles (locations 9 and 10).

All the other entry angles will be covered by everyday exercises and by course work in competition. By only drilling entries that need more focus, I do not waste valuable training time or subject the dog to excessive repetitions by practicing entries that he has no problem with. 🐾

Rachel Sanders owns Fast Forward Dog Sports, located in Atascadero, California, and conducts seminars throughout the U. S. Her list of accomplishments includes: 1999 USDAA 26" Grand Prix National Champion; 2000 USDAA 12" National Steeplechase Champion; 2002 USDAA 12" World Champion; 2003 USDAA 16" Veterans World Champion; 3rd place in 2001 USDAA 22" Grand Prix National Finals; and 3rd place in 2003 AKC 20" Nationals. She was also an AKC National Finalist in 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2005. Contact her at Rachel@fastforwarddogsports.com.