

Your Dog's Body Awareness

Things your dog can do:

- Walking backwards
- Weaves between your legs
- Number eights between your legs: forward and backward
- Walking on back legs forward, backwards
- Sit with front feet up (he has to balance his hind end to get it right)
- Sit with front feet up - stand with front feet up- sit down with front feet up:

This is one of the most difficult tricks physically I think, it requires a lot of body control for the dog (work those abs of steel), it took me quite a while to teach it too, but now she just jumps up and down into the sit position.

- Flips to your side from the front position: the dog starts in front of you and rotates his hind end from one heel position to the other
- Lefts and rights (circling)
- Head stand on front feet: you start by teaching 2o2o on a magazine, then on a book, on increasingly high objects, then continue doing it to a wall. Click when the dog starts touching the wall less and less... This took me almost 6 months, I progressed very slowly and I have to say latent learning helped a lot:) Some dogs are even able to walk like this, but only if they learn to curl their hind legs underneath their body, my dog stretches them totally into a vertical so I don't think she will ever walk like this. Try at least the wall thing, because just look at the photos of dogs stretching their hind feet when they do tight turns around a wing of a jump.
- Raising individual feet at a time (front and back!)
- Raising both right or both left paws in the air for a few seconds (front and back!)
- Raising diagonal feet in the air (do it yourself, no wonder they do it in yoga, its quite hard, takes a lot of balancing)
- The elephant trick: stand on a box/laundry basket with front feet and circle around with only hind feet in both directions (if you do the side flips this is a piece of cake)
- Get on the terraball - this was discussed here a lot last week (do all of the above tricks on the terraball, just kidding:)

So, basically, whatever cool tricks you come up with will really make the dog realise he actually has back feet. Once they get it, all of those tricks are really easy.

I can't emphasize enough the pole game. You should make your dog insane about running around a pole in the ground (or a tree or a wing of a jump). Start from very close, just feed from both sides, then increase the distance. Later on when he understands your body language for going around from either side, add a cue for each side (something different from left/right). Do all possible crosses. The reasons for doing this:

1. Your dog will know all your handling moves/your particular body language long before he ever sees any real agility equipment. You learn the same about the dog:)

2. Dog learns to run in a tight circle (do the tight turns) at his full speed and learns that turns are a blast and not slowing him down. He also learns the dynamic of turning his body.

3. Dog learns distance work.

4. You get a ton of opportunity to teach him the cues to turn tightly to both sides. I use them when I want to tell my dog to collect, change the lead, do a tight wrap around the jump and not take any other obstacle to the left or right (usefull in pull-throughs).

Use 2 or 3 poles/trees/wings of jumps and you can come up with any obstacle combination there is (long before you ever do any real equipment).

I started the pole game with my adult dog who I realised didn't know how to turn tightly at all. I named the turns to each direction, practiced all sorts of crosses and then it trasferred beautifully to jumping. Turning became fun, she can do it better, she turns perfectly and I am able to do the more difficult courses much more efficiently.