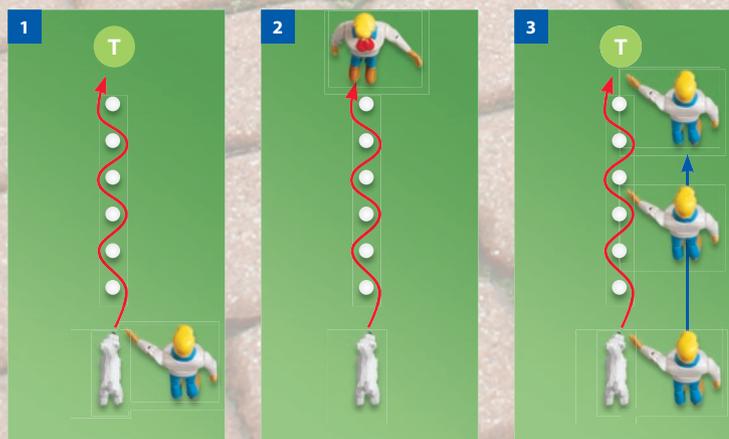


This month's exercises use a set of six weave poles, a toy and/or target, and, of course, lots of praise by the handler. The focus is on training independent weave pole performance.

My theory on the weave poles is that they should be taught from the beginning with three goals in mind: speed, accuracy, and independent performance. To achieve speed, I use slanted and/or channel weave poles from the start. I use lots of targeting, toys, and food and teach entries and exits from the beginning so that I achieve accuracy before the poles are ever straight up and long before the dog enters the agility ring. To ensure independent performance, I train the weave poles and all of the agility obstacles as shown in **Figures 1 through 3**: with a send, with a recall, and with the handler running with the dog to the obstacle (lateral to the dog on both the left and right). You should train each of these skills from all possible approach angles. I have found that gives the dog (and handler) confidence for independent weave pole performance.

You will find that independent weave pole performance is very important when running a course. You will be thankful every time you walk a course and notice all the time you save by sending and/or recalling through the weave poles, and also trusting your dog to stay in the poles as you move away.

Note: In this article I assume that you have already trained your dog to the point where he can weave straight poles. But if you are having problems with an exercise, don't be afraid to open up your channel weaves or tilt your slanted weaves. Gradually work the exercise until the poles are straight.



Karen Holik has been involved in agility for over 10 years as a competitor and also a USDAA and AKC judge. She has competed in the finals of the USDAA Grand Prix World Championships seven times with all her dogs: two Shelties, a Border Collie, and an All-American. Her youngest dog, ADCH MACH2 Triune's Feelin Hot Hot Hot (a.k.a. Sizzle) won the Steeplechase event at the USDAA World Championships in 2003 and 2006. Karen and Sizzle were members of the AKC/USA World Team in 2003, 2005, and 2006. Karen offers private lessons and seminars and can be reached at oncourseagility@comcast.net.

Send

The first thing I teach a dog is a send through the weave poles to a target. I like to use a placed target rather than a toy on the ground and then throw a toy if the dog is successful. This prevents a smart dog from exiting the poles early and self-rewarding with his toy before you can catch him. I hope the send has already been taught to your dog when the poles are open. But if not, you might have to go back a few steps and help the dog.

If your dog will not send through the poles while you are stationary at the beginning of the obstacle as seen in Figure 1, show your dog the target at the end of the poles and bring him back to the beginning of the poles. Send the dog through the poles, but go with him to the second-to-last pole as shown in Figure 4. Stop there and then send the dog to his target without moving forward. If successful, the next time don't go quite as far forward with the dog. Your goal is to be able to send the dog to the target without you moving as shown in Figure 1.

As your dog becomes comfortable being sent through the poles from all different approach angles as shown in Figure 5, start to add distractions on either side of the weave poles as seen in Figure 6.

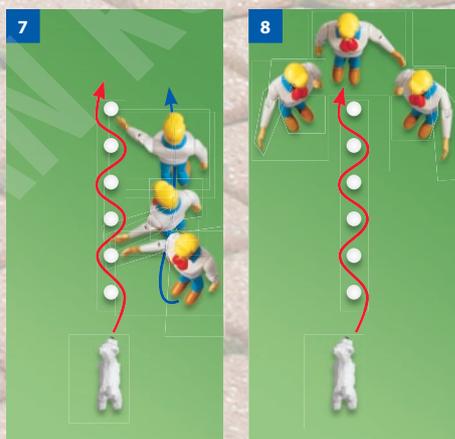
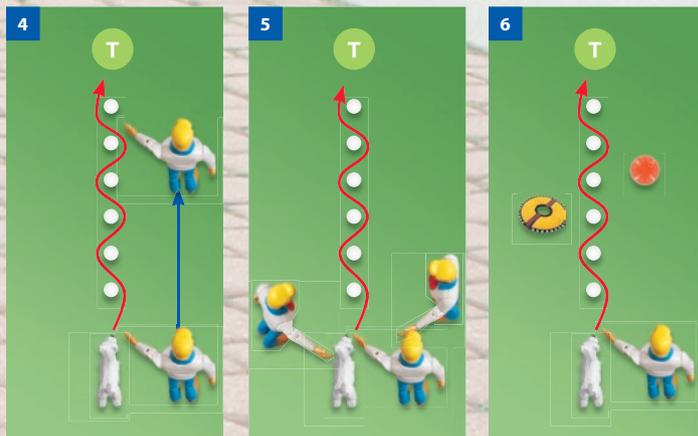
Recall

Next, I should be able to recall my dog through the poles while I stand stationary at the end as shown in Figure 2. The recall is easy if you have taught it from the beginning when your poles are still slanted or open. If your dog cannot do this, however, you can start near pole #2 facing your dog. When your dog enters correctly, turn and face the direction the dog is going and run with him to the end as seen in Figure 7. The next time, you can start at pole #3 or #4, facing your dog, and when he enters correctly, turn and face the direction he is going and reward at the end of the poles. Eventually, you should be able to stand at the end of the poles and call your dog though as seen in Figure 2.

Once your dog is comfortable working on a straight recall through the poles you can start to challenge him. Your goal is to be able to recall the dog through the poles from almost any position as seen in Figure 8.

Running with Your Dog

With your dog doing all of the above, it should be easy to move laterally with the dog from both the right and left side of the poles. It should also be easy to do a front cross at the end of the poles, a rear cross at the beginning, or move laterally while your dog is in the poles. (See "City Dogs" in *CR* August 2006 for help with weave entries and "City Dogs" in *CR* April 2007 for help with weave exits.)



A Few Things to Remember

- Help your dog after two bad attempts.
- *Run* back to your start position when your dog is losing enthusiasm!
- No corrections in the poles; simply use Try Again or something similar.
- Let the dog be successful and fast in the poles before increasing your distance from him.
- No bending over, pointing, or guiding is necessary. All these things could be hurting instead of helping your weave performance!