



List of training tasks for running contacts

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First you have to train the striding the you want - but in the process of doing that you can't lose sight of the rest of the training job. Once you have the basic striding you want on your running contact - you have a few training jobs to do:

Train the exits

You will want to be sure that you can handle any exit direction off of the contact without affecting the striding. The reality is that the dog does have to change their weight shift, balance, lead leg etc. even if you don't necessarily see that happening so you have to give them an opportunity to learn how to plan for the exit and get their body organized to do that.

Of course you have to sit down first with a glass of wine and figure out how you are going to cue the behaviors you want, and when you are going to give them. For me, I use verbal directionals on the approach to the running obstacle. "Climb-it-left" means do that thing and turn left at the bottom. I use it just like "tunnel-left" or "jump-left". It is the name of the obstacle and I call it on the approach.

I also use normal handling body language and the timing of the cues is exactly as if the contact obstacle was not there but there was a jump right at the bottom of it. So for example, if I was doing a blind cross at the end of a running A-frame, I would drop my far hand back as they were approaching the apex and as I am hustling to get ahead onto the front cross line.

No matter what you do, give the information before the dog gets over the apex. Otherwise you are at risk of trying to change their mind and being late on your cue.

Train different handler energy levels

You will want to be sure that the striding does not change no matter what you do.

a) whether you are behind or ahead, laterally far away or pulling away, crossing behind or crossing in front.

b) and regardless of the energy that you are putting into the picture

Notice in the video that the combination of rear cross and lower energy triggers Echo to stop instead of run off. She is defaulting to her other trained behavior which is the stopped contact. Her thinking may be something like this “If I don’t know where to drive to, don’t guess, stop”. I need to work on this, just like on the running dog walk, I want her to maintain her striding even if I am far behind, or deliberately hanging back because it suits the handling for the course.

Train through anticipation

You want to be sure that the anticipation of what comes next does not affect the striding. There are two ways this can happen:

a) by being distracted by say a tunnel or weaves, something the dog really loves to do.

b) or by making a decision on the downside about where to go next, say the approach side of a jump vs. the back side.

At first you might tempt your dog with a food bowl, target plate, favorite toy, raw chicken wing etc. out in front of the contact, and then mix in actual obstacles as they are good at ignoring the distraction. Changing up the exit each repetition, just a little bit, keeps them from noticing patterns that encourage them to assume or guess. Do this early in the training while you still have training aides to help maintain the striding.

Jumps and weaves after running contacts

You want to be sure the weight shift into a jump just after the running contact is something the dog is well prepared to do. This also applies to tight weave entries where the dog has to gear down.

My belief is that you start working on these things relatively early in the training - so long as you have a way to ensure the dog is 80% successful. In otherwords, work through this while you still have training aides to help. You can always go back and add them in at any time, but waiting for a long time to address these issues can accidentally teach your dog some habits that makes working on this harder later.