

Canine Freestyle Skills

Copyright© 2003 Andrea Sutherland *Intended for private, individual use only. Please do not distribute without the author's permission.*

Note 1 – Skills List: This is a list of core skills to prompt thought, and from which to choose. It is by no means exhaustive, particularly in the area of ‘tricks and miscellaneous’. Please let me know if you have anything you think should be added to this list.

Note 2 - Cues: voice and body cues are recommendations only. Be aware that most dogs will cue off body language faster and better than verbals, but verbals allow you to use your arms for stylistic moves (rather than just to cue the dog), and it looks better if you're not giving obvious hand signals, so it is a good idea to teach verbals anyway.

Note 3 - Spins: all spins are done away from the handler, whether on left or right (dog turning into handler looks awkward and dog ends up too far out). Imagine you are doing breaststroke; the hand moves forward and away from the body and the dog follows the movement. Be consistent; use your left hand to get the dog to spin to its left (whether it is at heel or in front), and your right hand to get the dog to spin to its right.

Note 4 – Difficulty Rating: Ratings are based on my experience, and assume the dog has done conventional obedience to at least a medium level (say pre-trial standard). However, each dog will have skill groups that are more difficult or more easy for that particular dog, eg working on the right, distance work, aerial work (on back legs) or ground work (crawl, rollover etc.). Rating 1 is considered a basic/easy to teach skill, 2 is moderately easy to teach, 3 is a more challenging skill. When deciding which skills to teach and in what area, look at your dogs natural inclinations (heeling, spins etc.), but try to get variety, so that you have a good mix of skills from each of the groups listed. Aim for a 3:2:1 ratio of level 1, level 2 and level 3 skills.

Note 5 – Position: All skills are done from a standing position unless otherwise specified.

Skill	Difficulty	Description	Voice Cue	Body Cue
Heel Position				
Heel	1	Normal heel position, stationary and moving, sit, stand, down	Heel	Left hand held at waist/thigh level
Heel back	1	Dog in heel position, backs up as handler backs up	Back	Normal heel hand signal
Heel sidepass right	1	Dog at heel, handler steps (or hops) to right, dog refinds heel position	Heel	Normal heel hand signal
Heel sidepass left	2	Dog at heel, handler steps left into dog, dog steps sideways left to maintain heel position	Move	Normal heel hand signal
Pivot heel	1	Dog in heel position, as handler pivots forward (to the right) (90°, 180°, 270° or 360°), dog holds/refinds heel position	Heel	Normal heel hand signal. Can be done as sit heel (hop-sit, hop-sit) or stand heel
Pivot heel back	2	Dog in heel position, backs up and tucks in as handler pivots left (90°, 180°, 270° or 360°), holding/refinding heel position	Heel/Scoot or GetIn	Normal heel hand signal. Can be done as sit heel or stand heel
Heel spin	1	Dog spins out (away from handler) while in heel position (stationary or moving), refinding heel position at end of spin	Spin	Circle hand away from body at waist level
Half heel spin	1	Dog at heel, both spin 180° left so dog is now in side position	Spin	Circle hand away from body at waist level
Right Side Heel				
Side	2	Heeling on the right side of handler, dog can be sent to Side from heel (across front of body or behind) or from Front position	Side	As for heel, but with right hand
Side back	2	Dog in side position, backs up as handler backs up	Back	Normal side hand signal
Side side pass left	2	Dog at side, handler steps to left, dog refinds side position	Side	Normal side hand signal
Side side pass right	3	Dog at side, handler steps right into dog, dog steps sideways right to maintain heel position	Move	Normal side hand signal
Pivot side	2	Dog in side position, as handler pivots forward (to the left) (90°, 180°, 270° or 360°), dog holds/refinds side position	Side	Normal side hand signal. Can be done as sit side (hop-sit, hop-sit) or stand side
Pivot side back	3	Dog in side position, backs up and turns as handler pivots right (90°, 180°, 270° or 360°), refinding side position	Side/Scoot or GetIn	Normal side hand signal. Can be done as sit side or stand side
Side spin	2	Dog in side position (stationary/moving), spins out (away from handler)	Twist	Circle hand away from body at waist level
Half side spin	2	Dog at side, both spin 180° right so dog is now in heel position	Twist	Circle hand away from body at waist level

Skill	Diffi- culty	Description	Voice Cue	Body Cue
<i>Front Position</i>				
Front	1	Move from heel/side to front, facing handler	Front/Come	Two raised hands (waistlevel) like stop signs
Come	1	Assume front position from somewhere in front at distance	Front/Come	Upraised arms
Comefore	1	Dog in front position moves forward as handler retreats	Front/Come	Raised hands as for front
Backup in front	2	Dog in front position, backup as handler approaches	Back	As for Front, pushing/flicking motion with hands
Backup in front (handler stationary)	3	Dog in front position, backup as handler stays still	Back	As for Backup in Front
Backup in front (handler backing up)	3	Dog in front position, backup as handler backs up (away from dog)	Back	As for Backup in Front
Front side pass left	2	Dog in front position, handler steps left, dog mirrors	Front	As for front, body movement is cue
Front side pass right	2	Dog in front position, handler steps right, dog mirrors	Front	As for front, body movement is cue
Front spin left	2	Dog in front position, spins to its left, handler stationary	Spin	Breastroke motion with left hand
Front spin right	2	Dog in front position, spins to its right, handler stationary	Twist	Breastroke motion with right hand
Half front left spin	2	As for half heel spin but handler facing dog, ie handler moving to left	Spin	Breastroke motion with left hand
Half front right spin	2	As for half side spin but handler facing dog, ie handler moving to right	Twist	Breastroke motion with right hand
<i>Jumps, Aerial, HindLeg Work</i>				
Over	2	Dog jumps over outstretched arm/leg/cane (kneeling or standing), often combined with Round (over, round, over etc.)	Over	One leg, arm or cane extended while kneeling or standing
OverUnders	3	Handler on all fours, dog jumps over back, crawls under, repeat	Over	Body position is ample visual cue
Arms	3	Dog jumps into handlers arms (kneeling or standing)	Cuddles	Open arms and hold, while kneeling or standing
Leap	3	Dog leaps into air as free jump (all four feet off ground), especially good for little dogs that can do that boing-boing straight up and down jumping	Whee!	Quickly raise and lower both arms, or use one extended arm as if pulling dog off the ground with an invisible leash (marionette-style)
Stand up	2	Dog stands up on back legs	Up-up	Hold both hands up above head, use body movement as cue for direction of travel
Rearing Horse	3	Stand up + pawing at the air with front feet	Up-up, Feet	Up-up cue, then motion pawing action with hands
Moving Stand up	3	While on hind legs, dog hops forward, backwards, sideways, spinning	Up-up, other cue as app.	As for Up-up, plus Comefore, Back, Sidepass or Spin cue
Dog Jumps	2	Jump over/crawl under other dogs (pairs or group performance)	Over/Under	Position of othe dog is adequate visual cue
Beg	3	Dog sits up on haunches, paws tucked in front	Beg	Hands in front of chest in beg position
High 5	2	Dog in sitting position, lifts one paw to its head height	Touch/Tap	Hold one hand out flat at appropriate height
High 10	2	Dog in sitting position, lifts both paws to its head height	Touch/Tap	Hold both hands out flat at appropriate height
Feet up	2	Dog places front feet on your knee (if kneeling), or extended arm, or hand (eg dog in heel position, while walking), or a cane (at side or in front) etc.	Feet Up	Body position provides adequate visual cue

Skill	Diffi- culty	Description	Voice Cue	Body Cue
<i>Weaving</i>				
Stationary weave	2	Dog weaves figure 8 around legs with handler stationary	Weave	Widespread legs, bent knee indicates to dog which leg to weave around. Dog should enter from front
Walking weaves	2	Dog weaves figure 8 around legs with handler walking	Weave	As for Stationary Weave. Dog should enter in front of the 'back leg' ie crossing behind the leg that has just taken a step
Pivot weaves	3	As for Walking Weaves, handler walking on spot, turning right or left	Weave	As for Walking Weaves
Back walking weave	3	Dog scoot weaves backwards thru legs as handler backs up	Scoot/GetIn or BackUp	Position legs then command scoot, and reposition legs as dog clears the body
Cane + leg weave	3	Dog weaves around each leg then cane and back, lifting cane over head to swap sides after each pass (weave around 4 items in total)	Weave	As for Stationary Weaves, presence of cane is cue to weave around that as well
<i>Circling Moves</i>				
Circle clockwise	2	Handler stationary, send dog from heel -> side -> heel, repeat to get multiple full circles	Round	Feet together, slightly bent knees (necessary to lure dog around), pull dog around body with repeated 'go to side', 'go to heel' hand signals
Circle anticlockwise	2	Send dog from side -> heel -> side, repeat to get multiple full circles	Round	As for circle body clockwise
Anticlockwise backup round body	3	From heel position, dog scoots backwards around stationary handler, until refinding heel position	Scoot/GetIn	Pull dog back around the body with repeated hand signals
Clockwise backup round body	3	From side position, dog scoots backwards around stationary handler	Scoot/GetIn	Pull dog back around the body with repeated hand signals
Circle clockwise spinning	3	As for circle clockwise, but handler spins anticlockwise as dog circles clockwise	Round	Pull dog around the body with repeated hand signals
Circle anticlockwise spinning	3	As for circle anticlockwise, but handler spins clockwise as dog circles anticlockwise	Round	Pull dog around the body with repeated hand signals
Circle leg/cane clockwise	2	Dog circles right leg (half leg weave) or left cane clockwise	Round	Presence of cane or spread legs with one knee bent is visual cue
Circle leg/cane anticlockwise	2	Dog circles left leg (half leg weave) or right cane anticlockwise	Round	Presence of cane or spread legs with one knee bent is visual cue
Big circle clockwise	3	Dog circles handler clockwise, at distance	Out, Round	Extended left arm while pivoting
Big circle anticlockwise	3	Dog circles handler anticlockwise, at distance	Out, Round	Extended right arm while pivoting
Big circle clockwise spinning handler	3	As for Big circle clockwise, but handler spins anticlockwise	Out, Round	Extended left arm while pivoting anticlockwise
Big circle anticlockwise spinning handler	3	As for Big circle anticlockwise, but handler spins clockwise	Out, Round	Extended right arm while pivoting clockwise
Crazy spins	3	As for Big circle anti/clockwise, plus dog does tight double half spins as it circles	Out, Round, Spin	As for big circle, fingers intermittently flick a spin signal

Skill	Diffi- culty	Description	Voice Cue	Body Cue
<i>Straddle Position</i>				
Straddle stationary	2	Dog comes up from behind to stand between handler's legs	Legs	Handler spreads legs, hands together low (in front of groin)
Straddle forward	2	From straddle stationary, handler and dog move forward together	Legs	As for Straddle Stationary, begin walking forward
Straddle backwards	2	From straddle stationary, handler and dog move backwards together	Back	As for Straddle Stationary, begin walking backwards
Straddle pivot	2	Pivot on the spot (left or right) with dog in straddle position	Back/GetIn	As for Straddle Stationary, pivot left or right
Scout back straddle	3	Dog in front facing away from handler, scoots back between handler's legs (usually following a half spin in front)	Back/Scout	Handler stationary, legs wide
<i>Ground Work</i>				
Rollover	2	From down position in front dog rolls to left and/or right	Rollover	Rolling motion with left/right hand
Dead dog	3	From down position, dog rolls onto back and holds position, with our without wagging tail	Bang	Pointed hand (as if gun)
Crawl	2	Dog crawls in heel position, or any other variation (eg around the body)	Crawl	Wiggly fingers pointing at ground
Lassie Crawl	3	Dog crawls on side, as if injured	Lassie	As for crawl, but both hands
Backward Crawl	3	Dog crawls backwards	Crawl, Back	Crawl signal, back signal
Bow	2	Dog lowers front end while keeping rear raised, holds it	Bow	Bowing action, one foot extended in front of other
Moon Walk	3	While in bow position, scoot backwards	Bow, back	Bowing posture, back signal
<i>Tricks/Misc.</i>				
Left paw front	2	Sitting or standing in front, dog raises left front paw	Touch/left	Handler lifts right foot (as if marching)
Right paw front	2	Sitting or standing in front, dog raises right front paw	Tap/right	Handler lifts left foot (as if marching)
Left paw heel	3	Sitting or standing at heel, dog raises left front paw	Touch/left	Lift left leg (marching on spot). Can also be used for a left leg flick on change of direction eg forward (halt) flick, backwards
Right paw heel	3	Sitting or standing at heel, dog raises right front paw	Tap/right	Lift right leg (marching on spot)
Lassie Limp	3	Dog holds up one front paw while walking (hopping forward)	Foot	Bend hand down to imitate injured paw
Carry	2	Hold and carry item (eg hat, cane, basket), stationary or moving	Hold	Offer item
Retrieve or Fetch&Carry	2	Retrieve placed/thrown item and carry or return to hand	Fetch	Outward swept hand (towards item)
Speak	2	Dog barks on command	Speak	Open and close fingers to imitate mouth
Shake Body	3	Full body shake (as if wet)	Shake	Open hand waggled from side to side
PickPocket	2	Dog sneaks up on handler and pulls handkerchief/item from pocket	Thief	Walking away from dog
Bad Dog	3	In any position, dog puts one or both front paws over face	BadDog or tongue cluck	Waggle finger in remonition