



# Musical Dog Sport Association (MDSA) Performance Guidelines

EFFECTIVE **APRIL 8, 2015\***

*\*Changes since November 2014 are in **RED**.*

*These performance guidelines describe the manner in which  
MDSA performances (titling and non-titling) will be conducted.*

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### Snapshot: MDSA Classes (Titling and Non-Titling)

These charts (Fig. B) summarize the various MDSA performance classes, both titling and non-titling. Be sure to review the full requirements for each class in *Section 10 and Section 11* before entering.

<b>MDSA Rookie Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>1:00 - 2:15 minutes</b>
<b>Rookie Class</b> Non-titling	MDSA members only. Dog must not have earned MDSA title. Leash and/or treats and/or toys permitted. Two (2) time entry limit per dog.		

<b>MDSA Novice Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>1:15 - 2:15 minutes</b>
<b>Novice Freestyle Dog (NFD)</b> Titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs.		
<b>Novice For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Unlimited entry limit.		

<b>MDSA Intermediate Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>1:15 - 2:15 minutes</b>
<b>Intermediate Freestyle Dog (IFD)</b> Titling	NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs.		
<b>Intermediate For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	NFD title <i>or</i> two (2) Successful Novice FEO ratings. Unlimited entry limit.		

<b>MDSA Standard Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>1:30 - 2:30 minutes</b>
<b>Standard Freestyle Dog (SFD)</b> Titling	NFD title pre-requisite. Two (2) qualifying legs.		
<b>Standard For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	NFD title pre-requisite <i>or</i> two (2) Successful Novice FEO ratings <i>or</i> two (2) Successful Intermediate FEO ratings. Unlimited entry limit.		

<b>MDSA Premier Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>2:00 – 3:30 minutes</b>
<b>Premier Freestyle Dog (PFD)</b> Titling	SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs.		
<b>Premier For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	SFD title <i>or</i> two (2) Successful Standard FEO ratings. Unlimited entry limit.		

<b>MDSA Veteran Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>1:00 – 2:00 minutes</b>
<b>Veteran Freestyle Dog (VFD)</b> Titling	Dog must be seven (7) years or older on date of event. Two (2) qualifying legs.		
<b>Veteran For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	Dog must be seven (7) years or older on date of event. Unlimited entry limit.		

## Snapshot: MDSA Classes *Continued*

MDSA Team Class	Music Time:	Varies
<b>Novice Freestyle Team (N-TEAM)</b> Titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Group must have three (3) to eight (8) teams. At least one (1) MDSA member. On- or off-lead permitted, but entire team is <i>all</i> on- or <i>all</i> off- lead. Two (2) qualifying legs. Music Time: 1:30 – 3:00 minutes	
<b>Novice Team For Exhibition Only(FEO)</b> Non-titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Group must have three (3) to eight (8) teams. At least one (1) MDSA member. On- or off-lead permitted, but entire team is <i>all</i> on- or <i>all</i> off- lead. Music Time: 1:30 – 3:00 minutes Unlimited entry limit.	
<b>Intermediate Freestyle Team (I-TEAM)</b> Titling	Pre-requisite to enter is the N-TEAM title earned by at least two (2) of the teams - handler <i>and</i> dog. Group must have three (3) to eight (8) teams. At least one (1) MDSA member. Entire team is off-lead. Two (2) qualifying legs. Music Time: 1:30 – 3:00 minutes	
<b>Intermediate Team For Exhibition Only(FEO)</b> Non-titling	Pre-requisite to enter is the N-TEAM title earned by at least two (2) of the teams - handler <i>and</i> dog. Group must have three (3) to eight (8) teams. At least one (1) MDSA member. Entire team is off-lead. Music Time: 1:30 – 3:00 minutes Unlimited entry limit.	
<b>Standard Freestyle Team (S-TEAM)</b> Titling	Pre-requisite to enter is the N-TEAM title earned by at least two (2) of the teams - handler <i>and</i> dog. Group must have three (3) to eight (8) teams. At least one (1) MDSA member. Entire team is off-lead. Two (2) qualifying legs. Music Time: 2:00 – 3:00 minutes	
<b>Standard Team For Exhibition Only(FEO)</b> Non-titling	Pre-requisite to enter is the N-TEAM title earned by at least two (2) of the teams - handler <i>and</i> dog. Group must have three (3) to eight (8) teams. At least one (1) MDSA member. Entire team is off-lead. Music Time: 1:30 – 3:00 minutes Unlimited entry limit.	

MDSA Props Class	Music Time:	Varies
<b>Novice With Props (N-PROP)</b> Titling	NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs. Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes	
<b>Novice With Props For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes Unlimited entry limit.	

<b>Standard With Props (S-PROP)</b> Titling	N-PROP or SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs. Music Time: 1:30 - 2:30 minutes
<b>Standard With Props For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	N-PROP or SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Music Time: 1:30 - 2:30 minutes Unlimited entry limit.
<b>Premier With Props (P-PROP)</b> Titling	S-PROP or PFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs. Music Time: 2:00 – 3:30 minutes
<b>Premier With Props For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-Titling	S-PROP or PFD title pre-requisite to enter. Music Time: 2:00 – 3:30 minutes Unlimited entry limit

<b>MDSA Brace Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>Varies</b>
<b>Novice Brace Freestyle Dogs (N-BRACE)</b> Titling	One dog must have NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs. Same dogs, same handler. Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes		
<b>Novice Brace For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	One dog must have NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Same dogs, same handler. Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes Unlimited entry limit		

<b>MDSA Pairs Class</b>		<b>Music Time:</b>	<b>Varies</b>
<b>Novice Pairs Freestyle Dogs (N-PAIRS)</b> Titling	One dog must have NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Two (2) qualifying legs. Same dogs, same handler. Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes		
<b>Novice Pairs For Exhibition Only (FEO)</b> Non-titling	One dog must have NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Same dogs, same handler. Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes Unlimited entry limit		

<b>MDSA Spirit of Sharing Class</b>	
<b>Spirit of Sharing (SOS)</b> Titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Title earned every 25 visits/events. Same dog, same handler.

## Section 1: MDSA Vision of Canine Musical Freestyle

The Musical Dog Sport Association's definition of canine musical freestyle is a dog sport in which training, teamwork, music, and movement combine to create an artistic, choreographed performance highlighting the canine partner in a manner that celebrates the unique qualities of each individual dog. It is built upon the foundation of a positive working relationship of a dog and handler team.

The following are essential elements of an MDSA canine musical freestyle performance that should be present, regardless of class entry or event format:

- A performance is always presented with the above MDSA canine musical freestyle definition in mind.
- The dog and handler seem intangibly linked in the performance. The relationship and bond the team shares is clearly illustrated.
- The music is selected to enhance and showcase the movement of the dog.
- All movement is choreographed with the music and presented in an artistic and creative manner. The performance should not look like an obedience routine set to music; neither should it look like a routine of "tricks" set to music. The goal is a *balanced* presentation of heelwork, moves, and move combinations.
- The movement of the handler complements the dog's movement.
- Canine musical freestyle is the creative expression of teamwork, training, willingness and joy shared by a dog and handler.

## Section 2: Eligibility

- MDSA freestyle events are open to all dogs, purebred or mix breeds.
- Dogs must be at least one (1) year of age at the date of the competition or on the date video event submission is recorded.  
**Age exception:** Puppies age six (6) months or older at the date of the live event or on the date video event submission is recorded will be permitted to enter the Rookie class, *only*. Please note the special requirements for puppy Rookie entries in Section 11 of these guidelines.
- Video event submissions must be entered within one (1) year of the recording date to qualify.
- Bitches in season may not compete at live events.
- Dogs and/or handlers with disabilities are welcome to compete as long as they are able to perform in a safe and joyful manner.

## Section 3: Equipment

- The ROOKIE and NOVICE TEAM classes can be performed on-lead, if desired. All other classes are performed off-lead.
- Dogs may be shown with no collar or a properly fitted collar (either buckle or limited slip/martingale).
- Decorative collars or bandanas are permitted provided they do not distract from, overshadow or interfere with the dog as the focus of the routine. Decorative collars shall not be wider than an appropriately sized flat collar. Flounces, ruffles, and other similar neckwear are not allowed.
- No special training collars may be used, including but not limited to, prong, chain, correctional slip, electronic or head halters.
- Food, toys, or clickers are not allowed in any class other than the ROOKIE class.
- Dogs are permitted to wear boots where slick footing is a concern. However, an affected gait, stumble or refusal of behavior caused by the boots will not be excused. Judges will evaluate the routine without regard to the presence of boots.
- All dogs on the live event show grounds must be on leash or crated, except when in the performance space.

## Section 4: Performance Space

- **See Fig. A for an illustration.** Routines are always to be choreographed and executed with an orientation to the center of the front, long side of the performance space. This is the standard position for the judge's table or video camera. If an alternate judge's table or video camera position is approved, choreography should still be planned and executed to the standard position.
- **Size:** The stage will be rectangular.
  - ✓ **LIVE EVENTS:** The ring dimension is always 40 x 50 feet (12 x 15 meters).
  - ✓ **VIDEO EVENTS:** The preferred dimension is 40 x 50 feet (12 x 15 meters). When space is an issue, a 30 x 40 foot (9 x 12 meter) ring may be used.
- **Ring Markers or Gating:** The performance space is based on a proscenium stage.
  - ✓ **LIVE EVENTS:** With ring gates on four sides.
  - ✓ **VIDEO EVENTS:** The space must be designated in either one of two ways:
    - **With markers** approximately 12 inches (30 cm) in height. Small cones or potted flowers may be used. The markers will be placed at the corners and the center points of each side.
    - **With ring gates or fencing and center markers** on four sides.
    - Video submissions missing ring marker(s) or gates/fencing will be marked as a minor or major error, depending on severity and at judge's discretion. Major errors will disqualify (DQ) the performance.

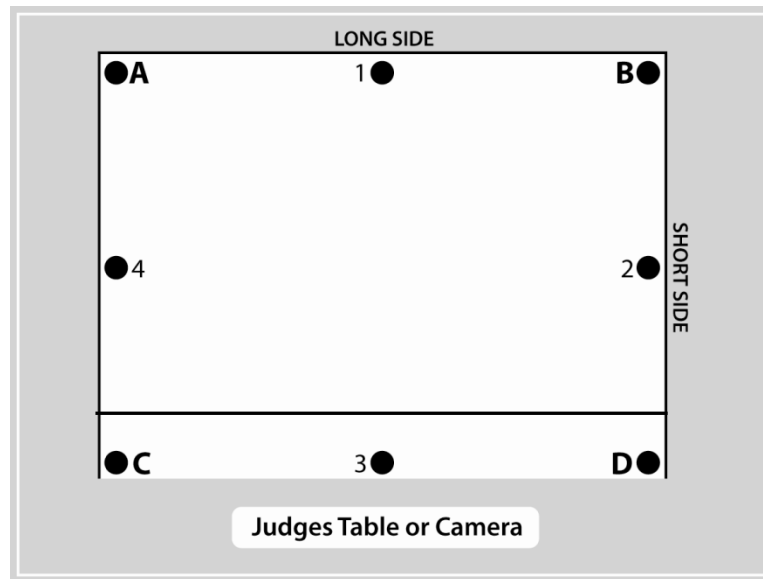
- **Judge Placement for Live Events:** The judge shall be placed on the outside of the ring on the front, long side of the space in the center. Under no circumstances will the judge's position be on the short side of the ring.
- **Video Events:** Take care to place your camera and music such that you, your dogs, the ring and your music are easily seen and heard by the judge.
  - ✓ Ideally, the camera should be placed a **minimum** of 6 feet (2 meters) from the edge of the front of the ring **at the center**. The MDSA recognizes finding a space to meet requirements can be a challenge. If you discover an alternate camera angle or spacing is required, you must contact the Executive Board at **musicaldogsport@gmail.com** for prior approval. Under no circumstances will the camera position be on the short side of the ring.
  - ✓ The camera should remain in a stationary position if at all possible. Camera pans and zooms are acceptable, but both the dog and handler should remain in view as much as possible and as choreography permits.
  - ✓ A short pan of the ring and dog/handler placement just prior to beginning your routine is a good way to demonstrate your physical space to the judges and alleviate questions, *especially* if you begin your routine separated from your dog at a distance.
  - ✓ The music should remain as close to the camera as possible.
  - ✓ The footage should be the original copy unless it has to be copied in order to conform to one of the acceptable formats. Absolutely no editing should be done to the original footage.
  - ✓ For video editing purposes, record approximately 5 seconds before and after your actual performance. You no longer need to include a title screen or a 30 second blank screen. The five second recording could be: the team entering the ring, setting up for the opening move, or a quick panning of the ring.

The preferred recording order would be:

- Team enters the performance ring
- Handler acknowledges audience
- Handlers cues the music to start
- Team performs their routine
- Handler praises dog
- Handler waves at audience
- Team leaves the performance ring.

There is no need to add fancy transitions to your video, or a title, frames, pictures, etc. Those will be removed for judging.

(Fig. A)



## Section 5: Performance Elements

Creative heelwork is an essential element of canine musical freestyle. Handlers are encouraged to explore the unlimited possibilities. In addition, the choice of what moves, behaviors and move combinations to use and how to present them is very important and should be carefully considered. A pleasing, balanced presentation is the goal. Creativity in a performance is encouraged, especially at the higher class levels. Even the most basic heelwork and individual moves can be performed in an almost endless variety of ways.

***While each titling and non-titling class requires certain performance elements, no specific moves or number of moves are required to fulfill them.*** Moves and move combinations should fit both the music and the dog's personality and strengths. The dog should never be asked to perform beyond its level of training or its physical capability.

For a list of example freestyle heelwork and moves, go to the MDSA Web site at [www.musicaldogsport.org](http://www.musicaldogsport.org) and click the link to **Moves Ideas** in the **Documents** section.

Example heelwork, moves, behaviors and move combinations include, *but are not limited to*:

Left Side Heel	Serpentines	Switches
Right Side Heel	Down	Pivots
Front work	Jumping	Recall
Circles	Rollover	Weaves
Spins	Bow	Zigzag



## Section 6: Signals and Commands

- The handler may use verbal cues, visual cues or both.
- Verbal cues should be quiet and not distracting.
- Visual cues should be smooth and should not detract from the performance. When possible, visual cues should seem to be a part of the choreography. Multiple signals should be avoided.
- No force real — or implied — should be used, including grabbing and physically positioning the dog. Touch is allowed, but only as a demonstration of praise.
- Handler signals appearing to lure the dog into performing are not allowed. In props classes, the prop should not be used as lure, either.
- It is the handler's responsibility, prior to entering the ring, to arrange a subtle signal for music steward to start the music.
- At the beginning and conclusion of the performance, the handler shall acknowledge the audience with a courteous nod, bow or wave. Handlers may choose to acknowledge their dog at the conclusion of the performance before acknowledging the audience.

## Section 7: Music

Music is a necessary part of canine musical freestyle. The music shall be carefully chosen to complement and showcase the movement of the dog and the dynamics of the team. Music is a powerful tool for communicating emotion, energy, joy, bond, relationship and teamwork.

- Choreography may reflect the style of music, such as country, swing or 50's.
- The music shall reflect a respect for the dog, the audience, and the sport. As such music lyrics shall not contain profanity or be obscene. Use of such music will be considered a *major* error in all classes.
- Handler is free to choose from all musical styles and genres. There is no requirement for use of either lyrics or use of instrumental only.
- Music editing is acceptable, and in some cases, required in order to meet the class time limit.
- Handlers are required to work within the time ranges for the class. Timing of the performance begins and ends with the music.
- Music more than 5 seconds over/under the class time limit may be scored as a *minor* error. Music 10 seconds or more over/under will be scored as a *major* error and will disqualify (DQ) the performance.
- Only CDs will be used at live events. The CD should be marked with the team's name, song title and artist. CDs shall have the song used for the performance as the only track.

## Section 8: Handler's Attire

- The handler's attire should not interfere with the dog as the focus of the routine.
- The handler's attire shall reflect a respect for the dog, the audience, and the sport.
- Attire shall complement the dog, the theme of the music, and choreography.
- Attire, including footwear, shall not overshadow, detract from or interfere with the performance of the dog.
- Attire is considered a prop when it is removed, added, or otherwise leaves the handler's body during the performance (for example, waving a hat, removing a scarf or putting on a jacket). Attire is also considered a prop if the dog interacts with it (for example dog tugs pants leg as an optional move).
- Footwear that could possibly harm or cause injury to the dog, such as high heels or cowboy boots with a hard heel, is not permitted.
- Keep in mind your attire reflects upon you, your dog, your professionalism, MDSA and the sport of canine musical freestyle. This is a performance, not practice, so it is expected that an effort be made to avoid your every day street clothes or clothes you might wear for training or practice.

## Section 9: Overview of Title Requirements

- All performances will adhere to these entire Performance Guidelines and also the additional requirements specific to the class entered (see Section 11).
- Entrants (**Members only**) are allowed, but not required, to enter the Rookie non-titling class for performance experience and to receive feedback prior to entering the Novice level.
- Entrants are allowed, but not required, to enter the Intermediate titling class for additional titling experience prior to Standard level competition.
- Entrants earning their dog's *first* MDSA title will begin working toward a title in the Novice class.
- **Two (2) qualifying legs** are required to earn a title (Note: See Section 9 for a special grandfather clause to this rule). Legs toward a title may be earned at video and/or live events.
- Performances for each **qualifying leg in Video or Live Events** must be earned with a new routine with new choreography and new music.
- Performances for each qualifying leg must be earned with the same handler and dog team, with the exception of the Team class.
- Only one (1) **titling class solo** entry per dog (Novice, Intermediate, Standard, Premier, Veteran, Props) per event is allowed. However, you may register for as many FEO, non-titling, Team, Brace or Pairs entries as desired (in addition to a titling solo entry) at any one event.
- Entrants may rework and re-enter the same routine to earn a qualifying leg **only** if the routine received a Non-qualifying (NQ) or Disqualifying (DQ) score or it was entered in a non-titling class at a previous event.
- **Although teams are not required to enter the Rookie class, it is recommended for those teams that are new to the sport.**

- There are no placements. Entrants are in effect competing against themselves to earn titles. All entrants receive at least one evaluation with a rating from an MDSA Judge. Entrants may also receive additional evaluations from apprentice judges for training purposes; however, the ratings of the apprentice judges are not used for purposes of determining qualifying/non-qualifying legs.
- Unless stated otherwise in individual class requirements (see Section 11), entrants need not be an MDSA member to earn MDSA titles or enter MDSA events.
- Upon successful completion of requirements for each title, handler will receive an MDSA title certificate and dog is eligible for title designation after name.
- All participants will receive either a qualifying or participation ribbon.
- The following will be marked as **errors** in a performance. Errors can be minor or major and are rated at the judge's discretion. Minor errors are considered a warning notice. Major errors will automatically disqualify (DQ) a performance. MDSA considers the following as performance errors:
  - ✓ Luring
  - ✓ Dog leaving ring
  - ✓ Dog out-of-control
  - ✓ Excessive barking
  - ✓ Excessive display of stress in dog and/or handler
  - ✓ Use of food or training aid (when not permitted in the class)
  - ✓ Misuse of prop (in prop class)
  - ✓ Use of prop (when not permitted in the class)
  - ✓ Fouling the ring
  - ✓ Harsh treatment of dog by handler (either real or implied)
  - ✓ Music more than 5 seconds over/under the class time limit may be scored as a *minor* error. Music 10 seconds or more over/under will be scored as a *major* error.
  - ✓ Music profane or obscene
  - ✓ Other issues, at the discretion of the judge that may affect the safety and well-being of the dog and other competitors, the positive working image of the sport, or for unsportsmanlike conduct on the part of the handler. Examples include but are not limited to: inappropriate attire or footwear, video submissions missing ring markers, or inappropriate equipment used on the dog.

## Section 9a: New Qualifying Leg Requirement

**Effective January 1, 2015**, two (2) qualifying legs will be required to earn a title. This applies only to teams that are entering a routine to earn their **first leg toward a new title** on or after January 1, 2015. Teams with either one or two legs toward a title in any class earned after January 1, 2010 and before January 1, 2015 are required to have three (3) qualifying legs to title in that class. That team will need two (2) qualifying legs in subsequent classes to title.

## Section 10: Description of MDSA Titling Classes

### SCORESHEETS

Sample scoresheets for all MDSA classes can be found in the **Documents** section of the MDSA website at [www.musicaldogsport.org](http://www.musicaldogsport.org).

### NOVICE CLASS (Beginner level)

**Title:** Novice Freestyle Dog (NFD)

**Music Time Range:** 1:15 - 2:15 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** None

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to show that the team is proficient in the foundations of freestyle – heelwork, movement, choreography, focus and attention.

- Team should demonstrate proficiency in front work and right and/or left side work.
- Team should demonstrate sustained focus and attention between dog and handler. Some minor breaks in attention are permitted at this level.
- Team should demonstrate a positive working relationship and a visible bond.
- Team should demonstrate a strong proficiency in foundational freestyle moves (for example spins, circles, switches or weaves). Optional moves are always encouraged, but not required at this level. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or willing to perform or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably. Be sure to read *Section 5: Performance Elements* for additional guidelines and expectations when choosing or creating moves for a performance.
- The team shall present a performance with a basic-level application of choreographic elements: floor pattern design, simple creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in directions, contrasts, transitions, flow, variety of moves and move combinations.
- Larger signals and slightly louder verbal cues are permitted, as long as they don't overshadow the dog. An intermittent delayed response to *some* cues on the part of the dog is permitted at this level.
- Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team. **Beginning on January 1, 2015, the Music Category will be counted in the overall team score at the Novice Level but only for teams for which the new 2-leg requirement applies (see Section 9a, above). Teams that fall under the 3-leg requirement (having 1 or 2 legs towards a Novice class title before January 1, 2015) will not have the Music Category counted towards their score. The judge will denote "NA" for this section. A severe error resulting in disqualification (DQ) is possible at this level if the music contains profanity and/or obscenities or is over/under the specified time for the class.**
- The team should cover the performance space

## INTERMEDIATE CLASS

**Title:** Intermediate Freestyle Dog (IFD)

**Music Time Range:** 1:15 - 2:15 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** NFD Title

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this optional class is to provide additional titling experience prior to Standard level competition. Entrants **are not required** to compete or title in this class prior to Standard competition. Even though this class has requirements similar to Novice, entrants will be expected to perform with a more advanced level of fluency, precision and creativity than what is permissible in the Novice Class.

- Music for Intermediate class *will be counted* in the overall team score at this level. Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team.
- Team should demonstrate proficiency in front work and right and/or left side work.
- Team should demonstrate sustained focus and attention between dog and handler. Some minor breaks in attention are permitted at this level, such as glances away or sniffing, however the dog should not leave the handler due to distractions or loss of focus.
- Team should demonstrate a positive working relationship and a visible bond.
- Team should demonstrate a strong proficiency in and variety of foundational freestyle moves (for example spins, circles, switches or weaves). Appropriate use of at least one optional, more complex move is expected. Example optional moves include (but are not limited to) side passes, front passes or mirror moves. Creative moves or move combinations of the handler's creation are also considered as optional moves and always encouraged. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or willing to perform or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably. Be sure to read *Section 5: Performance Elements* for additional guidelines and expectations when choosing or creating moves for a performance.
- The team shall present a performance with a basic-level application of choreographic elements, **but creativity in the choreography is required at this level**. Choreographic elements include: floor pattern design, creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in directions, contrasts, transitions, flow, variety of moves and move combinations.
- An effort should be made to demonstrate musicality in the choreography. In other words, some attempt should be made to pair at least one choreographic element – such as moves, floor patterns, and speed changes – **with** the music content or style.
- Larger signals and slightly louder verbal cues are permitted, as long as they don't overshadow the dog. Dogs are expected to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in their response to most of the handler's cues.
- The team is required to cover the performance space.

## STANDARD CLASS

**Title:** Standard Freestyle Dog (SFD)

**Music Time Range:** 1:30 - 2:30 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** NFD title

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to showcase the dog and the relationship between the dog and handler and a fluency in freestyle behaviors, choreography and music.

- Team should demonstrate proficiency in front work, right side and left side work.
- Team should demonstrate an element of basic distance work in the routine. There are no requirements as to how distance is achieved or for how long, but the expectations for this level are to demonstrate a basic ability and comfort level on the part of both dog and handler. Examples include (but are not limited to) a simple stay and recall or asking the dog to move away from the handler a short distance and then return. Distances will not be measured, nor is a specific distance required. However, to aid the judge's ability to clearly distinguish distance, a good rule of thumb is to strive for a *minimum* distance of approximately two times the handler's height. Keep in mind, as is the case with other moves, the handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors or distances they are not yet confident or willing performing or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- Team should demonstrate sustained focus and attention between dog and handler. Breaks in attention should be *very few* and *very minor* at this level.
- It is expected that the team is fluent in and builds upon the foundational freestyle moves from Novice (and Intermediate level, if applicable). Appropriate use of one or more optional, more complex moves is expected at this level. Example optional moves include (but are not limited to) side passes, front passes or mirror moves. Creative moves or move combinations of the handler's creation are also considered as optional moves and always encouraged. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or willing to perform or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably. Be sure to read *Section 5: Performance Elements* for additional guidelines and expectations when choosing or creating moves for a performance.
- The team shall present a creative performance with the application of choreographic elements: floor pattern design, creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in direction, contrasts, transitions, flow, variety of moves and move combinations. It is expected that the team builds upon the basic knowledge gained from Novice level choreography successes and errors to create a routine with an intermediate level of complexity and *more individual originality*.
- More emphasis should be placed on musicality in the choreography. In other words, some attempt should be made to pair one or more choreographic elements – such as moves, floor patterns, and speed changes – **with** the music content or style.
- Signals are permitted, but should be small. Signals should complement the choreography and/or music content or style. More emphasis on verbal cues or body movement cues is preferred at this level. Cues should not overshadow the dog. Dogs are expected to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in their response to most of the handler's cues.
- The music should match the dog's movement, and complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team. Music for Standard class *will be counted* in the overall team score at this level.
- The team is required to cover the performance space.

## PREMIER CLASS

**Title:** Premier Freestyle Dog (PFD)

**Music Time Range:** 2:00 - 3:30 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** SFD title

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to focus on the positive relationship between the dog and handler, at an advanced level, showcasing it in a creative and artistic manner. All freestyle elements – advanced training, focus and attention, teamwork, choreography, music and presentation – should be combined and executed at an advanced level. The bond and relationship of the handler and dog should be clearly evident and is a necessary part of a Premier freestyle routine.

- Team should demonstrate superior proficiency in creative heelwork. Complex heelwork should be included.
- Superior presentation is expected at this level. Attire, cues, music, choreography, movement and floor space should be combined in a manner that leaves the audience with an overall impression of poise, professionalism, and a positive working relationship at an elite level.
- An element of advanced distance work is expected. Distance is defined as approximately 10 feet away. A stay, moving stay or send away are all acceptable examples of achieving the distance. However the dog must execute a choreographic element(s) at a distance. There are no requirements as to how long distance is achieved, but the expectations for this level are to demonstrate a higher-level ability.
- Highly developed focus and attention between dog and handler.
- Premier expects that the dog should be allowed a level of freedom of expression and **individuality** in the interpretation of learned and/or taught behaviors.
- Foundational freestyle moves are flawless at this level. Optional moves and/or creative moves are required at this level. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not physically able to perform safely and comfortably.
- The team shall present an interesting, creative performance with the application of choreographic elements: floor pattern design, creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in direction, contrasts, transitions, variety of moves and move combinations. Superior musicality, originality and the showcasing of the dog's individual, unique qualities is expected in the choreography at this level.
- Signals are permitted, but they should complement the choreography and/or music content or style. More emphasis on verbal cues or body movement cues is expected at this level. Cues should not overshadow the dog. Dogs are expected to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in their response to handler cues.
- The music shall highlight the dog's movement and uniqueness and complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team. Music *will be counted* in the overall team score at this level.
- Teams will be required to perform a mirror or synchronized move element(s).
- The team is required to cover the performance space in a creative and purposeful manner.

## WITH PROPS

### **Titles:**

Novice With Props (N-PROP)  
Standard With Props (S-PROP)  
Premier With Props (P-PROP)

### **Music Time Ranges:**

Novice With Props                      1:15 - 2:15 minutes  
Standard With Props    1:30 - 2:30 minutes  
Premier With Props     2:00 – 3:30 minutes

### **Pre-Requisites:**

Novice With Props: NFD title  
Standard With Props: N-PROP *or* SFD title  
Premier With Props: S-PROP *or* PFD title

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q) for each level (Novice, Standard, Premier).

- The criteria used to review the prop title class entries shall be the same criteria as used for the corresponding class level. For example, a Novice Prop entry is expected to follow all Novice Class criteria - from music time to performance elements and requirements - with the exception that props are permitted in the performance.
- The use of props shall in no way detract from or overshadow the performance of the dog.
- The use of props shall enhance the routine.
- Props can be fixed or mobile.
- The dog cannot wear props.
- An element of the handler's attire may be used as a prop (example, hat, scarf, cane, umbrella). Attire is considered a prop when it is removed, added, or otherwise leaves the handler's body during the performance (for example, waving a hat, removing a scarf or putting on a jacket). Attire is also considered a prop if the dog interacts with it (for example dog tugs pants leg as a cute optional move).
- Props must be inanimate.
- The use of props should be choreographed
- Props must relate to the music content or style.
- Props should not be used as a training aid or lure, nor should it aid in the execution of a move. The presence of props should not markedly change the dog's drive, performance or attitude.



## VETERAN

**Title:** Veteran Freestyle Dog (VFD)

**Music Time Range:** 1:00 - 2:00 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** Dogs are at least seven (7) years old at the date of the event or filming.

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The primary purpose of this class will be to showcase the veteran dog and the special relationship between the veteran dog and handler. While criteria similar to the Novice class will be used to judge these routines, teams are encouraged to create performances that are appropriate for the skill level and physical abilities of the veteran dog. Choreography should be adjusted to meet the needs of the each veteran performer.

**MDSA will strictly enforce a zero tolerance rule that the veteran dog should never be stressed, over-faced, or required to perform beyond its physical capability. At the judge's discretion, the team will be disqualified (DQ) if the veteran dog shows it is not physically able to safely and happily perform the choreography.**

The criteria and requirements used to review Novice class entries will be used to review and qualify Veteran class entries, with the exception of music time, pre-requisites and the following special considerations for the veteran dog:

- Team should demonstrate competency in execution of foundational heelwork.
- The freestyle moves selected are not exclusive to any one level; rather they must be appropriate for the dog, used effectively, and executed with competence.
- The team shall present a creative performance with a basic-level application of choreographic elements *that are adjusted to meet the needs of the veteran dog*: floor pattern design, simple creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in directions, contrasts, transitions, flow, variety of moves and move combinations.
- The choreography should celebrate the relationship and bond of the team, and highlight the unique qualities of the veteran dog.
- Larger signals and slightly louder verbal cues are permitted if the dog's physical needs deem it necessary. An intermittent delayed response to some cues on the part of the dog is permitted.
- Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics and/or relationship of the team. Music will count for or against in the overall team score.
- An attempt to cover the performance space should be made, but the space covered should be proportional to the physical abilities of the veteran dog.

## **BRACE CLASS**

**Title:** Novice Brace Freestyle Dogs (N-BRACE)

**Music Time Range:** Novice Brace 1:15 - 2:15 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** One dog must have NFD title.

**Qualifying Legs:** Dog and handler team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to showcase the dogs, the relationship between the dogs, and the handler/dog relationship.

- The Brace team shall consist of one handler with two (2) dogs. The dogs need not be of the same breed, size or color. The same 2 dogs and handler must be present for each qualifying leg.
- The criteria and requirements used to review Novice class entries shall be used to review and qualify Novice Brace class entries.
- Mirrored, synchronized, unsynchronized, symmetrical and asymmetrical moves and move combinations for the brace team are all acceptable.
- Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team. Music for Novice Brace class **will be scored as a performance element**. A severe error resulting in disqualification (DQ) *is possible at this level* if the music contains profanity and/or obscenities or is over/under the specified time for the class.
- Both dogs should be an integral part of choreography.
- The dogs are permitted to interact with one another (for example, go over, go under) as long as it is performed in a safe manner and neither dog shows sign of discomfort or stress performing the move(s).
- The majority of the performance should be spent with both dogs performing at the same time with the handler. The handler is permitted to perform solo segments with a single dog, but such segments should be brief and limited. Note: If working with one dog in a solo segment, both dogs should remain in the camera (or judge's) view at all times.

## PAIRS CLASS

**Title:** Novice Pairs (N-PAIR)

**Music Time Range:** Novice Pairs 1:15 - 2:30 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** One dog/handler team must have earned the NFD title.

**Qualifying Legs:** Pair team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to showcase the dogs, the relationship between the dogs, and the handler/dog relationship.

- The Pair team shall consist of two handlers with two (2) dogs. The dogs need not be of the same breed, size or color. The same two dogs and two handlers must be present for each qualifying leg.
- The criteria and requirements used to review Novice class entries shall be used to review and qualify Novice Pair class entries.
- Mirrored, synchronized, unsynchronized, symmetrical and asymmetrical moves and move combinations for the pair team are all acceptable.
- Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team. Music for Novice Pairs class **will be scored as a performance element**. A severe error resulting in disqualification (DQ) *is possible at this level* if the music contains profanity and/or obscenities or is over/under the specified time for the class.
- Both dogs should be an integral part of choreography.
- The dogs are permitted to interact with one another (for example, go over, go under) as long as it is performed in a safe manner and neither dog shows sign of discomfort or stress performing the move(s).
- The majority of the performance should be spent with both handler/dog teams performing at the same time. A handler/dog team is permitted to perform solo segments, but such segments should be brief and limited. Note: If one handler/dog is working in a solo segment, both handler/dog teams should remain in the camera (or judge's) view at all times.

## TEAM CLASSES

**Title:** Novice Freestyle Team (N-TEAM)

**Music Time Range:** 1:30 – 3:00 minutes

**Pre-requisite:** No title requirement. Team must include at least one (1) MDSA member.

**Qualifying Legs:** Team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

- All team participants must enter under a designated team name.
- Qualifying or participant ribbons will be issued to all members of the team. However, title certificates will be automatically issued under the team name to the participants of the third qualifying leg. If participants of previous qualifying legs wish to also receive a title certificate, they must contact MDSA at [musicaldogsport@gmail.com](mailto:musicaldogsport@gmail.com) and a certificate will be provided at no charge.
- Teams are made up of at least three (3) to a maximum of eight (8) dog and handler teams. At least one (1) must be an MDSA member.
- Teams need not be composed of the same handlers and/or dogs for each qualifying leg, as long as the team name remains the same for each qualifying leg.
- Dogs may be on-lead or off-lead, but **all** dogs must either be on-lead or off-lead. The lead shall not be longer than 6 feet (2 meters). The lead should be handled in a graceful manner and not interfere with the performance of the dog. The lead may be dropped as necessary. Continuously tight leads or using the lead for corrections and manipulation are not permitted.
- The criteria used to review Novice Team entries shall be the same criteria as used for the Novice Class level, except for music time.
- Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team. Music for Novice Team class **will be scored as a performance element.**
- Mirrored, synchronized, unsynchronized, symmetrical and asymmetrical moves and move combinations for the team are all acceptable.
- At live events this class shall be held after the solo, Brace, and Pairs class entries, but before FEO and Rookie class entries.

**Title:** Intermediate Freestyle Team (I-Team)

**Music Time Range:** 1:30 - 3:00 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** The N-TEAM title must have been earned by at least two (2) of the teams - handler and dog. Team must include at least one (1) MDSA member.

**Qualifying Legs:** Team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this optional class is to provide additional titling experience prior to Standard level competition. Entrants **are not required** to compete or title in this class prior to Standard competition. Even though this class has requirements similar to Novice, entrants will be expected to perform with a more advanced level of fluency, precision and creativity than what is permissible in the Novice Class.

- All team participants must enter under a designated team name.
- Qualifying or participant ribbons will be issued to all members of the team. However, title certificates will be automatically issued under the team name to the participants of the third qualifying leg. If participants of previous qualifying legs wish to also receive a title certificate, they must contact MDSA at [musicaldogsport@gmail.com](mailto:musicaldogsport@gmail.com) and a certificate will be provided at no charge.
- Teams are made up of at least three (3) to a maximum of eight (8) dog and handler teams. At least one (1) must be an MDSA member.
- Teams need not be composed of the same handlers and/or dogs for each qualifying leg, as long as the team name remains the same for each qualifying leg.
- **All** dogs must be off-lead.
- The criteria used to review Intermediate Team entries shall be the same criteria as used for the Intermediate Class level, except for music time.
- Mirrored, synchronized, unsynchronized, distance, symmetrical and asymmetrical moves and move combinations for the team are all acceptable.
- At live events this class shall be held after the solo, Brace, and Pairs class entries, but before FEO, Rookie, and Novice Team class entries.

**Title:** Standard Freestyle Team (S-Team)

**Music Time Range:** 2:00 – 3:00 minutes

**Pre-Requisites:** The N-TEAM title must have been earned by at least two (2) of the teams - handler and dog. Team must include at least one (1) MDSA member.

**Qualifying Legs:** Team earning two (2) qualifying legs (Q).

- All team participants must enter under a designated team name.
- Qualifying or participant ribbons will be issued to all members of the team. However, title certificates will be automatically issued under the team name to the participants of the third qualifying leg. If participants of previous qualifying legs wish to also receive a title certificate, they must contact MDSA at [musicaldogsport@gmail.com](mailto:musicaldogsport@gmail.com) and a certificate will be provided at no charge.
- Teams are made up of at least three (3) to a maximum of eight (8) dog and handler teams. At least one (1) must be an MDSA member.
- Teams need not be composed of the same handlers and/or dogs for each qualifying leg, as long as the team name remains the same for each qualifying leg.
- **All** dogs must be off-lead.
- The criteria used to review Standard Team entries shall be the same criteria as used for the Standard Class level, except for music time.
- Mirrored, synchronized, unsynchronized, distance, symmetrical and asymmetrical moves and move combinations for the team are all acceptable.
- At live events this class shall be held after the solo, Brace, and Pairs class entries, but before FEO, Rookie, and Novice Team class entries.

## **Spirit of Sharing**

**Title:** Spirit of Sharing (SOS)

**Music Time Range:** Not applicable

**Pre-Requisite:** No title requirement. Same dog, same handler for each qualifying leg.

**Qualifying Legs:** One qualifying SOS visit in which freestyle is performed.

A new title level is earned for every 25 qualifying legs.

The Spirit of Sharing (SOS) title class is designed to recognize teams using canine freestyle as part of community service-related demonstrations. A qualifying "visit" is a freestyle performance at a community service event including, but not limited to:

- Visits as part of an organized animal-assisted therapy group.
- Hospitals and nursing homes.
- Educational demonstrations at schools, libraries, or preschools.
- Performances at humane society fund-raisers, rescue events, and other such demonstrations.

There are no requirements as to the content, length or format of the freestyle performance, so long as it celebrates the MDSA freestyle vision and philosophy. In addition, there is no requirement to submit video or photos, as these may be prohibited at certain events due to privacy laws. The only requirement is that the visits are tracked on the official log sheet. Log sheets are available from the **Publications** section of the MDSA website at [www.musicaldogsport.org](http://www.musicaldogsport.org).

As you reach each 25 visit milestone, you can send in your log sheet and fee to request approval for your title. This is an honor system program; signatures or initials of a supervisor are not required. There is no time limit to complete the milestones for each level and log sheets do not need to be submitted in conjunction with a video or live event. The entry fee helps offset the costs of operating the MDSA titling program.

Titles and title certificates will be issued for reaching the milestones as listed below.

- 25 Visits – SOS-25
- 50 Visits – SOS-50
- 75 Visits – SOS-75
- 100 Visits – SOS-100

The original Spirit of Sharing program has been discontinued and is replaced by this titling class. As a thank you to all the participants since the program's inception, MDSA will automatically issue titles and title certificates to the dogs who have already achieved one or more of the title levels since the program's inception up to April 1, 2012. These participants need not resubmit log sheets or entry fees.

## Section 11: Description of MDSA Non-Titling Classes

These classes do not qualify as legs toward a title. These classes are intended for performance experience, additional experience when a team is not yet ready to proceed to the next class level, or as an additional challenge for the team. Handlers will receive score sheets from the judge(s) that will include comments. Although these are non-titling classes, participants are expected to adhere to the MDSA Performance Guidelines when crafting and submitting a routine. Some additional participation restrictions apply to these classes, so be sure to review the details for each specific class before entering.

### **ROOKIE**

**Title:** Non-Titling

**Music Time Range:** 1:00 - 2:15 minutes

**Pre-Requisite:** MDSA Member

The purpose of this class is to provide entrants with performance experience, in a competition setting, practice and learning opportunities when the team is not yet ready to enter titling classes. **Although teams are not required to enter the Rookie class, it is recommended for those teams that are new to the sport.**

- The handler should not overshadow dog nor ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or willing to perform or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- Treats, toys and training aids may be used to praise and encourage the dog but should not be used as a lure.
- The dog may be shown on lead or off lead. The lead shall not be longer than 6 feet (2 meters). The lead should be handled in a graceful manner and not interfere with the performance of the dog. The lead may be dropped as necessary. Continuously tight leads or using the lead for corrections and manipulation are not permitted.
- For safety reasons, puppies entered in this class that are between the age of six (6) months and one (1) year, are required to abide by a "three paws on the floor" rule. The intention of this rule is to protect young bones during their critical time of physical growth and development. So, for example, jumps or other aerial moves that are cued by the handler are not permitted. It is permissible should a puppy spontaneously hop, bounce or jump due to excitement or enthusiasm.
- This class may be entered no more than two (2) times by any dog/handler team.
- At live events this class shall be held after the titling performances.



## FOR EXHIBITION ONLY (FEO)

**Title:** Non-Titling

The purpose of this class is to provide entrants with additional performance experience, additional practice or learning opportunities when the team is not yet ready to proceed to the next titling level, or to provide a performance venue for those who do not wish to earn a freestyle title or may have already earned a title and still wish to continue to participate.

- There is an FEO option at ALL title class levels.
- The criteria used to review FEO class entries shall be the same criteria as used for the corresponding class level. For example, a Standard FEO entry is expected to follow all Standard criteria, from music time to performance elements and requirements.
- Teams may enter FEO an unlimited number of times but each entry must be a new routine with new choreography and new music. (See Section 9b for a special exception to this rule.)
- There is no pre-requisite to enter Novice FEO. However, to enter Standard, Premier or Veteran FEO, the team must either meet the pre-requisite for the class OR have received two (2) Successful FEO ratings at the preceding level.
- At live events this class shall be held after the titling class performances, but before Rookie class entries.

## Canine Freestyle Fun Class

**Title:** Non-Titling

**Music Time Range:** Editing your music choice to fit the skill level of your dog is encouraged.

**Pre-Requisite:** MDSA Member

The purpose of this class is to provide members that do not wish to be judged or earn an MDSA title a performance venue at Musical Dog Sport Association video events. Participants will receive a Vimeo video link to all the performances in the event.

- The handler should not overshadow dog nor ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or willing to perform or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- Treats, toys and training aids may be used to praise and encourage the dog but should not be used as a lure.
- The dog may be shown on lead or off lead. The lead shall not be longer than 6 feet (2 meters). The lead should be handled in a graceful manner and not interfere with the performance of the dog. The lead may be dropped as necessary.
- There are no performance space requirements or prerequisites to submit a solo, prop, pair, brace, or team routine. Props may or may not be included in solo, pair, brace, or team performances.
- Teams may enter this non-titling class multiple times with different routines. A Canine Freestyle Fun routine may also be re-entered in the titling division at a later date as long as it meets MDSA titling performance guidelines.
- This is the only MDSA class where special effects and/or video editing is permitted.
- Videos of canine freestyle demonstrations in the community are acceptable. A Canine Freestyle Fun ribbon will be given to each participating MDSA member.