

## Some Notes on the Different Agility Organizations for New Competitors—from a personal point of view

When you first begin to compete in dog agility, the first question you have to ask yourself (after verifying that you and your dog are ready to compete) is which organization to compete in. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we are fortunate to have many active venues for competition, with agility available pretty much every weekend, year round, indoors and outdoors.

Generally, competitive agility comes in two kinds: standard agility, which includes all the obstacles, and then games of one kind or another. The most common game is Jumpers, which is a course of jumps, (sometimes) tunnels, and (sometimes) weave poles, but no contact obstacles. The various organizations have different competition heights, but all have an option where dogs can compete at a lower height. The lower height may be called such things as preferred, performance, veterans, or some other name. You'll want to read the organization rules carefully!

The organizations that sponsor agility competition here in the Pacific Northwest are:

\*The American Kennel Club (AKC) has three flavors of competition—standard, jumpers with weaves, and FAST. In FAST, the dog-handler team makes up their own course to garner points, competing against the clock, and complete a distance handling segment as well. Handlers can compete in a maximum of three classes per day of competition (one standard course, one jumpers, one FAST (if it's offered)). AKC competition is open to mixed breeds and pure-bred dogs. Beginners start in Novice and advance through Open and Excellent levels. Many people consider AKC courses to require tight technical handling. Times are generous, especially when compared with NADAC and USDAA. [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)

\*The United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA) has standard, jumpers (no weaves), tournament events (Steeplechase and Grand Prix), team events, distance handling events, and strategy events. Most competitors will be able to enter three or four events on each day of competition, sometimes more. It is open to all dogs, whether mixed-breed or the finest of pedigrees (and the mixed breeds often win). USDAA courses are wide open and fast, feature higher jumps, and require athletic, fit dogs and handlers. Levels are Starters, Advanced, and Masters. Any competitor, regardless of level, can enter the tournament events, although they are designed at the Masters level.

NOTE: While I love snooker, I think USDAA competition is the most difficult. It took us a year to get our first Starters level Q in standard (by which time we were in Open in both AKC and NADAC). Jumps are higher (my standard poodles jump 26" (regular) or 22" (performance) in USDAA) and the courses are longer and faster. The games are fun, though, requiring strategy and planning, as well as the ability to think on your feet. [www.usdaa.com](http://www.usdaa.com)

\*The North American Dog Agility Council (NADAC) has multiple different competitive events, including standard (no table, no teeter, no spread jumps), jumpers (no weaves), weavers (weaves and tunnels), tunnelers (just tunnels), touch 'n' go (contacts and tunnels), hoopers (a strategy game with just hoops) and chances (distance handling). Often two

standard classes are offered on the same day, allowing competitors to enter as many as six classes on one day of competition. NADAC courses emphasize speed and precision. NADAC also allows some training in the ring (although you won't qualify, you can repeat an obstacle or pet your dog, although food is not allowed). NADAC has lower jump heights than AKC or USDAA (the tallest height is 20") and allows all dogs to participate.

NOTE: I like competing in NADAC when I'm working on a particular issue, precisely because there are so many chances in one day. For example, if you're working on a start-line stay in competition, NADAC will give you a competition environment to test your stay AND the opportunity to reset your dog and try again if she breaks the stay (as long as you don't go over course time while you're doing such training). In the other organizations, you'd be whistled off. NADAC is also where I got over being so nervous I couldn't think; with six runs in a day, eventually the nervousness wears off! It's also helpful to have games that let you and the dog succeed without worrying about trouble spots (although if your dog doesn't like tunnels, NADAC is not a good place to be). [www.nadac.com](http://www.nadac.com)

\*Canine Performance Events (CPE) is a newer organization that emphasizes friendly, low-key competition that is fun for handlers and dogs. Their Level 1 events do not include the teeter or the weave poles, making them a great starting place for young dogs. Competitors can start at Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3. CPE is open to all dogs and provides generous allowances for dogs to jump lower heights. [www.k9cpe.com](http://www.k9cpe.com)

\*Teacup Dog Agility Association (TDAA) is open only to smaller dogs of all breeds (less than 17" at the shoulder) and features a smaller arena, smaller jumps, and smaller contacts. Those friends who have competed in TDAA report that the equipment is also much lighter and easier to move, which is almost a good enough reason to get a smaller dog. (Note that I two tall standard poodles whom I adore. I just hate moving that heavy A-frame!) [www.k9tdaa.com](http://www.k9tdaa.com)

\*The United Kennel Club (UKC) also sponsors some agility. They are their own world, with different obstacles. [www.ukcdogs.com](http://www.ukcdogs.com) has their rules and local contact people for more information.

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