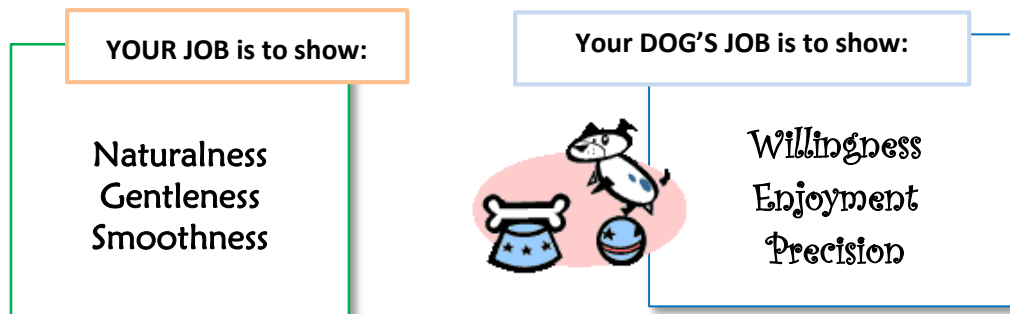


Competitive Obedience: Heeling

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The principal feature of the heeling exercise is the ability of the dog and handler to work as a team! Since it requires a great deal of handler awareness as well as tremendous focus from your dog, heeling is perhaps the most difficult exercise in which to earn a perfect score in competitive obedience. So, take your time, keep it fun, and plan to dedicate a great deal of time to this exercise. We will be working specifically on heeling throughout our training together and many of the games I teach will feature both predictability and spontaneity in your heeling. **Predictably** is necessary for your dog to learn position, and **spontaneity** is necessary to maintain the behavior and keep your dog from becoming bored.

In a trial, the judge will evaluate both dog and handler during this exercise. Points can be lost by the handler, and points can be lost by the dog. Your dog's job is different than your job – so don't confuse the two!



Most Common HANDLING ERRORS in Heeling

Here are the most common errors handlers make during the heeling exercise. The error might be slight (i.e. ½ point), or it can be a major point loss (3 or more points) for the team.

1. Loud commands, audible signals
2. Lack of briskness during heeling or Figure 8
3. Wide turns, narrow turns on Figure 8
4. Lack of acceleration on the fast
5. Not noticeably decelerating speed on the slow
6. Additional commands or signals, touching the dog

The best way to avoid a penalty is to beware of actions that lead to that penalty. See reverse side for more information about these common errors.

Most Common DOG ERRORS in Heeling

- Lag
- Forge
- Not in sync with handler
- Wide

These errors are lessened or eliminated by keeping up with your platform training and exciting heeling games.

The best way to avoid a penalty is to beware of actions that lead to that penalty. Read about Most Common Handler Errors in Heeling below.

1. Loud Commands, Audible Signals

If your commands are excessively loud, you will be penalized. Teach signals so if the noise level at the show is a bit intense you will have an option. You never know when there will be applause, a door slamming, or other loud sound distraction. If you choose to use a signal it must be inaudible and you cannot touch the dog while giving the signal. If you choose to use signals, keep the following in mind: 1) Signaling a correction to a dog is not allowed, and 2) A signal can only be a single gesture with one arm and hand only, and the arm must immediately return to a natural position.

2. Lack of Briskness During Heeling or Figure 8

The AKC Obedience Regulations state that the handler will walk briskly and in a natural manner with the dog on a loose leash. As the handler moves about the ring the judge will be watching to see if the handler maintains brisk heeling throughout the pattern as well as the Figure 8. As the handler is moving briskly s/he must also move in a natural manner, demonstrating smoothness and gentleness. Do not adjust your movement to fit your dog's pace during the Figure 8.

3. Wide or Narrow Turns on the Figure 8

The way in which a handler travels around the Figure 8 may be subject to lost points. For example, if dog is crowding and the handler is going wide to move out of its way, then two errors have occurred – 1) the dog crowded and 2) the handler went wide to assist the dog. The handler would have been better off maintaining the proper figure of eight and live with the crowding penalties applied to the dog. At the other end of the Figure 8 the opposite can occur. A handler may cut close to a steward to make a sharper turn to assist the dog – ensuring that there is less of a chance for lagging or crowding.

4. Lack of Acceleration on the Fast

The handler's performance during the Fast should have the following characteristics:

- a. Prompt response to the judge's orders "Fast" and "Normal"
- b. Handler running at a noticeably accelerated speed forward

5. Not Noticeably Decelerating Speed on the Slow

A handler performing a Slow will need to keep the same items in mind as mentioned for the Fast. Of course, the only difference is the handler is moving at a Slow pace. When a handler goes into a Slow they must noticeably decelerate speed and maintain that decelerated speed. As the order comes for "Normal" the handler then must accelerate back to a brisk pace.

6. Additional Commands or Signals, Touching the Dog

If a novice handler were to give an additional command or signal, a substantial penalty will be applied to the score. A substantial penalty is 3 or more points. There may be times when a handler will want to give an extra command or signal and lose points as a result. For example, if the dog stops heeling and the handler then gives an extra command or signal; this action might bring the dog's attention back into focus. Three or more points will be deducted but the exercise may be saved as a result. Keep this in mind and know where and when to apply the extra command or signal if needed. Just know that if more than one extra command or signal is given, the judge will question if the dog and handler are working as a team. The judge could also perceive that the handler is training the dog and excuse the team. Remember, the principal part of the heeling exercise is teamwork!