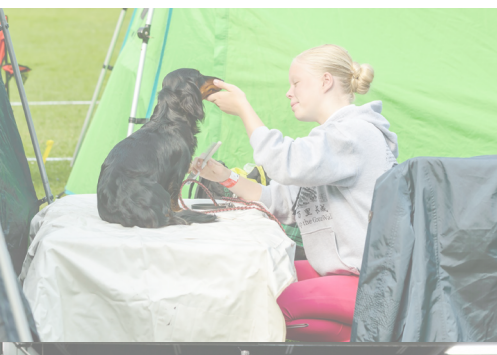


# Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Manual





# Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Manual



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# A Note to Adult 4-H Volunteer Leaders



Congratulations and thank you for getting involved as a volunteer leader in the Michigan 4-H dog project. This project can offer you and your 4-H'ers a variety of positive learning experiences. The success of these experiences depends largely on two key elements that you bring to the group: a desire to work with young people and an interest in dogs. You don't need to be an experienced dog person to work with 4-H'ers in this project area.

All 4-H activities should be designed to positively influence the development of the young people involved in them. A variety of 4-H club and group development materials are available on the Michigan 4-H Youth Development website at <https://www.extension.msu.edu/4h>. You'll find Michigan 4-H's *Guiding Principles for Positive Youth Development* at <https://bit.ly/3IFGc9f>.

## Helping Young People Develop Life Skills

As with all 4-H project areas, involvement in the 4-H dog project is designed to provide two major outcomes for 4-H'ers: learning more about the project area and developing key life skills, such as problem-solving, organization, and communication.

As a 4-H leader, it's important that you recognize these skills in your 4-H'ers. Key life skills for you to keep in mind as you work with your 4-H'ers include:

- **Positive self-awareness and self-esteem**—4-H clubs and groups and 4-H activities provide settings in which 4-H'ers can have experiences that make them feel good about themselves. By becoming aware of their own abilities and potential, 4-H'ers develop positive attitudes about themselves. These attitudes are important to their success in life. In a 4-H dog project, 4-H'ers develop an appreciation of their own knowledge and skills and their ability to share their knowledge and skills with others.
- **Problem-solving and decision-making skills**—The ability to make good decisions and solve problems is important to people of all ages. The hands-on, learn-by-doing atmosphere of 4-H activities provides many

opportunities for 4-H'ers to enhance their ability to solve problems and make decisions. 4-H dog projects are designed to help 4-H'ers develop these skills while they learn about different breeds of dogs and how to care for, train, and show them.

- **Communication skills**—4-H activities help 4-H'ers develop and enhance their interpersonal and formal communication skills. Group activities give 4-H'ers opportunities to develop interpersonal communication skills such as good listening habits. 4-H'ers can develop formal communication skills by preparing and delivering talks and demonstrations and by creating web pages, posters, electronic slide shows, and videos about what they learn in 4-H.
- **An awareness of science and technology**—Science and technology play large roles in our everyday lives and it's important to help 4-H'ers recognize their own impact on the world around them. Dog projects can spark the interest of 4-H'ers in areas such as biology, veterinary medicine, and other animal science careers.
- **Leadership skills**—4-H activities provide wonderful opportunities for 4-H'ers to develop their leadership skills. Whenever possible, encourage the 4-H'ers in your club or group to take on leadership roles. For example, one or two members could design meetings around topics such as the different gaiting patterns they may encounter when in the ring or the breed differences between the hound group and the sporting group. A member could also take the lead in coordinating a field trip or arranging for a special resource person to attend a meeting.

## Your Role as a 4-H Volunteer

As a 4-H dog project volunteer leader, you may fill a variety of roles:

- **4-H club or group organizer**—Responsible for setting up meetings, contacting members, and working with officers. (**Note:** Many of these jobs can and should be



## A Note to Adult 4-H Volunteer Leaders

done by members, club or group officers, or older teen leaders.)

- **Teacher**—Responsible for helping 4-H'ers develop the knowledge and skills they need in dog showmanship and other areas of the 4-H dog project.
- **Resource finder**—Responsible for identifying appropriate educational materials and arranging for experts to attend a club or group meeting and demonstrate particular skills.
- **Youth developer**—Whatever other role or roles you play in your 4-H club or group, remember that your primary role is youth developer, responsible for helping 4-H'ers grow and develop to their full potential.

### What You Need to Know About Dog Showmanship

It will be helpful to familiarize yourself with these points:

1. The basics of handling a dog in a showmanship class and of showmanship class procedures and judging. You can do this by:
  - Reviewing this manual to find out what members need to learn about dog showmanship and competing in the class.
  - Attending volunteer training on the 4-H dog project as a whole and specialized training on dog showmanship. Check with your county MSU Extension 4-H staff to see where and when such workshops are offered and whether similar workshops are available for 4-H'ers.
  - Contacting your county MSU Extension 4-H staff to find out about other dog showmanship resources.
  - Attending or watching on television or online all-breed and single-breed dog shows organized by the American Kennel Club (AKC), the United Kennel Club (UKC), and other organizations. Watch showmanship and conformation classes to learn how different dog breeds are groomed and exhibited.

2. What kinds of dogs your 4-H'ers are working with so you can help them learn breed-specific grooming, handling, and showing techniques.
3. How 4-H dog showmanship classes at the county and state levels are organized. (For example, shows may divide 4-H'ers into classes according to their age or experience levels.) Be sure to share this information with your 4-H'ers so they know what to expect.
4. How volunteer leaders with other 4-H clubs or groups in your county and across the state help their 4-H'ers learn about dog showmanship and run their 4-H dog programs.

### Meeting Topics & Activities

You can build many educational activities into your 4-H club and group meetings to help your 4-H'ers prepare to compete in 4-H dog showmanship. Visit the Michigan 4-H Youth Development website at <https://www.extension.msu.edu/4h/> for information on 4-H volunteer, leadership, and club and group development, or contact your county MSU Extension 4-H program staff.

Ask your group what dog-related topics they would like to explore and encourage them to help lead sessions around these topics. Examples include:

- **Caring for the dog**—Explore what is involved in providing excellent daily care for dogs, including nutrition, exercise, grooming, medical care, and companionship.
- **Steps in dog showmanship**—Demonstrate the steps involved in showing a dog so that the 4-H'er and dog are prepared for judging.
- **The appearance, attitude, and behavior of the handler**—Focus on what 4-H'ers need to know, how they should act, and how they should present themselves so they convey a confident and courteous manner during judging.
- **The dog showmanship score sheet**—The sections of Appendix A: Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Score Sheet, the point values assigned to each section, and what the dog and 4-H'er need to do to earn those points.





# Welcome to the Michigan 4-H Dog Project!

Congratulations on deciding to get involved in the Michigan 4-H dog project! In dog showmanship, you will be able to demonstrate your knowledge and skill in properly handling, gaiting, and presenting your dog in the ring.

This guide provides the basic information you will need to know to compete successfully in 4-H dog showmanship classes. You'll also want to check out the Resources section of the manual for lists of books, websites, and videos that contain more information on dogs and dog showmanship.

In a 4-H dog showmanship class, you will present your dog as if you were in a breed-specific class at a dog show. The big difference is that in 4-H dog showmanship, your knowledge of your dog's breed standard and your performance will be judged, not your dog. You will be expected to showcase your dog in a way that

demonstrates you have in-depth knowledge of your dog's breed standard.

If you have a mixed breed dog, use the grooming and ring techniques for the breed that your dog most closely resembles, even if you have no idea of your dog's parentage. You'll need to learn about the breed's history, identifying characteristics, anatomy, and **husbandry** (care and management).

You also will be expected to know the appropriate way to stack, gait, and present your dog in the ring. (For example, a German Shepherd Dog should be gaited at a flying trot, while a Miniature Pinscher should be exhibited at a high-stepping, hackney-style trot.) Be prepared, too, for the judge to ask you dog-related questions that are appropriate for your age and class (experience) level.





# Judging the Showmanship Team



While you're in the showmanship ring, the judge will evaluate your skills, attitude, and appearance, and your ability to work with your dog as a team. There are three main parts of a showmanship class: stacking, gaiting, and the judge's examination.

- **Stacking** is posing a dog on a table, ramp, or floor in the ring for the judge's examination. There are two types of stacking:
  - » **Hand stacking**—When you use your hands to set up your dog in a stand or stack.
  - » **Free stacking**—When your dog stops and poses naturally on its own.
- **Gaiting** refers to moving the dog in the ring. It is evaluated in two parts: how well you perform the gaiting pattern the judge picks (from among the *Down and Back*, *Triangle*, *T*, and *L* patterns) and how well you perform the go around. The go around is when you and your dog gait around the ring individually or in a group).
- **The judge's examination** is the part of the showmanship class when the judge runs their hands over your dog to evaluate its physical structure. At the end of the examination, the judge may ask you breed-specific questions or general questions related to canine health and anatomy.



## The 4-H Handler

As a 4-H dog handler, you should present your dog in a way that appears effortless.

### Appearance

Your appearance is an important part of the impression you will make in the ring, so your dress and grooming should be neat, clean, and professional. (See the Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Exhibitor Dress Code at <https://bit.ly/44zdk46>.)

**(Note:** *Professional* clothing doesn't have to be expensive or dry-clean-only. Check local thrift stores for second-hand clothes or organize a show-clothes swap meet within your own 4-H club or group or with other clubs or groups in your county.)

Your clothing should allow you to move your arms and legs freely when gaiting but not disturb your dog.

The color of your clothing is important in dog showing. It should complement, not match, your dog's coat without distracting from or blending into the coat. If your dog is all or mostly one color, you could wear a solid color that allows your dog to stand out, or you could wear a quiet print that includes your dog's color. If you wear clothing that matches your dog's color too closely, the judge may have trouble picking out your dog against your clothing. (For example, if your dog is all or mostly black and you wear black pants, your dog will seem to disappear into you.) If your dog's color or pattern is varied, you could wear a solid color that matches or complements one of your dog's colors.

You will be given an armband with a unique exhibitor identification number on it when you check in. Depending on the show, you will check in either with the ring steward (judge's assistant) or at the ring. Wear the armband on your left arm in the ring.

## Judging the Showmanship Team

### Posture & Position

Pay attention to your posture and position. Except when hand stacking your dog, stay at least an arm's length away from your dog so you don't block the judge's view. Keep your clothing, hair, and head out of the judge's line of sight, especially when hand stacking your dog.

### Smoothness

Be calm, pay attention, and try to relax. The more stress you feel, the more stress your dog will feel. Take your time and move slowly but surely, without delaying the judging. (Better to be a little slow than so quick that you miss something.) Try not to jerk the lead. If you're using bait, don't move your bait too much. Your actions should highlight the dog, not distract from your presentation of it.

Look confident and smile. Enjoy the time you spend with your dog practicing and in the ring. This class is designed to showcase how well you and your dog work together and to demonstrate the bond you have developed.

### Attention & Focus

When you're in the ring, pay attention to where you are gaiting, standing, and looking. When gaiting, watch your dog, the judge, and where you are going. Keep track of where the judge is and always keep your dog between the judge and you. Make some eye contact with the judge.

Help the judge by listening carefully and following their directions. Respond respectfully ("Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Yes, ma'am," "No, ma'am") when the judge talks to you. If you don't hear or understand something the judge says, you may politely ask them to repeat themselves.

### Proficiency

Groom and present your dog appropriately for its breed. You can find information about dog breeds online, in breed-specific books, or from knowledgeable people who raise, train, and show dogs of your dog's breed.

Practice how to gait and stack your dog. Just as in obedience and agility classes, you cannot expect your dog to perform without training. Showmanship is an evaluation of your skills and teamwork.

It may be helpful to watch the class before yours so you can see how the judge runs the class before you enter the ring.

If you are working with a young dog, work hard to create a positive experience for it in the ring. Young dogs present unique challenges, but with patience and practice yours will mature into a wonderful show partner. And even if it doesn't behave perfectly in the ring, showing a young dog can be a great way to showcase your handling skills.

### Ring Courtesy: Do's & Don'ts

When you and your dog are in the ring, **do**:

- Be kind.
- Be patient.
- Be aware.
- Talk quietly to your dog.
- Keep bait off the ground.
- Stay in line until asked.

When you and your dog are in the ring, **don't**:

- Distract with noise, excited play, or fast movements.
- Crowd other people or dogs.
- Throw bait.
- Upstage others with exaggerated movements.

### Attitude & Good Sportsmanship

Enter the ring confidently and do the best job you can. Whether you win or lose, be gracious and congratulate the winners and thank the judge and steward. Good sportsmanship is the most important quality you can display, no matter how you place.

Exhibitors, family members, trainers, and others may not approach the judge before judging is done unless the ring steward or other show staff are present. All requests to speak to the judge must be made through the ring steward or show staff, no matter how you place.

After the show, write thank-you notes or letters to the people who helped with the show, such as:

- Show management officials
- Superintendents
- 4-H staff and volunteers
- Donors and sponsors



## Judging the Showmanship Team

### The Dog

Your dog is your partner and the other half of your team. Your goal should be to use the skills you have learned to present your dog in a way that brings out their finest qualities.

### Grooming

Grooming is an important part of how you present your dog in the ring. You are responsible for grooming your dog meticulously before the show. Bathe, dry, and brush your dog's coat. Trim the nails and clean the ears, eyes, and teeth. Pet or show clips are equally acceptable in 4-H dog showmanship classes.

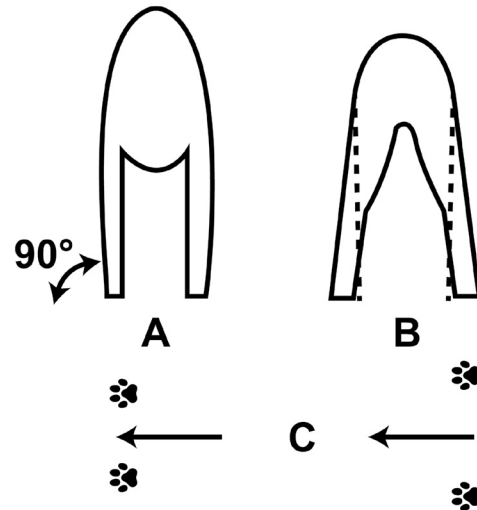


### Proper Breed Presentation

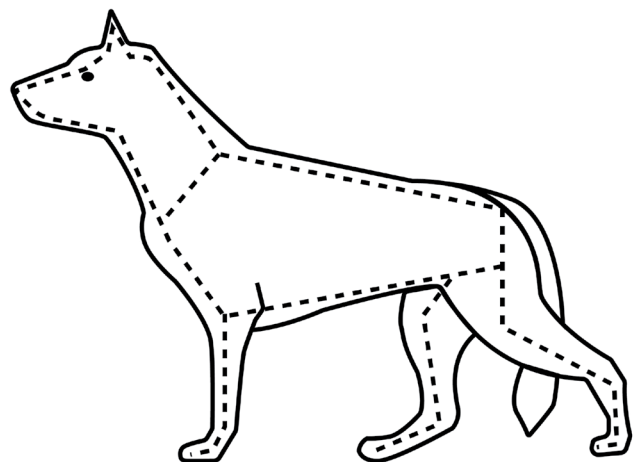
When stacking, gaiting, and presenting your dog for the judge's examination, your actions should be appropriate for your dog's breed. (For example, it would be incorrect to sprint around the ring when showing a Chihuahua.) Know the proper head and tail set for your dog's breed. If you are showing a mixed breed, pick the breed your dog most closely resembles and show your dog in the manner appropriate to that breed.

While most dogs are stacked square; that is, with their feet forming a rectangle on the table, ramp, or floor (Figure 1), this is not true for all breeds. German Shepherd Dogs, for example, are stacked in a three-point pose (Figure 2). If needed or customary for the breed, bait your dog so it will exhibit the proper expression. (**Expression** is showing animation and interest in the bait by standing still with ears forward, head up, and chest forward. Some breeds also extend the tail.)

**Figure 1.** The proper position of the feet and legs of a correctly stacked dog. **View A (left):** When viewed from the front, the front legs are perpendicular to the floor, with the width at the shoulder the same as the distance between the front feet. **View B (right):** When viewed from the rear, the width at the hips is the same as the distance between the rear feet. **View C (bottom):** All four feet point forward.



**Figure 2.** How to stack or pose a German Shepherd Dog correctly. Hold the dog on a loose lead with the head up and forward and the ears erect. Unlike other breeds, the lower rear legs (below the hock joints) of a German Shepherd Dog should *not* be perpendicular to the floor. Place the dog's rear leg farthest from the judge under the body and let the tail drape between the rear legs. Extend the rear leg closest to the judge backward to help form a smooth slope from the top of the shoulders to the top of the rear hock. Stand at or near the dog's head, opposite the judge.



## Judging the Showmanship Team

If your dog will be examined on a table or ramp, set it up with its front paws near the center of the front edge of the table or ramp, or as close as you can get to that position.

If your dog's breed is traditionally stacked for examination on a ramp (such as a Chow Chow or Chinese Shar-Pei) or on a table (such as a Lhasa Apso or a Norfolk Terrier), train it to be comfortable stacking on the floor, too, in case no ramp or table is available.

All dogs of the same size in the same showmanship class must be judged on the same surface, at the judge's discretion (Figure 3). Breeds that are the size of a Shetland Sheepdog or smaller should be presented for examination on a table, if one is available. (Information about which breeds are traditionally shown on a table, on a ramp, or on the ground can be found in the AKC "Table Breeds List" at <https://bit.ly/3M1Cb9T>.)

You may encounter a few other breed-specific presentation skills. It is important to research your dog's breed so you know the best way to showcase it. For example, if your dog has long, flowing, or feathered ears, when you present it for the judge's examination, drape its ears up and over its muzzle. This will help show off a smooth neck-to-shoulder line. You may also show off that smooth line by removing your dog's collar and placing it around your wrist during the examination.

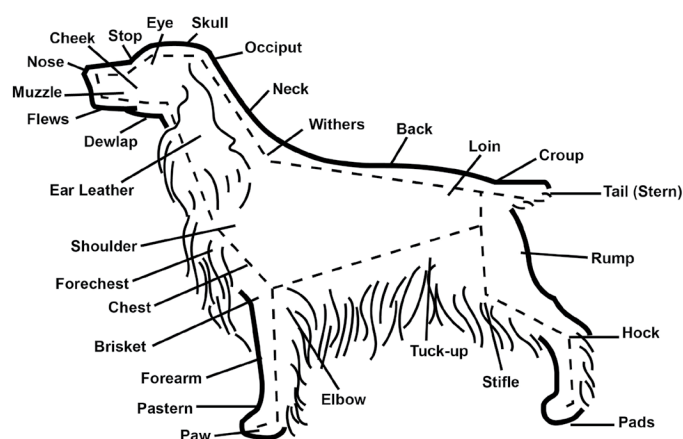
**Figure 3. A row of exhibitors hand stacking their dogs in the ring. All dogs in the same class must be stacked on the same surface (table, ramp, or floor) for the judge's examination.**



### Your Knowledge of Your Dog

Learn as much as you can about dog anatomy and structure (Figure 4). This will help you demonstrate your knowledge of your dog's breed and your handling skills. (For example, if a judge says, "Your dog's hock should be perpendicular to the floor," you will need to know what body part to move.) Learn about your dog's breed history and breed standard, too. Then you can combine what you know to minimize your dog's faults and highlight its best features in the ring.

**Figure 4. The parts of a dog.**



### Collars & Leads

Some 4-H'ers choose to use collar-and-lead combinations on their dogs in showmanship and some use separate collars and leads (Figure 5). Whichever you choose, pick a style and color that:

- Is easy for you to put on and take off your dog and use in the ring.
- Gives you adequate control of your dog.
- Complements your dog's colors or markings.
- Doesn't bunch up on your dog's neck and hide its smooth neck-to-shoulder line.

Small dogs are often shown in martingales, loop leads, or slide leads. Large dogs are often stronger than small dogs, so their handlers usually show them with separate collars and leads to give the handlers greater control. No matter how big a dog is, its showmanship collar is generally finer



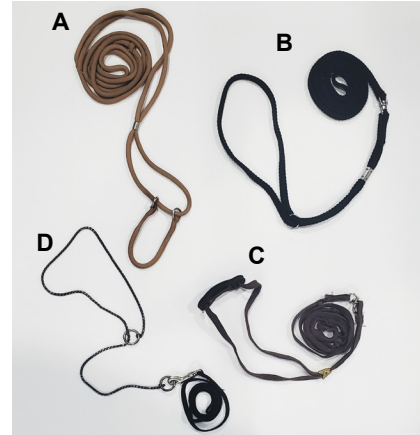
## Judging the Showmanship Team

than its obedience training collar to help give it a smoother neck-to-shoulder line.

Show collars may be flat, buckle, snap, slip, or martingale (limited slip) and made of materials such as woven nylon, metal chain, or flat or braided leather. Harnesses are not appropriate in the ring. The lead can be made of nylon, leather, or other material, and may be beaded. **(Note:** For safety reasons all leads for all dogs should be 48 inches or less in the showmanship ring.)

When showing, put the collar up high on the dog's neck, resting under the jaw and directly behind the ears. This gives you the greatest amount of control. Be aware of the position of the collar and adjust it as needed. If your dog's front legs are off the floor, the lead is too tight. If the lead is sagging or bouncing around, it is too loose.

**Figure 5. Separate collars and leads and collar-and-lead combinations that are suitable for 4-H dog showmanship. Clockwise from top left: A. A nylon martingale-style lead and collar combination. B. A braided nylon slip collar and lead combination. C. A leather spinner lead with a slide clip. D. A thin chain and nylon slip leader collar with attached nylon lead. (Photo by Jamie Bushard, Michigan 4-H Volunteer)**







# The Showmanship Team in the Ring

The purpose of the dog showmanship class is to demonstrate teamwork between the 4-H'er and the dog.

## Breaking Down the Steps

As mentioned earlier in the Judging the Showmanship Team section, there are three main parts of a dog showmanship class: stacking, gaiting, and the judge's examination. In this section we'll discuss how to perform each part in more detail, then talk about how the three parts come together in the Ring Procedure section.

### Stacking the Dog

**Stacking** is the process of standing and posing your dog so it looks its best for the judge's examination. There are two ways to stack a dog: hand stacking and free stacking. Both types of stacking are used in the showmanship ring.

- **Hand stacking** is when you move your dog's feet into the desired position with your hands. You and your dog should practice hand stacking often so you can do it quickly and smoothly. Practicing in front of a mirror can be helpful.
- **Free stacking** is when your dog comes to a stop and poses on its own, without you touching it. Dogs must be trained to free stack correctly.

Most dog breeds are hand stacked for the judge's examination. Even dogs that are usually free stacked should be trained to be comfortable with hand stacking.

The process of hand stacking is the same on the table, ramp, and floor (Figure 6). You should be able to hand stack your dog quickly and smoothly.

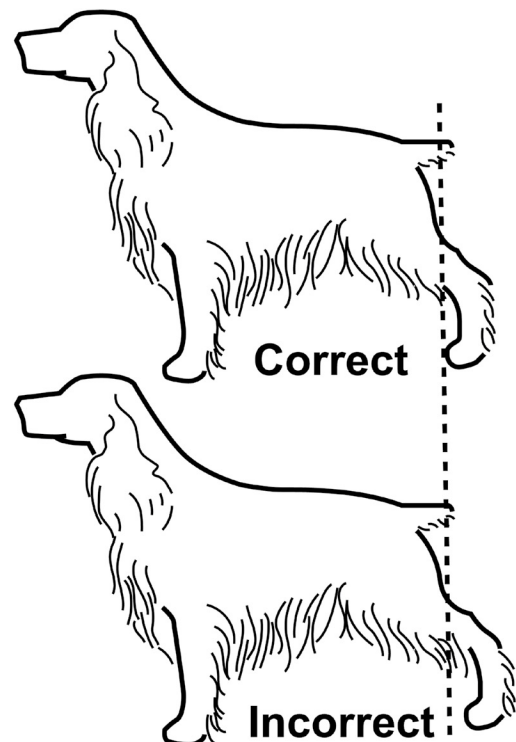
When you move a front leg, lift it at the elbow, not at the pastern. (The pastern is equivalent to the human wrist.) This keeps the leg straight and makes it more likely the dog will keep the leg where you place it. When you move a rear leg, lift at the hock or slightly above it and place the leg so the hock below the hock joint is perpendicular to the floor. You may straighten your dog's feet and legs by turning the legs slightly inward or outward before placement.

Choose whichever of these stacking methods you and your dog are most comfortable with:

1. Starting on the side closest to the judge, move your dog's front foot into position, then the front foot closest to you. Then move the back foot closest to the judge, followed by the back foot closest to you.
2. Starting on the side closest to the judge, move your dog's front foot into position, then the back foot. Then repeat the steps on the side closest to you.
3. Identify one foot that is already in the correct position. Move the other three feet into the correct position in the order that is most comfortable for you and your dog.

After the feet are set, adjust the rest of your dog's silhouette. Depending on your dog's breed, this may require holding the tail or baiting for expression.

**Figure 6. Side view of a correctly (top) and an incorrectly (bottom) stacked or posed dog. Note that the hocks of the correctly stacked dog are perpendicular to the floor. (See Figure 2 for a diagram of how to stack the rear legs of German Shepherd Dogs.)**



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

Keep a little distance between your body and your dog when stacking so you have room to move around your dog and keep your dog between you and the judge. Don't set your dog up too close or too far behind the other dogs in line. Keep about 3 feet in front of and behind your dog so you have enough room to adjust its position if needed.

When crouching to hand stack your dog on the floor and then standing up again, try to keep your body straight and raise and lower yourself with your legs. Do not use your dog as a support when standing up.

While you're waiting your turn for the judge's examination and to execute the gaiting pattern, you may choose either to free stack or hand stack your dog.

As you and your dog finish the gaiting pattern, the hours you've spent practicing free stacking will finally pay off. Stop about 3 feet in front of the judge with your dog at a slight angle, and free stack your dog. The distance and angle will allow the judge to easily see your dog's silhouette in the free stack. If you stop too close, with your dog facing straight at the judge, they will be looking straight down at your dog and won't be able to see it free stack.

Ideally your dog's free stack will result in the same silhouette that you achieve with a hand stack (Figure 7). You can use the lead and bait to guide your dog to place its feet correctly,

**Figure 7. A handler free stacking their dog in front of a judge in the ring.**



but don't touch the dog. Don't give up, even if your dog is challenging. Keep working to show the judge you are trying to get your dog's feet in the proper position.

Once your dog is correctly stacked, take a step back and let the dog show itself. You may encourage and continue to bait your dog for expression.

Stay alert and keep working with your dog the whole time you are in the ring, because the judge may glance around at the rest of the class between examinations. When you aren't gaiting or undergoing the judge's examination, stack your dog in line or, if there are mats, on the far edge of a mat closest to the judge. If you're at a corner where two mats meet, angle your dog across both mats. Keep a safe distance (about 3 feet) between you and the dogs and 4-H'ers in front of and behind you so you aren't crowding them.

### Gaiting the Dog

**Gaiting** is moving your dog at the correct speed in the ring. At dog shows, judges evaluate the movement of gaiting dogs by watching them from the rear, front, and sides.

Most dog breeds are gaited at a **trot** (Figure 8), which is when the legs on one side of the dog move opposite one another. That is, when the right front leg is moving

**Figure 8. A handler gaiting their dog correctly at the trot.**



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

**Figure 9. Trotting is the preferred gait for most breeds in dog showmanship classes. This Australian Shepherd is pacing, which is incorrect in the ring. Pacing is when the front and rear legs on the same side of the body move in sync.**



forward, the right rear leg is moving backward. At a **pace**, the right front leg and the right rear leg move forward at the same time (Figure 9). Pacing is incorrect in the ring.

When gaiting, hold your lead hand and arm slightly away from your side to help keep your dog from running into your leg. Keep your forearm level and adjust the tightness of the lead by gathering it into your hand or letting it out, instead of raising or lowering your arm. Practice until you can quickly and easily gather or let out the lead with one hand, without it tangling.

Pay attention to three things when gaiting: your dog, where you are going, and where the judge is. Keep the dog between you and the judge and hold your lead in the hand closest to the dog.

Practice with your dog so you are both able to move in a straight line when performing a gaiting pattern. If there are mats in the ring, keep your dog in the center of the mats. If there are no mats to help guide you, pick a spot on the far wall or fence and gait toward it. Glance back to make sure your dog is properly lined up with the judge and move away in a straight line. When in motion, your dog should move

naturally and freely. Gait at the correct speed for your dog's breed and physical ability.

You'll gait your dog two ways in the ring: while following a pattern and in the go around. After examining your dog, the judge will ask you to perform one of four patterns: a Down and Back, a Triangle, an L, or a T. Appendix B: Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Gaiting Diagrams includes diagrams of these four patterns and of variations on gaiting in a group.

If you aren't sure which pattern the judge has asked you to complete, politely ask them to repeat the instructions. If you aren't sure whether you should start the pattern gaiting diagonally across the ring or straight down to the end of the ring, a glance at the judge's feet may help. The judge will probably be facing the direction in which they wish you to gait.

When you return to the judge at the end of a pattern, stop and free stack your dog at a slight angle to the judge and far enough away that they can see the dog's silhouette clearly (Gaiting Diagram 1).

### **Down & Back Pattern**

In the Down and Back pattern (Gaiting Diagram 2), you will gait your dog away from and then back to the judge in a straight line. This line may run diagonally across the ring or straight down the side of the ring, depending on the judge's instructions. You can do the turn at the end of the Down and Back in one of two ways:

- Turn in toward your dog and then gait back to the judge. This is great for small dogs because it doesn't interrupt their gait.
- Bring your dog around you, with the dog on the outside of the turn, and gait back to the judge. (In this case you're allowed to break the rule about never crossing between the dog and the judge.)

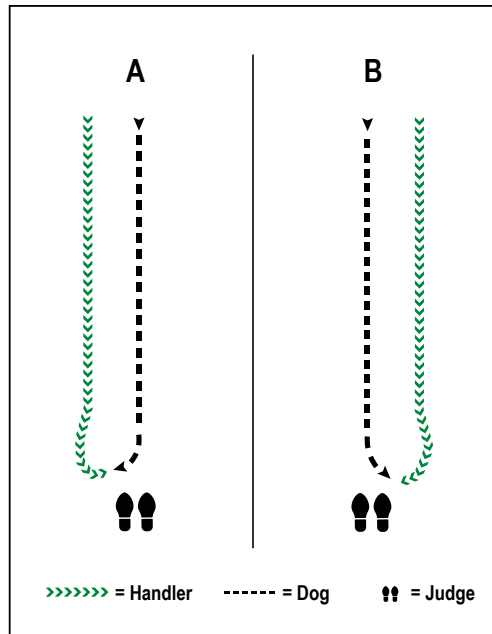
Finally, stop and free stack your dog in front of the judge.

**(Note:** For safety reasons, the double, or paired, Down and Back **is not allowed** in the Michigan 4-H dog project.)

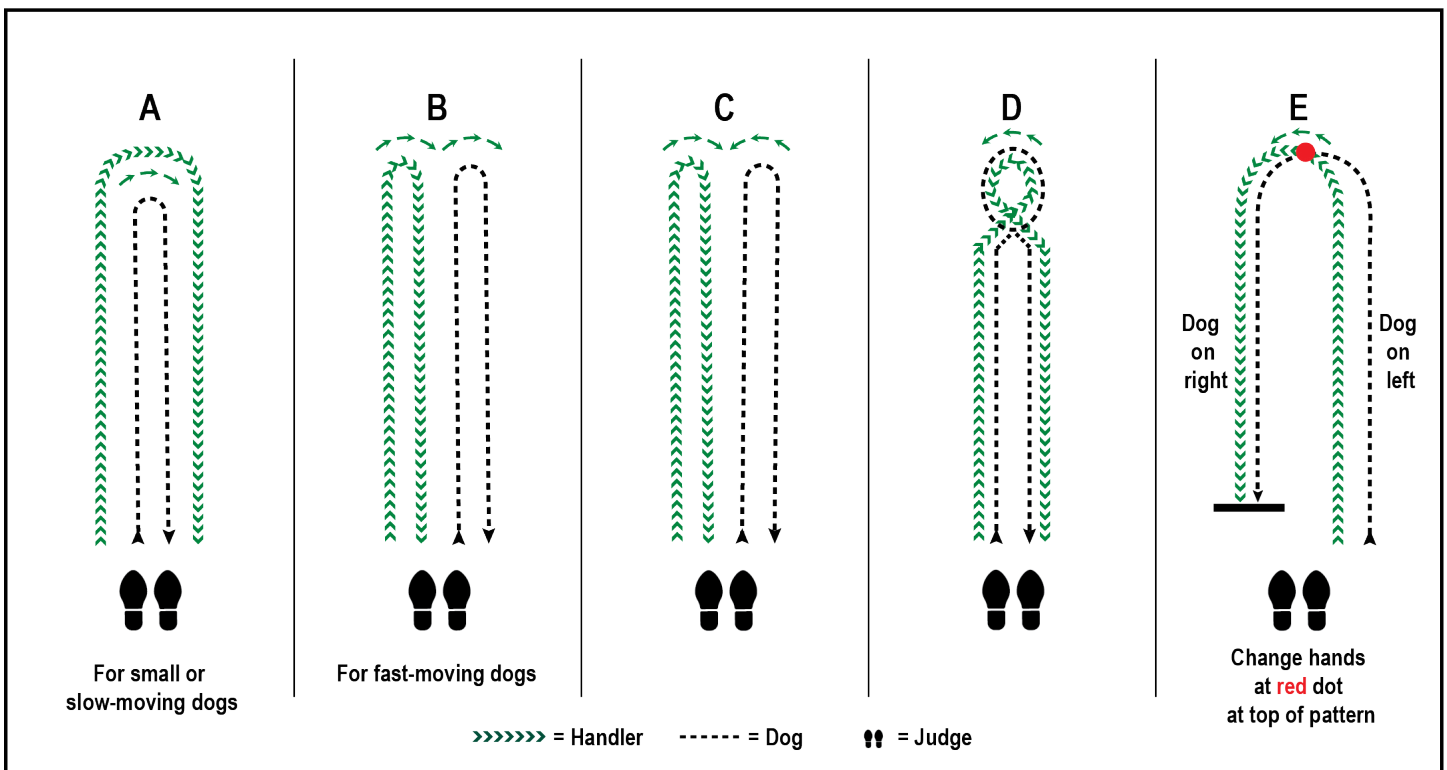


## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

**Gaiting Diagram 1. Free stack diagram. Come to a natural stop and free stack your dog 3 to 4 feet from and at a slight angle to the judge. Stand completely (A) or slightly (B) in front of the dog. If the judge moves around your dog, move smoothly to keep the dog between you and the judge.**

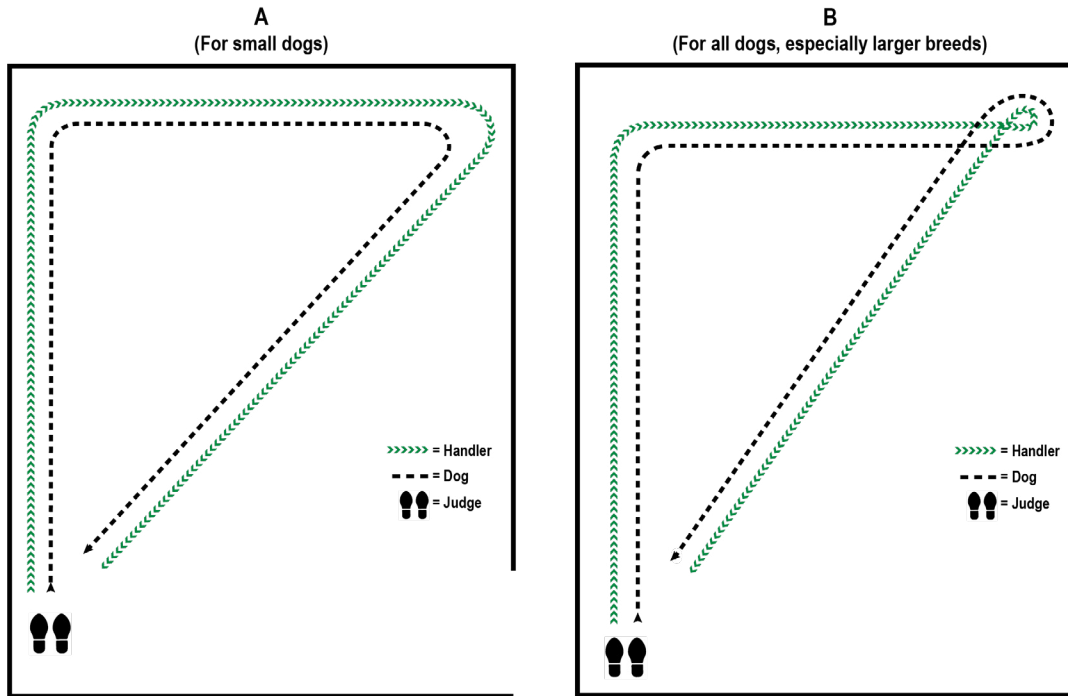


**Gaiting Diagram 2. Down and Back gaiting patterns. Be sure to gait your dog in a straight line away from and back to the judge. Don't let your dog stop during the about-turn. From left to right: Pattern A works well for small or slow-moving dogs; Patterns B, C, and D work well for large or fast-moving dogs, or when you need to change sides with a dog of any size or speed; and Pattern E works well for large or fast-moving dogs.**

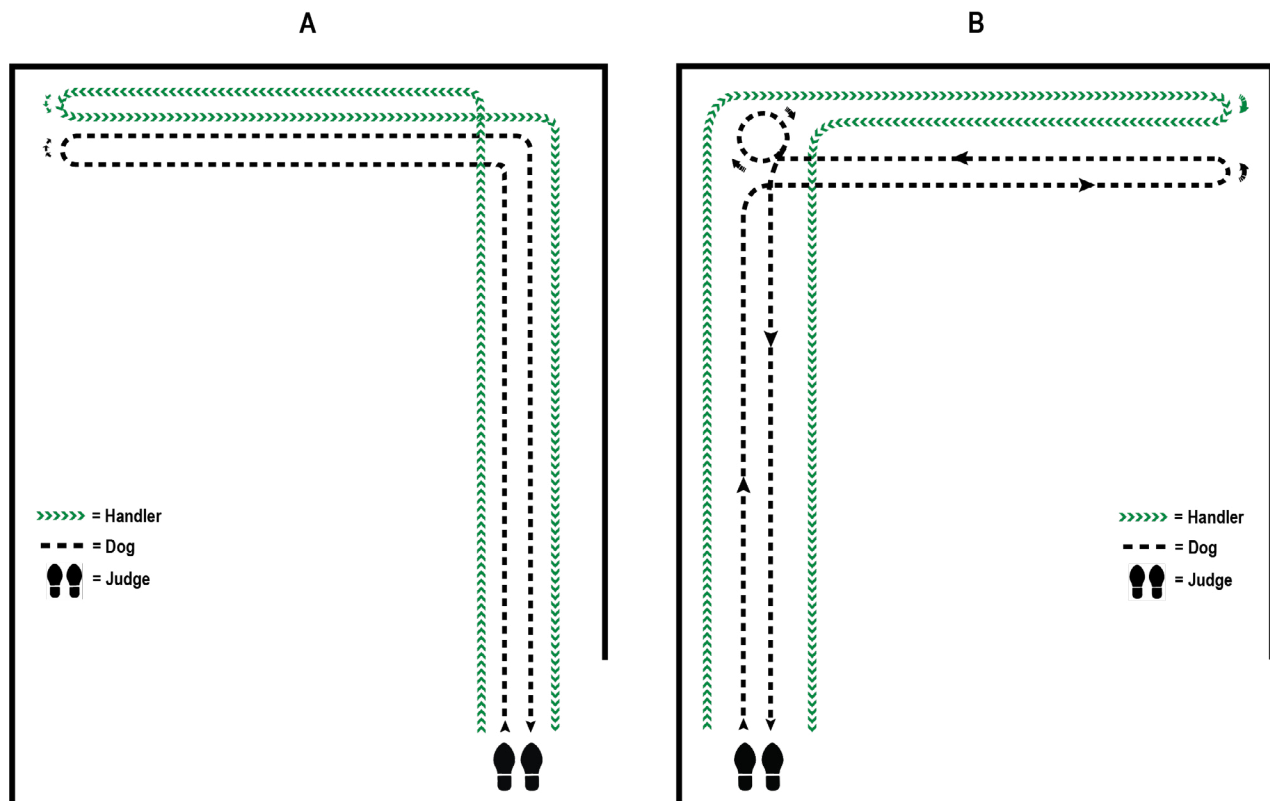


## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

Gaiting Diagram 3. Gaiting the Triangle pattern.



Gaiting Diagram 4. Gaiting the L pattern. Cross in front of your dog at the crook of the L. When you reach the corner diagonally opposite the judge, change your dog to your left side and complete a smooth left turn.



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

### **Triangle Pattern**

The Triangle pattern (Gaiting Diagram 3) lets the judge see your dog move from the rear, front, and side. There are two ways to perform this pattern. Both start with gaiting away from the judge to the first corner of the pattern. Make a left turn and gait across the far end of the ring. When you reach the corner, you may:

- Turn in toward your dog and then gait back to the judge.
- Bring your dog around you on the outside of the turn and gait back to the judge. (In this case you're allowed to break the rule about never crossing between the dog and the judge.)

Whichever way you turn, be sure to line your dog up with the judge when returning.

Finally, stop and free stack your dog in front of the judge.

### **L Pattern**

The L pattern (Gaiting Diagram 4) lets the judge see how your dog moves from the rear, front, and both sides. It will also showcase your lead-handling skills.

Make a courtesy turn, gait away from the judge to the far end of the ring, and then make a right or left turn, depending on the judge's position. When you reach the far corner, turn toward your dog and transfer the lead to your opposite hand. Continue turning until you are facing the way you came. Then gait back to the corner with your dog on the side closest to the judge. As you approach the corner, let your dog continue past you and transfer the lead back to your opposite hand. Make the turn and gait back to the judge.

Finally, stop and free stack your dog in front of the judge.

The most difficult part of this exercise is at the far corner where you switch hands. It takes practice to make the switch and turn smoothly. Your dog also must be comfortable with gaiting at your right side.

### **T Pattern**

The T pattern (Gaiting Diagram 5) starts in the middle of the ring. Make a courtesy turn, then gait away from the judge to the far end of the ring. Make a left turn. When you reach the far corner, turn toward your dog and transfer the lead to your right hand. Continue turning until you are facing the way you came, then gait to the opposite corner of the ring. Once

there, turn toward your dog and transfer the lead to your left hand, then continue back to the center. Make a left turn and gait back to the judge with the dog on your left. Finally, stop and free stack your dog in front of the judge. (**Note:** Large or fast-moving dogs should do a circle to the right before gaiting back to the judge.)

### **The Go Around**

When you have finished your pattern and free stack, the judge will have you gait (*go*) counter-clockwise *around* the ring to the end of the line. Gather up your lead, adjust your dog's collar, adjust your presentation of the dog as needed, and follow the ring around to the end of the line.

You may gait your dog slightly faster on the go around than you did in completing the pattern. Use the entire ring to give yourself as much time as possible to demonstrate your skills, but round the corners slightly to avoid having to make sharp turns. End the go around with a free stack at the end of the line. Be sure to leave a safe distance (about 3 feet) between yourself and the 4-H'er and dog in front of you.

Once all the examinations are finished, the judge may ask you to gait your dog around the ring once more, either as a group or one at a time. This is your last chance to demonstrate your dog handling skills.

Whether you are gaiting as a group or individually, wait for the judge's cue before moving. If you are gaiting in a group and you are the first person in line, turn around and ask the others, "Are you ready?"

Keep a safe distance (about 3 feet) between yourself and the 4-H'er and dog ahead of you. If you get too close, slow down briefly to increase the distance between you and the next team before resuming the proper speed for your dog. If you have a slower dog, don't speed up even if other dogs are pulling ahead or running up behind you. Take the time to show your dog correctly. Do not pass other dogs unless the judge tells you to.

If the examination table is still in the ring while you are completing a go around, be sure that neither you nor your dog run into it. You may also ask the judge how they would like you to gait in relation to it before setting off. When you do your go around and stop to stack your dog, stop either before or after the table so it doesn't block the judge's view of you and your dog.



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

### The Courtesy Turn

Courtesy turns are useful maneuvers that are performed for one of three reasons:

- To get your large dog gaiting straight away from the judge at the proper speed without using up the first few feet of a gaiting pattern. When you complete the turn, your dog should be moving at the correct speed.
- To slow your fast dog to the proper speed.
- To line up your dog correctly in front of the judge before starting a gaiting pattern.

To perform a courtesy turn (Gaiting Diagram 6), briefly step across the judge's field of view, which will put you between the judge and your dog. Make a clockwise turn just to the judge's right side, then begin your pattern. You'll need to practice figuring out the best speed for you and your dog. Start the courtesy turn slowly, then gradually speed up so that when you complete the turn your dog is moving at the correct gait. There should be no pause between finishing the turn and starting the pattern—one should flow smoothly into the other.

### Baiting Your Dog

**Bait** is the term for a treat used in the show ring. The practice is called *baiting*, not *treating*, because you are baiting for expression, not rewarding your dog as you would during a training session. Some breeds are almost always baited, others rarely are. If your dog isn't interested in bait, you aren't required to use it.

With a well-trained dog, you will usually leave the ring with most of the bait you carried into it. The bait is generally a single quarter-sized piece of food, not the multiple small treats you would use while training.

Bait doesn't have to be food, it can be anything that your dog will pay attention to, such as a small toy. If you're using a toy, be courteous to the other 4-H'ers and dogs in the ring. Don't toss it around or squeak it, which would distract other competitors.

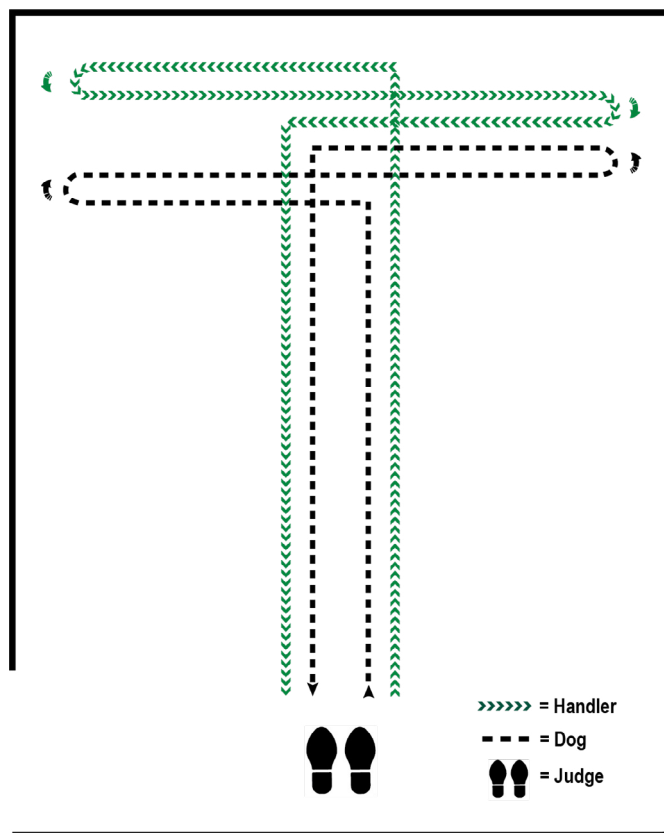
When baiting, stand in front and slightly to the left side of your dog so you are not blocking the judge's view. Keep the bait in your right hand, with the lead in your left.

You can carry bait in your pocket, tucked behind your armband, or in a bait bag. Bait bags are smaller than the

treat bags used in obedience training and are pinned onto your clothing. If you are using a bait bag, make sure it is closed before you bend over or gait your dog so the bait doesn't fall onto your dog or go flying out when you start moving.

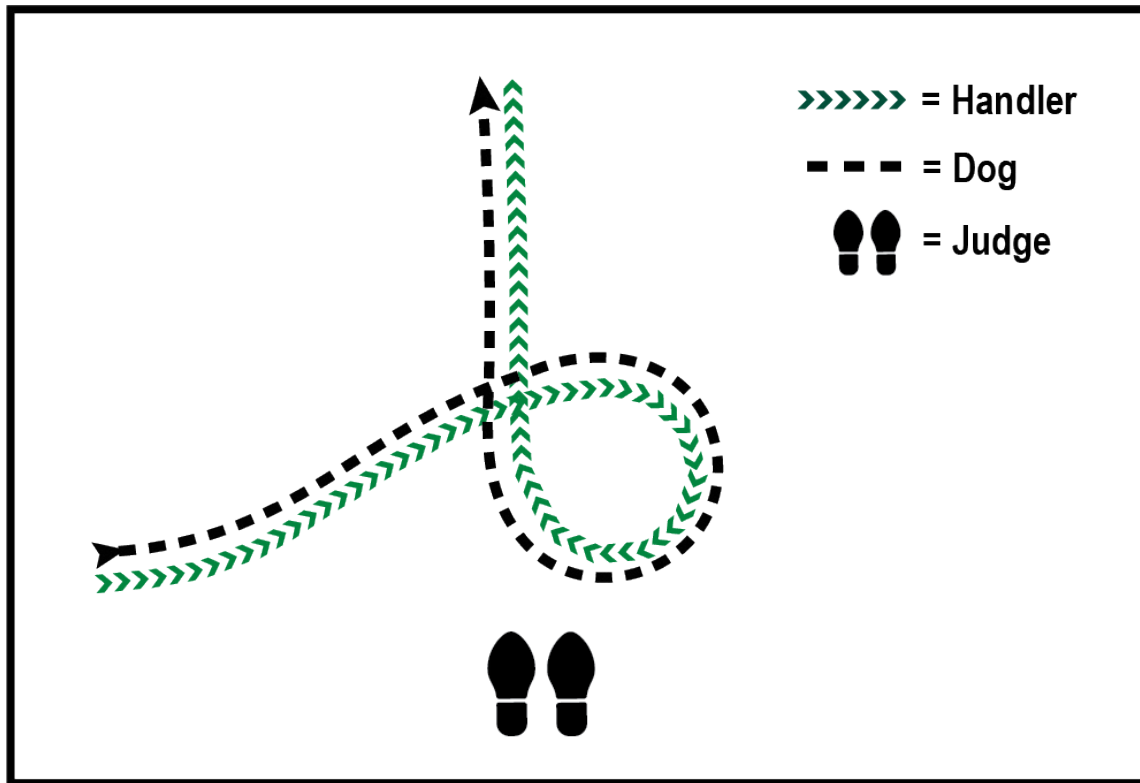
Keep the hand and arm holding the bait as still as possible, and don't distract the judge or other competitors by waving the bait around. Don't try to bait your dog while you are gaiting, focus instead on where you are going. Baiting is best done when the dog is standing still. If you are baiting your dog before the examination, don't feed the dog right before the judge looks at its bite.

**Gaiting Diagram 5. Gaiting the T pattern. Gait straight away from the judge and turn left to start the top of the T. Do an about-turn, changing hands on the lead and putting your dog on the right. Gait to the other side of the ring then do another about-turn, changing hands to put your dog on the left. When you reach the center of the T, turn left and return to the judge. (Note: Large or fast-moving dogs should do a circle to the right before they return to the judge.)**



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

Gaiting Diagram 6. Courtesy turn diagram.



### The Judge's Examination

The judge's examination is your first opportunity to demonstrate how well you know your dog and its breed standard. Wait until the judge signals you to move forward so they can observe your skill at moving your dog into position to be stacked.

If you have a small breed dog and you don't see a table in the ring, you are permitted to (politely) ask for one. When you reach the examination table, check it for stability to show that you are concerned about your dog's safety. Next, at the judge's signal, carefully pick up your dog and place it as close to the center of the front edge of the table as you can. Then hand stack your dog (Figure 10).

When hand stacking your dog for the examination, don't lift the dog by the stomach to place its feet, and never use your feet to move your dog's feet. The judge will deduct points from your stacking score for either of these moves.

Once your dog is stacked, adjust its silhouette as needed by, for example, raising or lowering the tail, baiting for expression, or moving the ears forward. If your dog is on

a table or ramp, move a short way down the side of the table or ramp so the judge has a clear view of your dog. If your dog is on the floor, move slightly to one side and bait forward to let the approaching judge clearly see your dog's expression.

The judge will check your dog's silhouette, then approach from the front to look at the head and expression. You may bait your dog at this point, but don't let it eat the bait. When the judge moves toward your dog to start the exam, you must have control of the dog's head because where the head goes, the rest of the dog follows.

For the judge's safety, shorten your leash and hold onto either the dog's head or its collar. While the judge should be skilled in reading dog body language and staying out of harm's way, you must not let your dog turn its head to follow the judge. If something startles or frightens your dog, you need to have complete control over where its head goes.

The judge will feel the shape of your dog's skull and the ear set. Then they will ask you to show your dog's bite. Next, the judge will move their hands down the dog, checking the

## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

**Figure 10. A series of photographs showing an exhibitor safely and securely lifting their dog onto a show table and stacking the dog for examination.**



front first and then the rear. You can put one or both hands on your dog's head while this is happening if you need to. If your dog moves a foot while the judge is checking it, you may reset the foot. If the judge moves an incorrectly placed foot into the proper position, they will expect you to know enough not to undo the correction.

Once the judge finishes the hands-on exam, they will take a step back and look once more at your dog's silhouette. Now you can adjust your dog's position or expression as needed, such as by holding the tail, baiting, or smoothing the dog's coat. Then, step back and resume showing off your dog.



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

### Checking the Bite

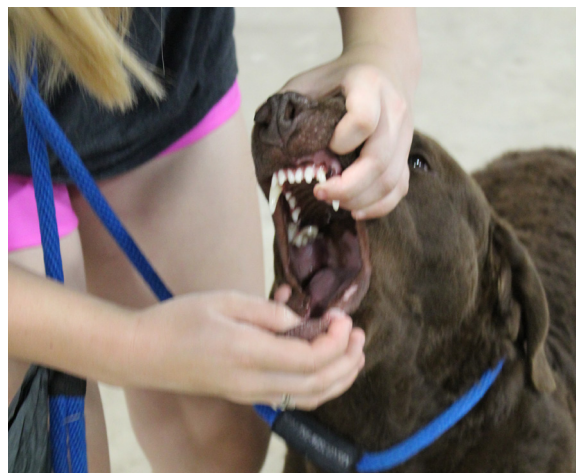
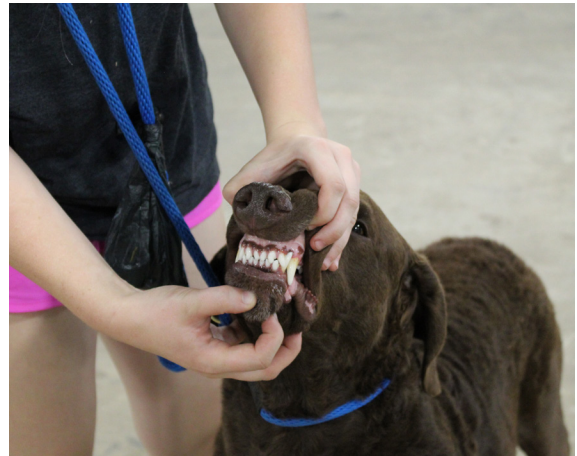
The **bite** is the alignment of the dog's teeth when its jaws are closed and its lips and **flews** (the upper, side lips) are parted. Which teeth you need to show the judge depends on your dog's breed. Some breeds are only required to show the front teeth, while some are required to show the teeth on all sides and to open the mouth.

Read your dog's breed standard to learn the **dentition** it should have. An AKC document for judges called "Conducting Oral Exams" (<https://bit.ly/3zBB9K0>) lists which oral exam (front, sides, open mouth, or thumb) each breed is required to have at AKC shows. Practice the type of examination your dog's breed typically undergoes so that your dog is used to having its mouth handled.

The first step in showing any part of your dog's bite is to put your bait away. Then, keeping your head and hair out of the judge's line of sight, tilt the dog's head up toward the judge. Remember to use the fewest fingers possible to show your dog's bite to give the judge a clear view.

- **Bite (Front)**—To show your dog's incisors (front teeth), close the dog's mouth, then gently pull the upper and lower lips apart to show all of the incisors (Figure 11).
- **Teeth (Side)**—To show your dog's teeth, first show the incisors following the steps in the bite exam. Then, starting on the side closest to the judge, gently pull the upper and lower flews apart along the muzzle to show the side teeth from the canines to the molars. Repeat on the other side.
- **Mouth (Open mouth)**—To show your dog's dentition, carefully open its mouth by sliding your index fingers and thumbs behind the canine teeth. (With practice, this move will signal your dog to open its mouth.) The judge will quickly count your dog's teeth, then indicate that you may close its mouth.
- **Thumb**—The judge will run the flat of their thumb across the outside of your dog's top lip (or inside along your dog's gums) to check that the jaw is properly aligned. This procedure is appropriate in smaller breeds with short muzzles and undershot jaws.

**Figure 11.** A handler showing their dog's teeth for the judge's bite examination, according to the breed requirement for Labrador Retrievers. The handler of this chocolate Lab is showing the dog's bite, or front teeth (top), side teeth (middle), and open mouth (bottom).



## The Showmanship Team in the Ring

### Ring Procedure

Now that you know more about how to perform each part of a dog showmanship class, let's combine them into the steps that make up the ring procedure:

1. Dogs and 4-H'ers are arranged by size and speed.
2. The 4-H'ers gait their dogs together or separately counterclockwise around the ring to a designated spot.
3. The judge examines the first dog in line.
4. The dog and 4-H'er perform the pattern the judge has chosen.
5. The dog and 4-H'er gait around to the end of the line.
6. Steps 3 through 5 are repeated until all the dogs have been examined.
7. The judge sends the dogs and 4-H'ers around the ring, either one at a time or as a group.
8. The judge places the class.

Judges may make some adjustments, but this is the basic procedure you should practice. If you are not in the first showmanship class of the day, try to watch it so you can find out the judge's preferred ring procedures. If you are the very first 4-H'er in a class, pay close attention to the judge. Ask them to repeat or clarify any procedure you do not understand. If you start a pattern and realize you are doing it wrong, stop and start the pattern again.

Judges may ask you age- and class-appropriate, breed-specific questions or general questions related to canine health and anatomy.

How you place in any showmanship class represents one judge's opinion of your performance and how well you understand your dog on that one day. Use the experience and knowledge you gain from each class you enter to help improve your performance in the future.







# Glossary of Dog Showmanship Terms

**bait/baiting**—A single small treat, toy, or other object used to help focus a dog's attention in the ring; the act of using bait in the ring.

**bite**—How a dog's teeth are lined up when its jaws are closed and its flews or lips are parted.

**canine teeth**—The four large teeth behind the incisors and in front of the premolars. There is one canine tooth on each side of the upper and lower jaws.

**conformation**—A dog's physical form; the ideal conformation for a given breed is spelled out in the breed standard, which is generally published by the breed's parent club or (in the U.S.) by the American Kennel Club or the United Kennel Club.

**courtesy turn**—A maneuver performed before starting a gaiting pattern to get a large dog moving at speed, a fast dog slowed down, or any dog aligned correctly with the judge. *Courtesy* refers to the idea that the turns were first used to honor or show courtesy to the judge.

**dentition (teeth)**—Dogs have baby teeth and permanent teeth. Complete dentition for an adult dog is 42 teeth: 12 incisors, 4 canine teeth, 16 premolars, and 10 molars.

**expression**—A dog's demeanor in the ring. Ideally, a dog shows animation and interest in the bait by standing still with ears forward, head up, and chest forward.

**flews**—The upper, side lips that often are large and somewhat floppy in hounds and some other dog breeds.

**free stack**—The process of stacking or posing a dog without touching it; with practice and training most dogs will free stack into the pose that is most appropriate for their breed; see *stack/stacking*.

**gait/gaiting**—The speed at which a dog moves in the ring; the act of moving a dog in a pattern in front of the judge or around the ring.

**grooming**—The process of caring for a dog's coat, nails, and teeth.

**hand stack**—To pose a dog for a judge's examination by moving its feet and legs with your hands and holding its head and tail in a specific position that is appropriate for its breed.

**husbandry**—The breeding and care of dogs (including health and training).

**incisors**—A dog's six upper and six lower front teeth that are between the canine teeth.

**mixed breed**—A dog whose parents are not of the same breed.

**overshot jaw**—A jaw misalignment in which a dog's upper jaw is longer than its lower jaw.

**pace**—A rolling gait in which the dog's front and rear legs on the same side move together; pacing is generally considered incorrect in the ring for most breeds.

**pattern**—A specific path you and your dog follow in front of the judge so they

can see you both move from as many angles as possible.

**purebred**—A dog whose parents are both of the same breed.

**ramp**—A low table, 15 to 24 inches high, with no more than a 30-inch incline from the floor to the tabletop on one end for a dog to walk up and down. A dog is stacked on the ramp for examination by a judge.

**stack/stacking**—To pose a dog to make the most of its appearance before examination by a judge. A 4-H'er may do this by physically moving the dog's feet (*hand stacking*) or by using bait and light pressure on the collar or lead to encourage the dog to move its feet itself (*free stacking*).

**table**—To place a small dog so it can be posed for and then examined by the judge. Often a grooming table with the grooming arm removed is called into service for the purpose. The table's exact dimensions are less important than that it is sturdy and has a nonslip surface.

**trot**—A two-beat gait in which the dog's diagonal feet (front left and back right or front right and back left) move and strike the ground at the same time. In dog showmanship, a trot is the preferred gait, though the style and speed of the trot depend on the breed.

**undershot jaw**—A jaw misalignment in which a dog's lower jaw is longer than its upper jaw. Undershot jaws are typical in bulldog breeds but not in most other breeds.



# Resources

The resources listed here cover various aspects of dog care, management, and showing.

## Books

Read as much as you can on dog showing, breeding, judging, behavior, and structure, and about specific breeds.

Alston, G. G., with Vanacore, C. (1992). *The winning edge: Show ring secrets*. Howell Book House.

American Kennel Club. (2017). *The new complete dog book* (22nd Ed.). CompanionHouse Books.

Elliot, R. P. (2014). *Dogsteps: A new look* (3rd Ed.). CompanionHouse Books.

Gilbert Jr., E. M., & Gilbert, P. H. (2013). *Encyclopedia of K-9 terminology*. Direct Book Service.

Smith, C. S. (2001). *The absolute beginners guide to showing your dog*. Three Rivers Press.

Trotter, P. C. (2009). *Born to win, breed to succeed* (2nd Ed.). Kennel Club Books.

## Online & Other Resources

Contact your local kennel club and your favorite breed's parent club and check out the organizations and publications listed in this section.

**A Bit on Bites: Judging Canine Dentition** (<https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/sports/bites-judging-canine-dentition/>)—This AKC web article from 2015 offers glimpses of some of the more unusual bite standards found in dog breed standards.

### AKC and UKC All-Breed Shows—

The American Kennel Club and United Kennel Club sponsor a variety of all-breed shows around the U.S. throughout the year. Spectators can pick up a wealth of dog showing tips and techniques from watching breed-specific and junior showmanship classes. Video clips from many shows are available on YouTube.

### Conducting Oral Exams ([https://images.akc.org/pdf/events/conformation/Oral\\_exams.pdf](https://images.akc.org/pdf/events/conformation/Oral_exams.pdf))—

This 2023 resource from the American Kennel Club outlines how AKC judges should perform oral exams of dogs. It includes an “Oral Exam by Breed” chart that lists which breeds are required to have which oral exams (front, sides, open mouth, or thumb exam) at AKC shows.

### 4-H Dog Project Manual: Facilitator Guide for Leaders and 4-H Members

(<https://www.akc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/4-H-manual-FINAL-jan18-2022.pdf>)—This manual was developed in 2021 by Florida 4-H with the American Kennel Club.

**Glossary** (<https://www.akc.org/about/glossary/>)—This page on the AKC website offers definitions of dog terms.

### Junior Showmanship Guidelines

(<https://4h.extension.wisc.edu/files/2021/05/Junior-Showmanship-Guidelines.pdf>)—This PDF from University of Wisconsin–Extension includes a variety of showmanship diagrams such as for the courtesy turn.

### Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Exhibitor Dress Code

(<https://bit.ly/44zdk46>)—A summary of the clothing expectations for exhibitors in Michigan 4-H dog showmanship classes.

### Table Breeds List (<https://bit.ly/3M1Cb9T>)—

This 2023 AKC resource lists the dog breeds in its table-required, ramp-required, ramp-optional, and ground-only categories for AKC dog shows.

### Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show

(<https://www.westminsterkennelclub.org/>)—Known by fans as simply “Westminster,” this dog show began in 1877 and has been televised every year since 1948. Clips from previous years’ shows are available on the Westminster Kennel Club website and on YouTube. Watch the breed judging and juniors competitions to learn more about how to show your favorite breed.





# Appendix A: Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Score Sheet



CLASS: \_\_\_\_\_

ARM BAND NUMBER						
BREED						
Handler						
Attitude (5)						
Dress & grooming (5)						
Posture (5)						
Go around						
Attention (5)						
Control (5)						
Courtesy (5)						
Stacking						
Timing (5)						
Square (5)						
Show bite (5)						
Reset (5)						
Complete unit (5)						
Gaiting patterns (Down and Back, Triangle, L, or T)						
Control (5)						
Turns (5)						
Stop (5)						
Handler position (5)						
Final stacking						
Head & tail (5)						
Side (5)						
Front (5)						
Rear (5)						
Handler (5)						
TOTAL SCORE: (perfect score = 100 points)						

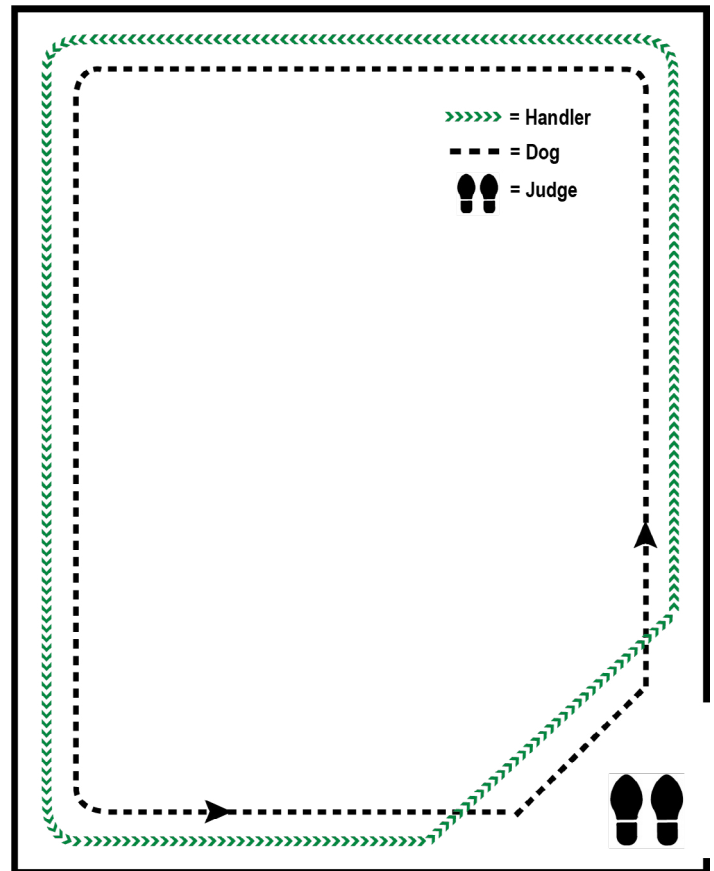
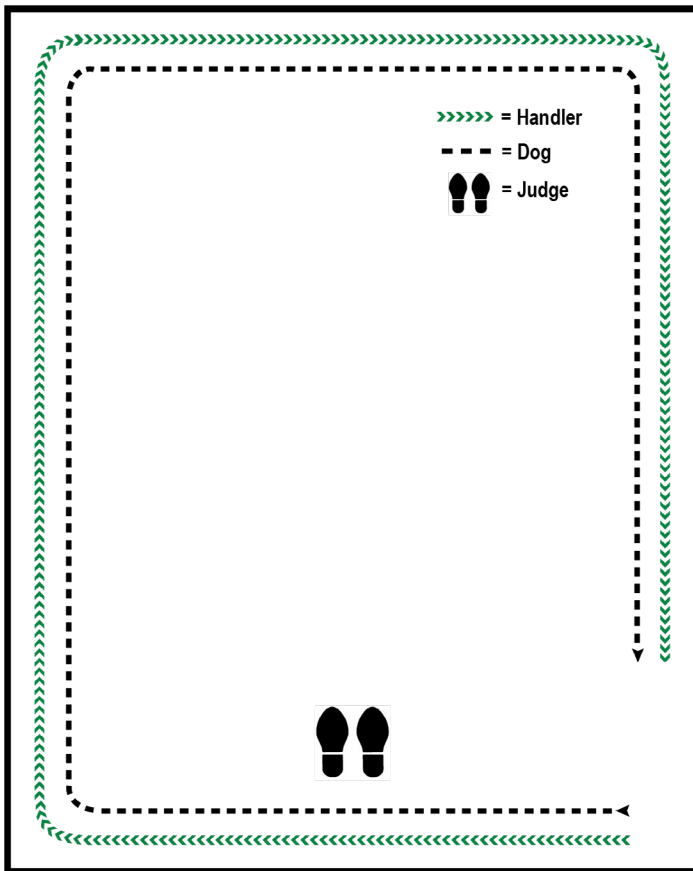


# Appendix B: Michigan 4-H Dog Showmanship Gaiting Diagrams

This appendix includes diagrams of group gaiting with the judge in various places in the ring and all of the gaiting patterns you could be asked to do in a Michigan 4-H dog showmanship competition. (**Note:** Gaiting Diagrams A, B, and C do not appear in the body of the text.)

**Gaiting Diagram A. Gaiting in a group with the judge in the center. Leave a safe distance between dogs (about 3 feet). Only pass other 4-H'ers and dogs if the judge tells you to. Be considerate of dogs that have slowed or stopped.**

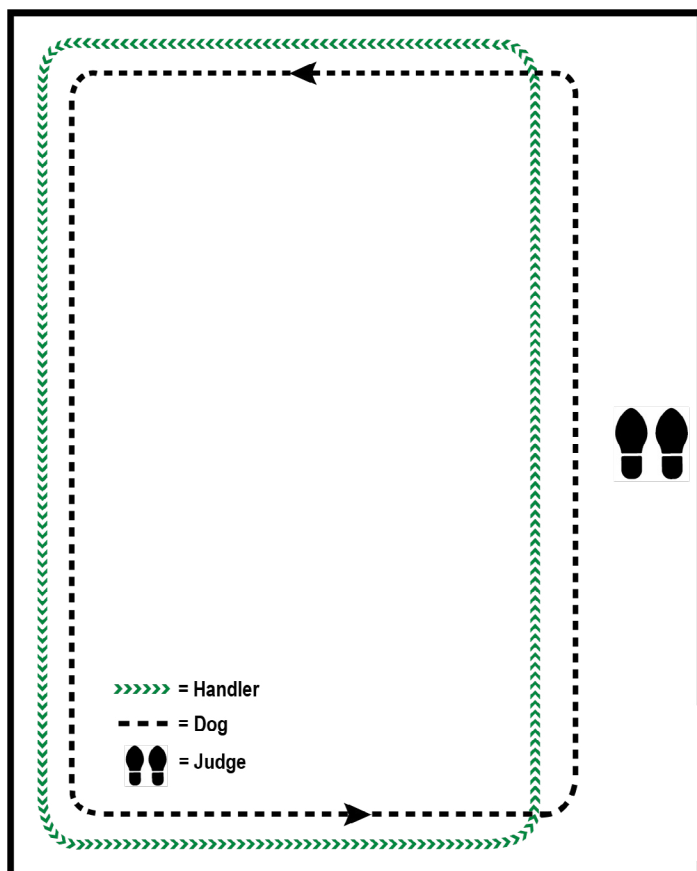
**Gaiting Diagram B. Gaiting in a group with the judge in the corner. Cross behind your dog as you approach the judge. Cross in front of your dog after you pass the judge.**



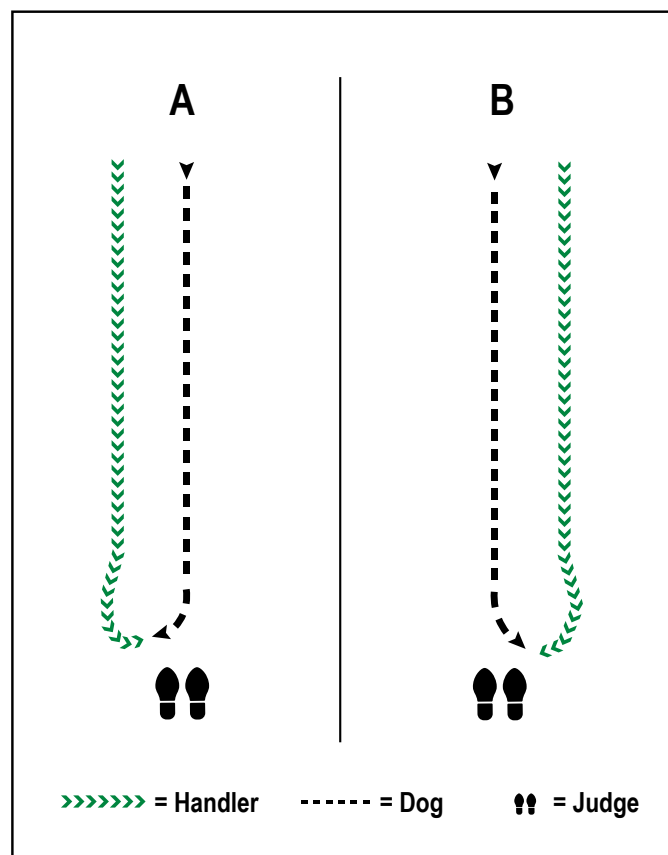


## Appendix B

**Gaiting Diagram C. Gaiting in a group with the judge at the side. Cross behind your dog at the corner before the judge. Cross in front of your dog at the corner after the judge.**

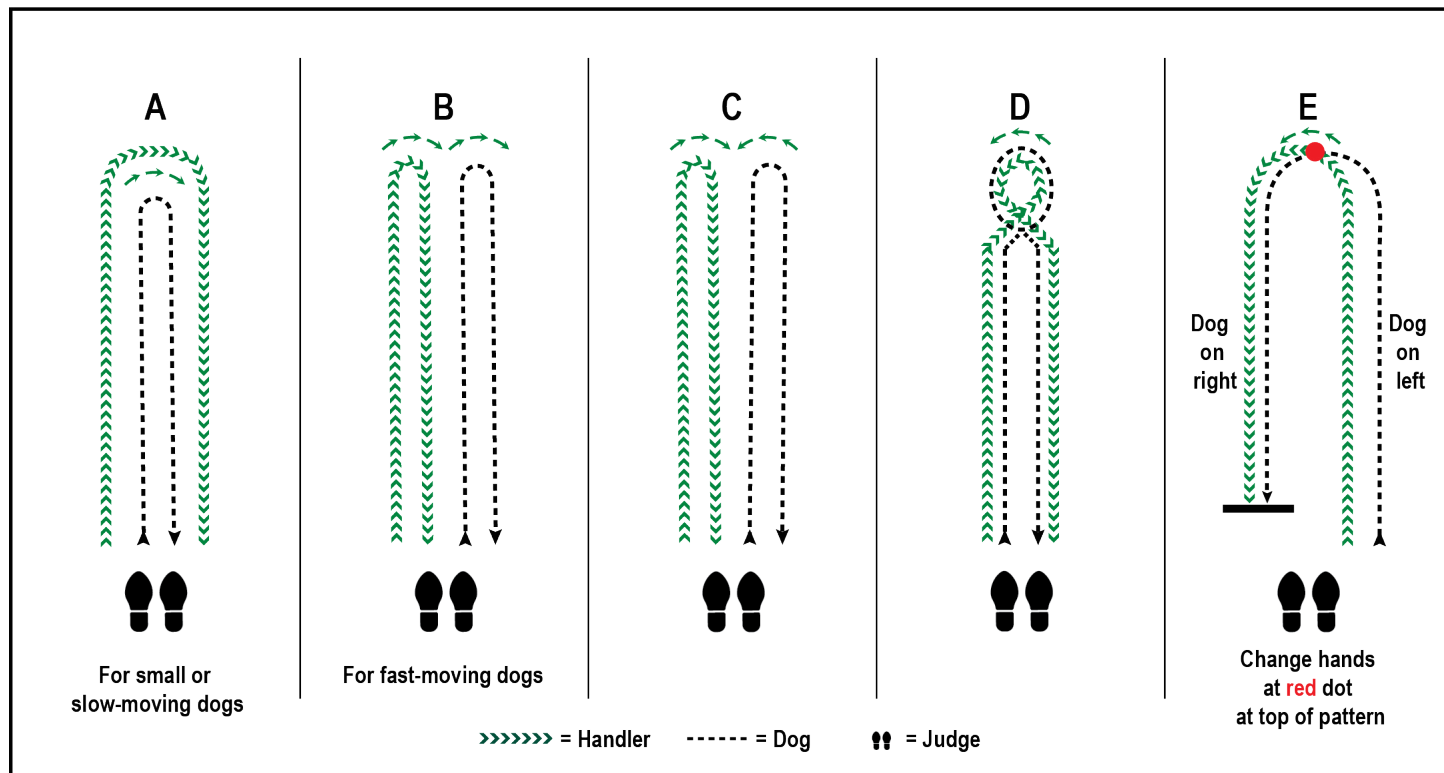


**Gaiting Diagram 1. Free stack diagram. Come to a natural stop and free stack your dog 3 to 4 feet from and at a slight angle to the judge. Stand completely (A) or slightly (B) in front of the dog. If the judge moves around your dog, move smoothly to keep the dog between you and the judge.**

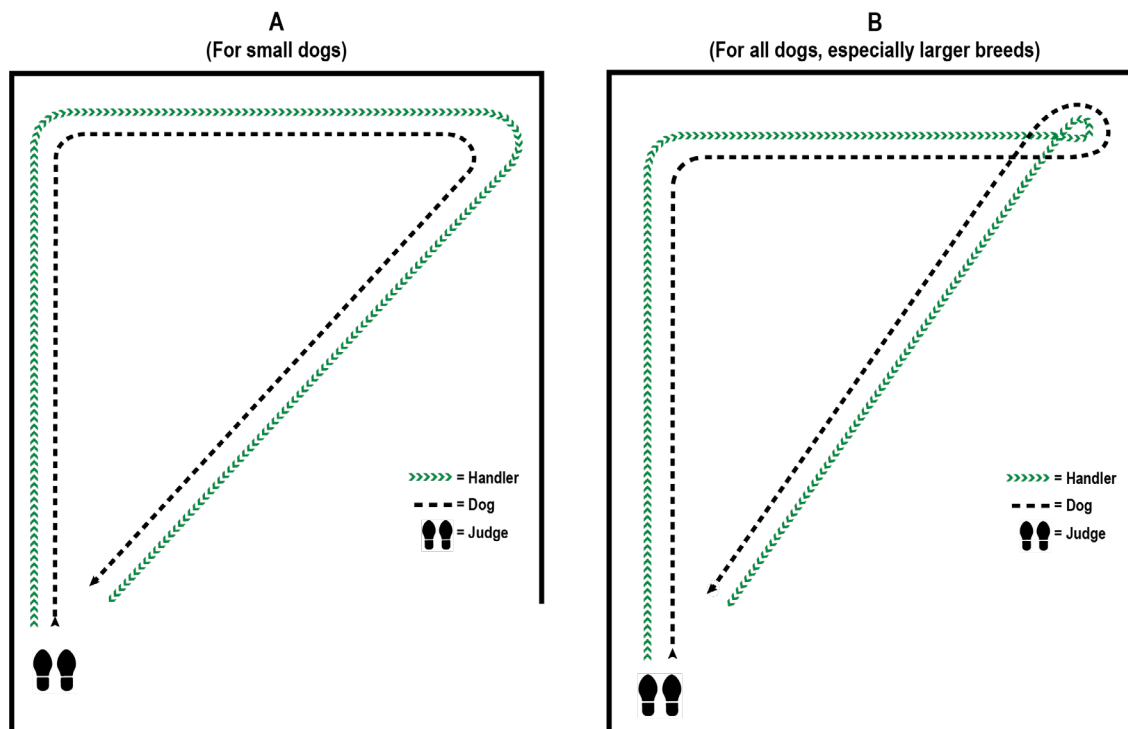


## Appendix B

**Gaiting Diagram 2. Down and Back gaiting patterns.** Be sure to gait your dog in a straight line away from and back to the judge. Don't let your dog stop during the about-turn. (From left to right): Pattern A works well for small or slow-moving dogs; Patterns B, C, and D work well for large or fast-moving dogs, or when you need to change sides with a dog of any size or speed; Pattern E works well for large or fast-moving dogs.

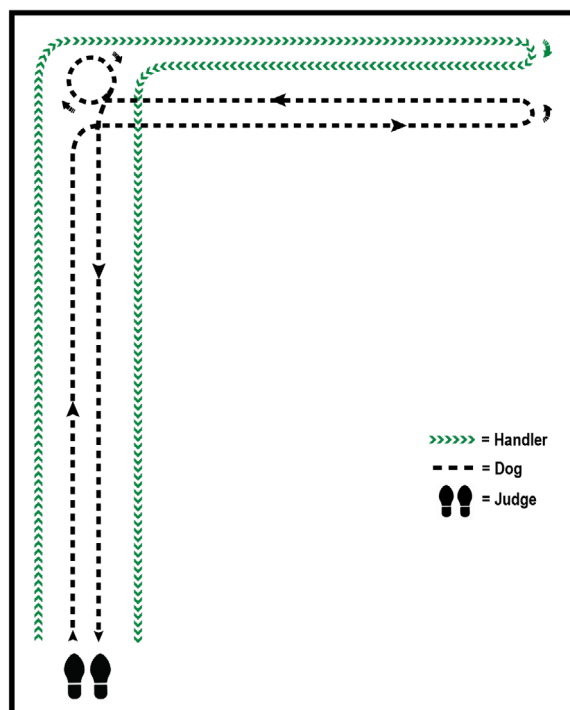
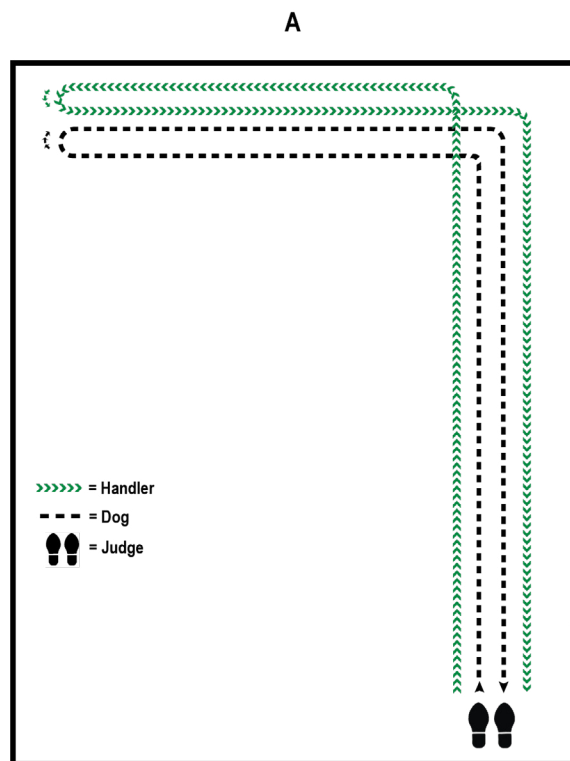


**Gaiting Diagram 3. Gaiting the Triangle pattern.**

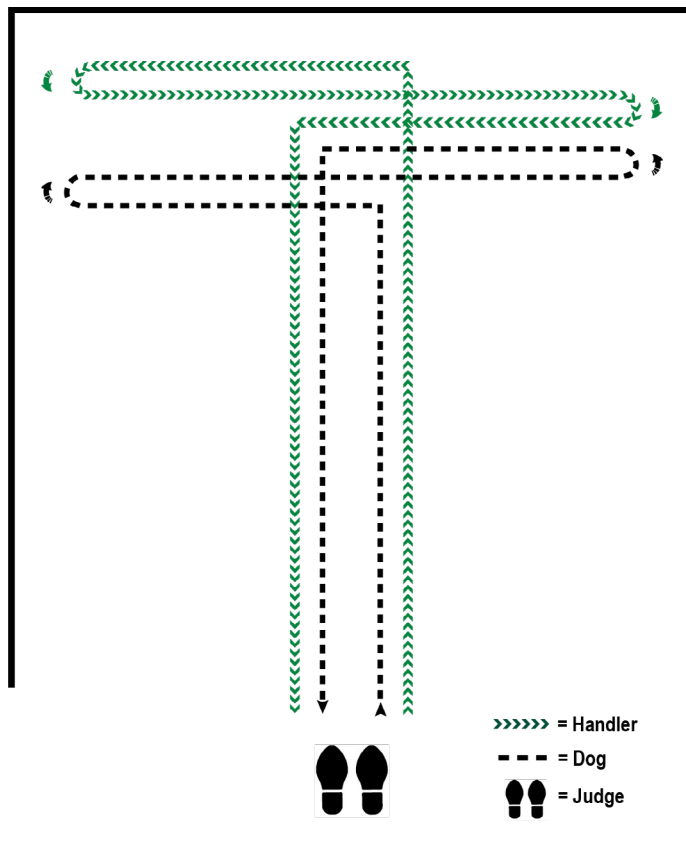


## Appendix B

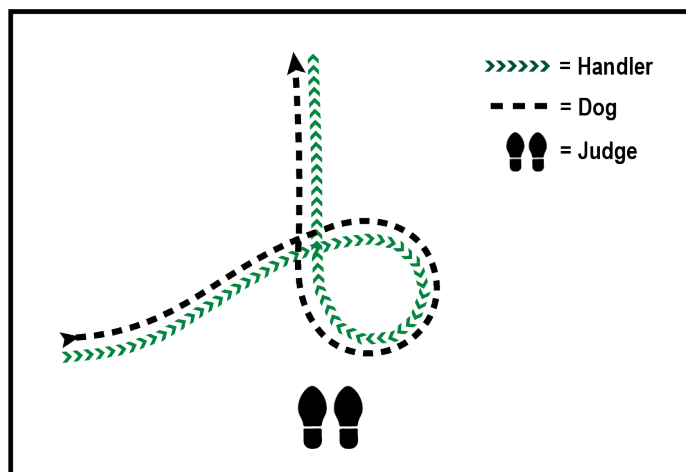
**Gaiting Diagram 4. Gaiting the L pattern. Cross in front of your dog at the crook of the L. When you reach the corner diagonally opposite the judge, change your dog to your left side and complete a smooth left turn.**



**Gaiting Diagram 5. Gaiting the T pattern. Gait straight away from the judge and turn left to start the top of the T. Do an about-turn, changing hands on the lead and putting your dog on the right. Gait to the other side of the ring then do another about-turn, changing hands to put your dog on the left. When you reach the center of the T, turn left and return to the judge. (Note: Large or fast-moving dogs should do a circle to the right before they return to the judge.)**



**Gaiting Diagram 6. Courtesy turn diagram.**







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