Grooming and Handling Dogs
Table of Contents

Showing Your Dog ................................................................. 3
Posing Your Dog ................................................................. 5
Gaiting Your Dog in the “L” Pattern ............................................ 11
The Triangle Pattern .............................................................. 13
Training Your Dog for Grooming and Handling Classes ............... 14
Grooming Your Dog ............................................................... 14
Score Card ........................................................................... 15

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This educational material has been prepared for 4-H use by the National 4-H Dog Care & Training Development Committee, composed of representatives of the Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and State Land Grant Universities in cooperation with the National 4-H Council. Dr. Dennis A. Hartman, Professor of Dairy Science, Virginia Tech, served as principal author.

Special thanks are extended to Purina Dog Foods Group, Ralston Purina Company, for financial and technical assistance.

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the following 4-H members who posed their dogs so patiently for this publication: Stephanie Johnson, Brewster, New York; Nancy Hahn, Brewster, New York; Jessica Ettinger, Ithaca, New York; Mrs. Susan Hamlin, 4-H Leader, Elmira, New York; and Martin Grey, County Agent, Carmel, New York.

Material for this publication is based on information provided by the American Kennel Club. There is a United Kennel Club which also has information on training dogs. If you are interested in what they have to offer, contact them at 100 E. Kilgore Road, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49001.

Printed and distributed by National 4-H Council, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815. National 4-H Council is a not-for-profit educational organization that uses private resources to help expand and strengthen the 4-H program. 4-H is the youth education program of the Cooperative Extension Service of the State Land-Grant Universities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Programs and educational materials supported by National 4-H Council are available to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin or handicap. Council is an equal opportunity employer.
This bulletin has been prepared to instruct 4-H members in how to show their dogs in grooming and handling classes. It also will be helpful to anyone who wishes to enter his dog in a breed show.

Competition is important in the development of good attitudes and good sportsmanship. In addition, competing for honors in grooming and handling classes encourages both youths and adults to groom and handle their dogs to the best of their ability. Proper feeding, care and training are basic to grooming; therefore these classes play an important role in the 4-H Dog Care & Training program.

At dog shows you can meet many people, all of whom have a love for dogs. You will learn a great deal about feeding and caring for your dog and about dog behavior. If you have not attended a dog show, plan to do so soon.

Both purebred and mixed breed dogs can be shown in grooming and handling classes. The dog is judged both on his performance in the ring and on his appearance. In addition to obeying commands to heel, stand and turn, he must look alert and be well groomed. Because the dog is being judged on condition, grooming and temperament as well as on the way he moves, showing in this class requires just as much careful preparation as does showing in an obedience class. When competing in a grooming and handling class, bathing the dog the night before the show will not be your only concern. Clipping, plucking and putting a bloom on a dog’s coat take careful preparation.

### Showing Your Dog

The following 34 points describe the procedure that is used in grooming and handling classes:

1) The judge or announcer will signal the beginning of the class and ask the handlers to enter the ring, taking their dogs in as large a circle as the ring will allow. The judge will usually direct you in a counter-clockwise direction after entering the ring. Keep the dog on your left side when going counter-clockwise to place him between you and the judge (figure 1). If the judge asks you to reverse your direction, place the dog on your right so he is still between you and the judge. If the dog in front of you is slow, you may pass him on the inside. Everyone should attempt to keep his dog moving at a suitable speed since it benefits the handlers as well as the judge and spectators.

When moving in a circle, your dog should be shown at his natural gait. For certain breeds this will be a brisk walk; for others it may be an easy trot. If you are showing a small dog you may only have to walk briskly to put him at his natural gait; with a large dog you may have to run flat out to put him at a showy trot. You should train your dog to move with his head up or carry it at the position suggested.
by the breed standard. You may encourage your dog to move with animation by talking to him as you move. This will also help in keeping his attention. Just remember that a happy dog is a handsome dog. You should also remember that you are on exhibit. Move as smoothly as possible and try to perform as a team with your dog. Remember, however, that your purpose is to show your dog and not yourself.

2) After you have circled several times, the judge will signal that the exhibitors should line up. The dogs should remain in order and be posed head to tail (figure 2). The judge may look at them briefly from a distance of about 25 feet to get an overall perspective of the class.

3) Next, the judge will carefully inspect each dog (figure 3). You will be asked to bring your dog in front of the others for inspection and gaiting. In order to show your dog correctly, you must know how a properly posed and gaited dog of your breed performs. Breed magazines and attendance at dog shows will help you understand the standards for your dog. If your dog is a mixed breed, he should be shown according to the standards of the breed he resembles most.
Posing Your Dog

The following illustrations will show you how to move your dog's legs to set him up to his best advantage. If you grasp the dog's leg as shown in the illustrations, he is less likely to move them after you remove your hand.

It will take a bit of practice for you to learn to make the proper moves around your dog so that you can present him with assurance. After some practice, you will be able to move around your dog very smoothly and work as a team. When training your dog to pose, let him know that you mean business and that it is not a playtime. Practice training your dog twice a day for a 15- or 20-minute period. Training twice a day for a shorter period is much better than once a day for a very long period. In a grooming and handling competition, the judge may purposely or accidentally cause your dog to move one of his legs, thus changing the appearance. If this happens, correct the pose immediately but smoothly.

4) If your breed is shown without a lead, remove it now. Do not toss it aside carelessly but carefully place it nearby so that neither you nor the judge will become entangled in it. Do not remove the lead if your dog is likely to escape from you and cause troubles with other dogs in the ring. When you pose your dog, place the front legs first. Put your hand over the elbow joint and lift his leg (figure 4). If you grasp him by the foot or lower leg he probably will move after you remove your hand.

5) With small breeds you may wish to set the front end in this manner (figure 5).

6) Next, place the rear legs. Grasp the leg just above the hock (figure 6).

7) You can also place the rear legs by reaching under the dog. When placing the legs, you must lift up slightly on
the dog's head because he will tend to lower his head when you touch his legs (figure 7).

8) When posing your dog, place the legs wide enough to indicate strong front and rear ends. The feet should point straight ahead. The rear legs should be positioned far enough back so that the portion of the leg between the hock and pastern is perpendicular. This stance will help the dog to present a strong back, rather than giving the appearance of being sway-backed. His head should be held high enough to add style. Hold the dog by his lower jaw and the side of the muzzle on the side opposite of the judge. The manner in which the tail should be held varies somewhat between breeds. The English Cocker in figure 8 is posed correctly.

9) The dog in figure 9 has been stretched too much. Note how his back is flattened. He seems to have lost a bit of character throughout.

10) Small breeds are shown and handled the same as large dogs except that they may be shown on a table to enable the judge to examine them more easily (figure 10).
11) The judge will examine your dog's head for shape, width between the eyes and other points characteristic of your breed (figure 11).

12) The ear length and set of setters and some other breeds is important. The judge will pull the ears forward to measure their length (figure 12).

13) The eyes should be clean and clear (figure 13).

14) The ears should be clean (figure 14).
Honor the judge before gaiting if this is the accepted practice in your area. Ask the steward as you enter the ring.

Figure 22—(lower right) Beginning the "L" pattern.
Figure 23—(upper right) Making the square turn.
Figure 24—(upper left) Reverse the pattern by changing hands on the lead and turning the dog in toward yourself. Change hands and reverse as smoothly as possible.
Gaiting Your Dog in the “L” Pattern

After the judge has examined your dog, he will ask you to gait him. He may ask you to use the “L” pattern that is shown in the diagram.

21) Before gaiting your dog, honor the judge by turning your dog in front of him. Some judges prefer not to be honored. You may ask the steward when entering the ring if the judge or show committee has a preference.

22) Regardless of whether you honor the judge, be sure to get your dog under control at this time and go away from the judge in a straight line for about 25'. This allows the judge to clearly see the action of your dog. Take your dog at a brisk trot or the natural gait specified in the breed standard.

23) Make a square turn to the left and continue for about 25'.

24) To reverse the pattern, change hands on the lead and turn the dog in towards yourself. Do this as smoothly as possible.

25) At the corner of the “L”, again change hands and turn the dog in toward yourself.

26) Now bring the dog straight toward the judge. During the entire procedure the dog should travel with style and animation.
27) Upon returning to the judge present your dog in a natural pose. The judge will check and see if your dog stands straight on his front and rear legs. A bait such as cooked liver may be used in some areas to show your dog to his best advantage. The ring steward will announce to the contestants if baits are permitted.

28) If you are showing a large dog, such as an English Setter, you may prefer not to change hands on the leash but to take the dog around yourself at the end of the “L” pattern. This solves the problem of turning a large dog in toward yourself. Large dogs are sometimes a bit awkward and difficult to turn.

29) When taking the dog around yourself, the lead remains in your left hand and the dog is on your left side. Since you do not want to block the judge’s view, train your dog to stay behind. At the corner of the “L”, you should make a square corner and go straight toward the judge as shown in figure 26. Always make square corners and trot your dog in straight lines.
The Triangle Pattern

The judge may ask you to follow the triangle pattern as illustrated. This pattern will be easy for your dog to learn as he will remain on your left side at all times. Neither does it require changing the lead from the left to the right hand.

30) If honoring the judge is preferred by the judge or show committee, do so as shown in figure 21. If this is not preferred, take your dog straight away from the judge for about 25 feet at a brisk trot or the natural gait specified in your breed standard.

31) Make a turn to the left and continue for about 25 feet. Talk to him as you move to keep his attention and looking his best. (upper right)

32) Make a second turn to your left and go straight toward the judge (upper left). Stop before the judge and present your dog in a natural pose as shown in figure 27. This will allow the judge to see how correctly your dog stands when his feet have not been placed. The ring steward will announce if the use of baits is permitted.
Training Your Dog for Grooming and Handling Classes

It will take practice to train your dog to perform the “L” or “triangle” exercise well. Walk him through the pattern several times before going at a brisk trot. Young dogs in particular may mistake the brisk trot for some kind of game and therefore not pay close attention. Walking through the pattern will also give you more time to change hands and to turn your dog with authority.

You may teach your dog to pose more easily if you begin training away from distractions such as other people and dogs. After your dog has made some progress, find a location where there will be distractions similar to those in a show ring and ask someone unfamiliar with your dog to examine him as the judge will. When shown in breed classes, the male dog will be checked for the existence of both testicles and their normality. You should rehearse this examination also. Each training session should be no more than 15 to 20 minutes in length. Try to end each lesson on a pleasant note and give your dog plenty of praise.

Tips on Showing

The following points are important when showing your dog. Wear the armband identification on your left arm. When posing your dog, keep him between yourself and the judge. As the judge moves around your dog, step backward or forward so you do not block the judge’s view. Move around your dog with alertness and smoothness. Your positions and the moves you make should be well rehearsed. After the judge has examined your dog and has turned away, be prepared for him to glance back for a final look.

The temperament of your dog is very important. You can lose points if your dog is aggressive or shy when examined by the judge. If the dog attempts to bite, he will probably be dismissed from the class. Always have your dog under control and keep your composure. If your dog moves his foot or if the judge moves it, correct it as soon as it does not interfere with the activities of the judge. Do not be distracted by friends or relatives along the ringside. Give full attention to showing your dog (but always keep one eye on the judge). Continue to show until all the dogs have been placed and also as you leave the ring.

Learning to show a dog to his best advantage takes time and practice. You can learn by watching professional dog handlers and by studying pictures of your breed in dog magazines to learn the correct position of the tail and the general style you should present.

If you have trained your dog in obedience, you may have some difficulty teaching him to heel on the right side while gaiting. Also, he may sit occasionally when he should stand. These problems can be corrected with a bit of training. Use a training collar for obedience and a show lead for breed shows. If your breed uses a training collar for both obedience and breed classes, use a chain collar for one and nylon for the other. This distinction may help your dog to identify the performance that is appropriate. Many dogs do well in both obedience and breed classes. If you wish to participate in both, let no one discourage you.

Grooming Your Dog

Clipping, Plucking and Stripping

Most breeds require clipping and some need stripping and plucking as well. These skills call for special training and lots of experience. Instruction cannot be given in pictures or through descriptions. Learn these skills by observing and consulting with professionals at dog shows. You may also find books on these subjects at a book store or library.

Basic Grooming

All dogs should be clean and their coats should be free from loose hair and mats. Ears should be clean with no excess wax. All dogs should be shown with their toenails properly trimmed and most dogs are shown with their whiskers trimmed. Basic grooming can be done by a 4-H member.

Bathing

You may be told that dogs should not be bathed since it will cause dry coats, skin problems, and a variety of other ailments. This is not true — dogs should be bathed when they become dirty or develop a bad odor. Particularly since most dogs are pets and spend much time in the home and with the family, they cannot be allowed to become dirty or smelly. Bathing may remove the natural oils that give luster to a coat, but it will soon return to normal. Coat dressing can be used to give the coat bloom if needed for a show.

Before bathing your dog, fill his ears with a piece of cotton to keep water out of them. Smear a little vaseline into the corner of the eyes to keep soap from irritating them. Wet him completely from the neck back in order to keep fleas from migrating to his head. You may find it convenient to place a small or medium-sized dog in a tub or wash basin. A sink equipped with a hose and a sprinkler is handy.
Be sure to test the water temperature. It should be comfortable to your hand. A mild liquid dog shampoo is suggested because it penetrates to the skin easily and lathers quickly. Bar soap, either made especially for dogs or a mild all-purpose soap, may be more useful on feet and legs, especially if they are quite dirty. Work a brush back and forth through the coat to clean the skin and to remove any foreign materials from the hair. After washing the dog's coat, wash his head. A washcloth will control the lather and keep it out of the dog's eyes. The cloth can also be used to clean the inside of his ears. Use a cotton swab dampened with rubbing alcohol or a commercial ear-cleaning preparation to rid the inner part of the ear of dirt and excess wax. Rinse all the soap from the coat with plenty of water.

When the weather is warm, dogs can be washed outdoors. At other times use a heated room such as the garage, basement, or other convenient area so that the dog will not become chilled. After washing, use a comb to straighten tangles and remove water from the coat. You can then use towels to dry the coat. In breeds where it is important for the coat to lie flat, pin a towel around the dog's body.

**Trimming the Toe Nails**

The toenails should be trimmed to the approximate length shown in figure 18. Ask your veterinarian the correct length to trim the nails since it differs between breeds with light colored nails and dark nails. Dog nail trimmers are sold at many dog shows and at livestock supply stores. You may need someone to hold your dog's head while you hold the foot because dogs usually dislike this rather simple operation. After trimming, use a nail file to smooth the edges of the nail.

**Trimming the Whiskers**

Most breeds are shown with their whiskers trimmed off. It is best to use a pair of blunt-nosed scissors for this job because there is less danger of injury should the dog jump. If you do not have a pair of blunt-nosed scissors, an ordinary pair can be used but enlist the help of a friend to hold the dog. The whiskers should be cut smoothly at the muzzle.

---

**Score Card**

You and your dog may be judged according to the following score card:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance of Animal</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Condition and Thriftiness: normal growth, being neither too fat nor too thin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Temperament: friendly, neither shy nor aggressive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cleanliness: coat clean and free from excess loose hair. Skin, clean and indicating a healthy condition. Ears, clean and free from dirt and excess wax. Eyes, clear and not mattery. Teeth, clean and white (it is courteous for you to lift the dog's lips for the judge). Gums, clean and healthy, not pale and anemic</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Clipping and Plucking: hair clipped, plucked or brushed appropriate to the breed. Members are encouraged to do the clipping or plucking themselves, though it is also permissible to use the services of a professional</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Grooming: hair properly groomed, hair dressing should not be used excessively. Toenails should not be too long</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Showmanship</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total points: 100