

# A New Twist on Training with 2 x 2 Weaves

By Mary Ellen Barry, photos by  
Lynne Brubaker Photography, Inc.

I have been using the 2 x 2 weave method, originally developed by Susan Garrett, since its inception seven years ago. I personally find it to be a brilliant method to teach dogs an understanding of entries. Here I will present my own technique for training with 2 x 2 weave poles. I think this new process is simple for the handler to work through and I find the dog's learning and understanding is exceptional.

## STEP 1: Introducing Two Poles

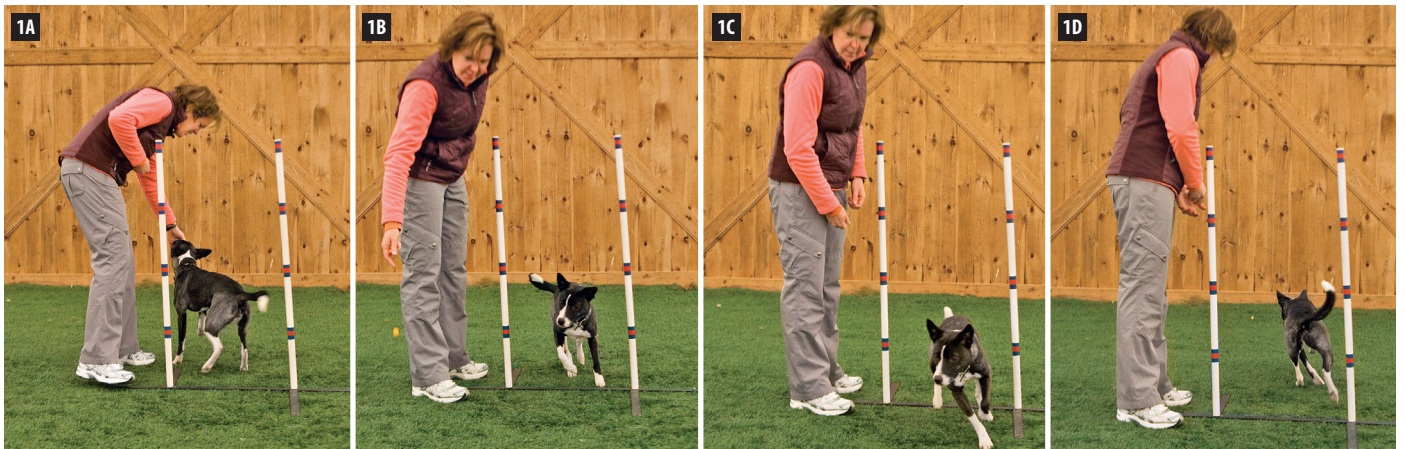
Start with a hungry dog and some treats that will easily show up on whatever surface you work on (I work mostly on artificial turf and find bright yellow cheese cubes to be perfect). Stand in a neutral position as illustrated in **Figure 1** and shape your dog to pass through the two poles. At this point, you are *not* concerned with correct entry. Your goal for this stage should be to get the dog eagerly passing back and forth through the poles. Start by marking and treating your dog for first looking at the poles, then moving toward the poles, then going through, and so on.

Initially, you can reward your dog from your hand. Once your dog understands to pass through the poles, you should *throw* your treat on the ground 3'-5' away from the poles. Throwing the treat teaches your dog to keep moving, not to stop between the poles; and it also sets up your dog to turn and approach the poles again. Time your rewards so that your dog is not looking at you before you throw your reward.

Throughout all stages of this training you want your dog to look *forward*, not at you.

I do not use a clicker at any point during the 2 x 2 training because I have found clicking can cause the dog to look at the handler more often. Also, the dog may slow down or be cautious between the two poles because he is anticipating a click.

Progress to Step 2 once your dog is eagerly passing through the poles, while looking ahead for his reward, and making an immediate turn to pass through again.



## STEP 2: Establishing Direction of Entry

Now that your dog is eagerly passing back and forth through the poles, you want to establish direction. From this point forward, only one direction will be correct. Your goal for this step is for your dog to learn that he should always pass through poles 1 and 2, with pole 1 on his left shoulder and pole 2 on his right shoulder.

Stand in a neutral position as in Step 1, with the dog on your right. Hold the dog by his collar. Release the dog to pass through the poles. Reward your dog for passing through with pole 1 on his left shoulder and pole 2 on his right. Throw your treat on the ground 3'-5' away from the poles toward "T" in the diagram. See **Figure 2**. After the dog gets his reward, turn and recall him to your right side,

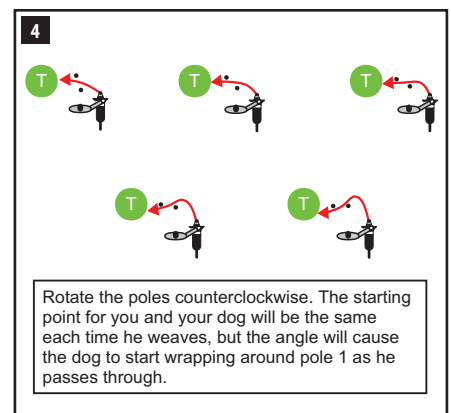
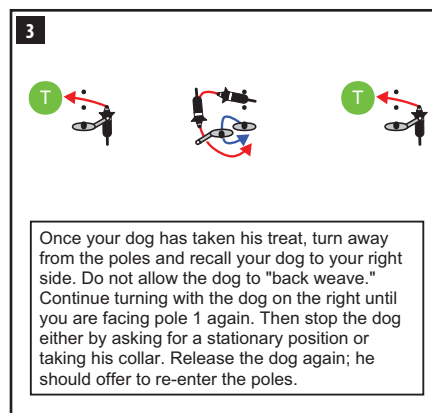
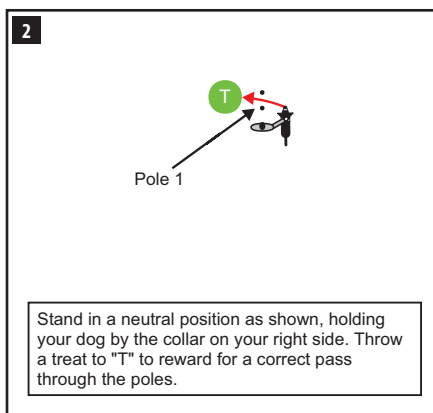
away from the poles. Do *not* let him pass back through the poles. Continue turning with the dog on the right until you're facing pole 1 again. Then stop the dog either by asking for a stationary position (sit, down, or stand) or taking his collar. Release the dog again; he should offer to re-enter the poles. See **Figure 3**.

If you do not stop your dog before each entry, your motion and shoulder rotation will be cueing the poles; at this point in the training you still want your dog to be *offering* the poles without any cues from you.

When your dog is eagerly passing through the poles correctly, it's time to start rotating the poles slightly after every few correct attempts. The poles should be rotated counterclockwise.

The starting point for you and your dog will be the same each time he weaves, but the angle will cause the dog to start wrapping around pole 1 as he passes through. As before, only reward for the correct behavior, throw rewards to the same place (the "T" in the diagrams), and recall the dog to your right side and stop him before allowing him to offer re-entering the poles. See **Figure 4**.

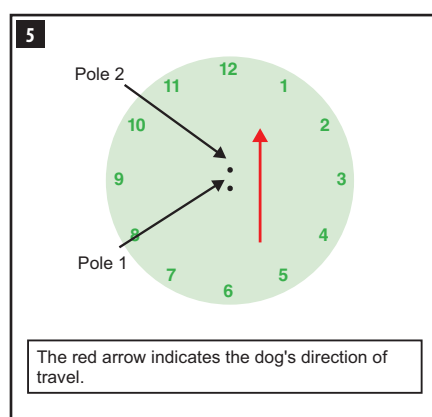
Progress to Step 3 when your dog is reliably moving away from your side (with no cues from you) and passing through poles 1 and 2, with pole 1 on his left shoulder and pole 2 on his right.



## STEP 3: Working Sends Around the Clock

Before starting this step, we need to talk about some general concepts that apply to this step as well as *all* of the steps that follow:

- During each step, you are going to be working entries "around the clock." Imagine the poles are on a clock face as in **Figure 5**. Pole 1 is always at 6 o'clock and the last pole (pole 2 in the initial training stages and later pole 12) is always at 12 o'clock. The dog should always pass through with pole 1 on his left and pole 2 on his right.
- Each session starts at 6 o'clock so that your dog understands which direction he is working. With success, you and your dog will then move in either a clockwise direction or a counterclockwise direction and start at a new location on the clock. You will work your way around the clock face in this manner. The entries at the lower portion of the clock (between 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock)



are easier entries for the dog, and the entries at the upper portion of the clock (between 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock) are much more difficult entries.

- Rewards are *always* thrown after the last pole at 12 o'clock, which is on the same line where more poles will be added.

- Rewards can be either food or toys. In each step, I recommend that you start with food rewards to maintain your dog's thoughtfulness and accuracy, and then progress to toy rewards to build speed and drive. When you are throwing your rewards, they should land 3'-5' past the last pole. You do not want to encourage your dog to fly out of the weave poles at full speed because you will be adding more poles at each stage. If your dog has rehearsed exiting at full speed and running 10'-15' to get his reward, he may be unable to progress through the later stages of training as easily because he will need to learn to look for more poles.
- Once your dog does the poles and gets his reward, do *not* let him pass back through the poles again on the way back to you.

Starting at 6 o'clock, stand in the same neutral position as in Step 1, with the dog on your right. As the dog passes through the poles, he will be making a correct entry (pole 1 on his left and pole 2 on his right). Mark and throw the reward toward 12 o'clock. Bring your dog back to your right side and repeat this a few times. Your dog should now be passing through the poles, making a correct entry, and looking for his reward to be thrown toward 12 o'clock. At this point, the dog should still be offering the poles, so you do not want to say *Weave* or *Poles*.

Next you will work around the clock to teach your dog to hit an entry from any angle. At this stage, you are *sending* your dog to the poles, so you are not moving. Start 3'-5' from the poles at 6 o'clock, with the dog on your right. Have the dog at your side, either holding his collar or gently restraining him. The dog can also be in a stay at your side and you can use a release word. If your dog makes the correct entry, throw the reward toward 12 o'clock and then take one step to your left to 7 o'clock. If your dog misses the entry, stay at 6 o'clock for the next attempt. If it takes him more than one attempt to hit the entry, stay at 6 o'clock for a few repetitions before moving to your left to 7 o'clock. See **Figure 6**.

When starting from 7 o'clock, you should again be 3'-5' from the poles with the dog on

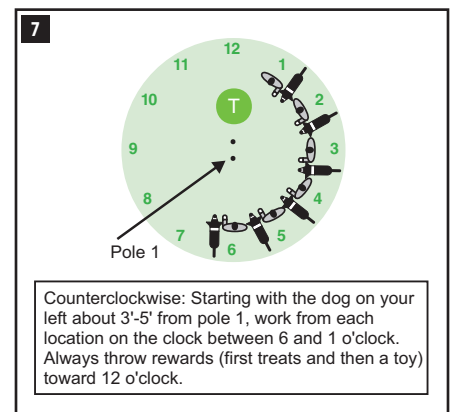
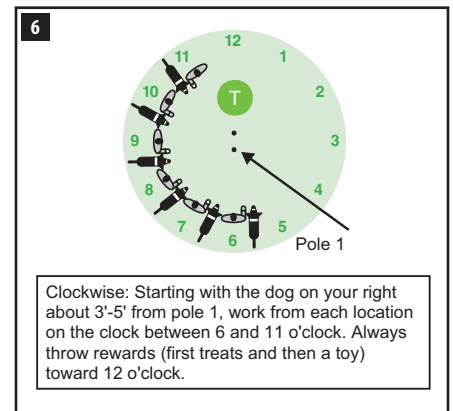
your right. If your dog hits the entry, reward and take another step to your left, so you are at 8 o'clock. If your dog misses the entry, stay at 7 o'clock for a few repetitions before moving to 8 o'clock.

Repeat the process at 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, and 11 o'clock. Each time the reward should be thrown toward 12 o'clock. You want your dog to understand from the very beginning how to hit challenging entries and that he should always enter with pole 1 on his left and pole 2 on his right. By moving your starting position each time the dog hits a correct entry, you are teaching the dog that your location is not relevant to his weaving; it's his job to find the entry.

*Note:* When you stand at each location on the clock, your shoulders should be facing the direction the dog needs to move toward to hit the correct entry. This is the same direction you would face if you were to move toward the entry with the dog. This way, the dog does not have to cut across your plane or veer away from you to hit the entry.

After you finish working the clockwise arc of the poles (6 o'clock through 11 o'clock), go back to 6 o'clock with the dog on your left this time. Repeat the same process on the counterclockwise arc of the poles, which is 6 o'clock through 1 o'clock. See **Figure 7**.

Once you have worked each position on both the clockwise and counterclockwise arcs, using food as a reward and then toys, progress to Step 4.



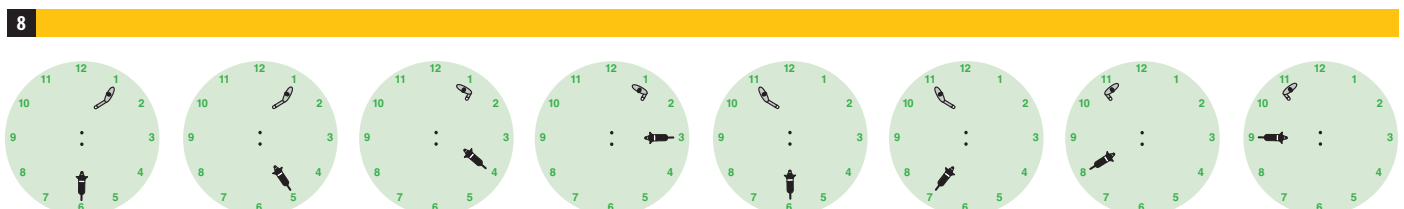
During each step of the training process, you are going to be working your entries “around the clock.” Imagine that your poles are on a clock face. Pole 1 is always at 6 o'clock and the last pole is always at 12 o'clock. The dog should always pass through with pole 1 on his left and pole 2 on his right.

## STEP 4: Working the Clock with the Dog and Handler in Different Locations

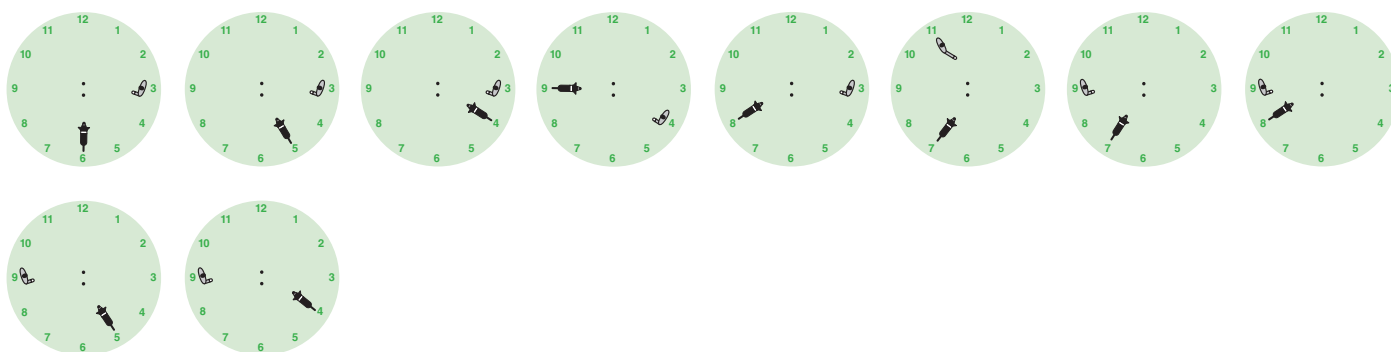
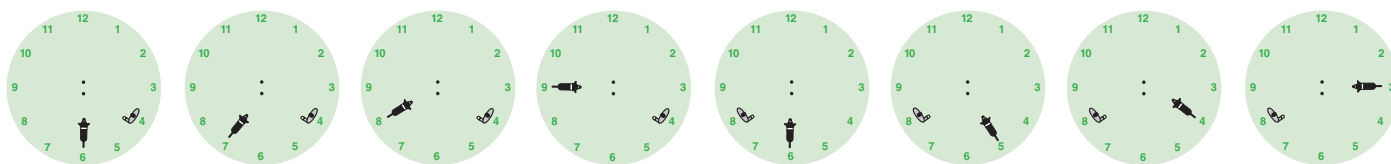
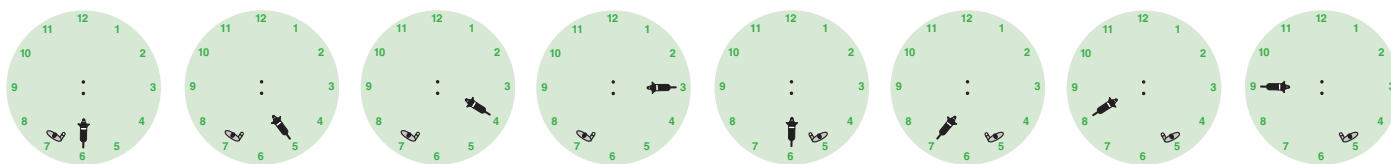
Until now, the dog has been sent to the poles while you are right next to him. Now you want to work on having the dog find the entry while you are in a different location. The dog is still starting 3'-5' from the poles. You still are not moving during this stage.

**Figures 8 through 11** show the various locations I stand in during this stage of training. I generally stand in locations that do not require any additional handling because I am asking my dog to find entries independently of my location. If I have to add

handling, then I am changing his focus from the poles to me; for example, I would not stand at 7 o'clock with my dog at 2 o'clock since this would require me to handle him so that he comes toward me and then turns away from me to find the entry.







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## STEP 5: Adding Two Poles

Your dog is now ready for a second set of two poles to be added. The new set of poles is added about 4' *in front* of the current set (that is, at the 6 o'clock end of the current set) and is set straight as shown in **Figure 12**. The goal at this stage is that your dog hits an entry, zigs back, and hits another entry. There is no angling or rotation of the poles.

Leave your dog at 6 o'clock and go stand at 11 o'clock between the two sets of poles. Release your dog and as he exits the first set, throw a cookie between the two sets of poles. Reset your dog at 6 o'clock and repeat. This time, after your dog eats his cookie, see if he notices the second set of poles and offers you any behavior. If he hits the entry, reward; if he notices the set and offers you something, even if it is incorrect, praise him and allow him to try again. If you need to move a bit toward the second set of poles to get him to notice it at this point, that is okay.

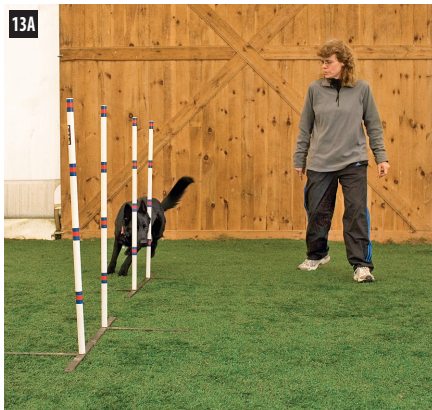
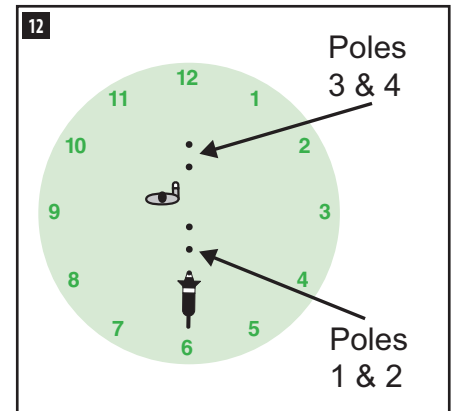
Repeat this a few times and then fade the first reward. Start asking your dog to perform both sets of poles for one reward. Repeat this a few

more times until your dog *confidently* offers both sets of poles in a row without pausing.

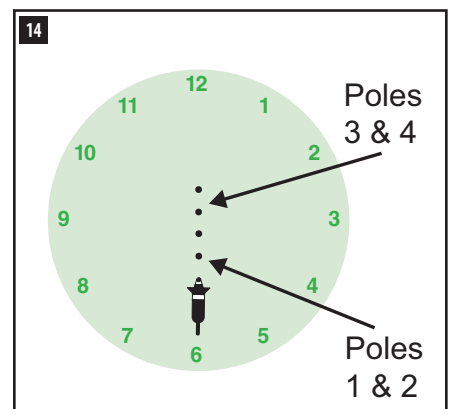
Now it's time to repeat all of the clock work from Steps 3 and 4. At this stage and in the steps that follow, I do not send my dog through two sets of poles while I am positioned on the lower area of the clock (between 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock). Rather, I send my dog to the first set of poles and as he starts toward them, I move forward to cue the second set of poles with my motion as shown in **Figure 13**. Although I want independent weave entries, I do not want to train out my dog's natural responsiveness to my physical cues. If I am standing on the approach side of an obstacle, I expect my dog to collect and take only that obstacle when cued to do so. I do not expect my dog to carry on and perform additional obstacles. Because the two sets of poles are two different pieces of equipment at this point, if I remain stationary my dog's natural response will be to only do the first set of poles. Therefore, if I am starting on the lower arc of the clock, I will move with my dog so he is cued to perform the second set of poles with my forward motion. When I am

starting at a position on the upper portion of the clock (any location between 2 o'clock and 10 o'clock), however, I still send my dog to the poles without moving forward.

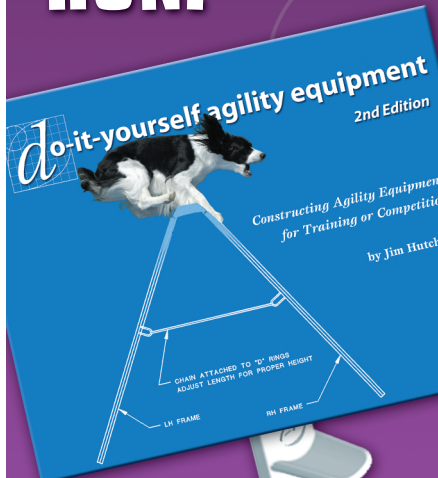
Once you have worked through the clock work in Figures 4 through 7, and your dog is successful, begin moving the second set of poles (poles 3 and 4) closer to the first set until the bases are together and you have four regulation poles as in **Figure 14**. Repeat the clock work each time you move the poles closer together.



*In Step 6 start adding lots of handler motion and begin practicing crosses.*



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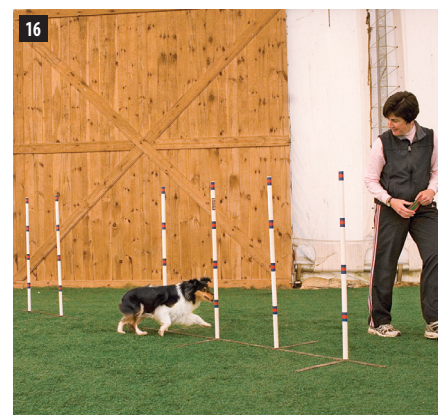
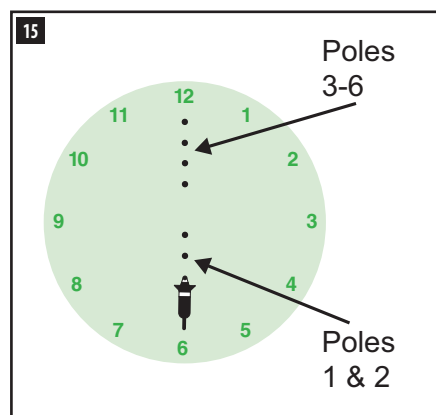
1" and 2" vinyl tape

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## STEP 6: Adding Two More Poles

Once your dog can weave the line of four poles and can hit all the entries around the clock, you are ready to add another set of two poles. The new set of poles is added about 4' in front of the current two sets of poles (that is, at the 6 o'clock end of the current sets) as illustrated in **Figures 15 and 16**. Repeat all of Step 5.

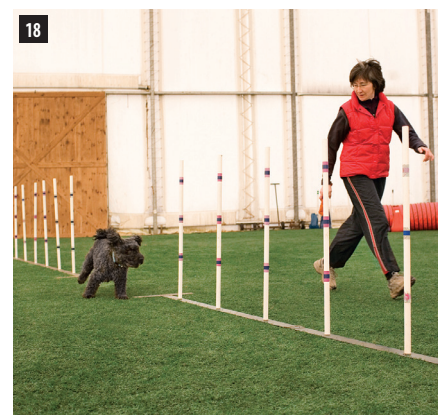
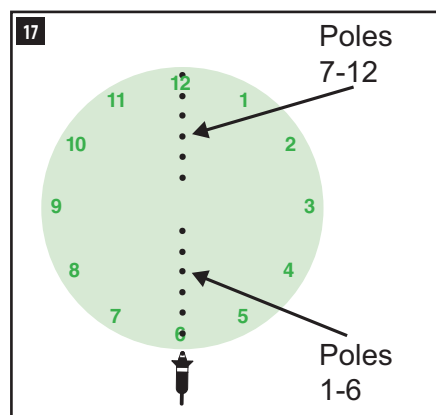


## STEP 7: Ready for 6 x 6

Your dog is now ready to weave two sets of six poles. Add a set of six poles (this can be a regular set of six poles rather than three sets of 2 x 2 poles) in front of your current six poles, about 6' apart as shown in **Figures 17 and 18**. Repeat all of Step 5 and continue practicing the handling maneuvers you introduced in

Step 6, as well as working on adding lateral distance and lateral motion away from the exit. Gradually move the two sets of six poles closer until your dog can weave 12 regulation poles.

Good luck and most of all have fun. 🐾



Mary Ellen has been involved in agility for 13 years and has achieved the USDAA ADCH with her Border Collies, 13-year-old Zoe and 7-year-old Fizz. Mary Ellen and Fizz represented the U.S. at the 2006 IFCS World Championships in the Netherlands where they earned six placements including three gold medals and again represented the U.S. in May 2008, in Belgium. She has been an instructor at Say Yes Dog Training, as well as Clean Run and Power Paws Camps. She lives in Norristown, Pennsylvania, with her husband George, and offers private lessons and agility seminars. Contact her via [mebarry@kineticdog.com](mailto:mebarry@kineticdog.com).