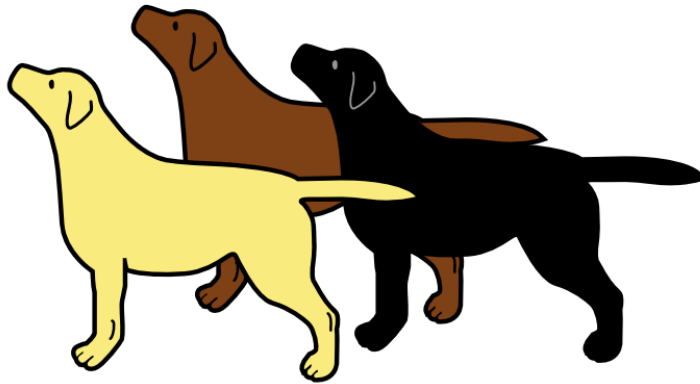


Labrador Retriever Club



of Greater Boston

Drills for Fieldwork Workshop

June 2023 Edition

Rainer Fuchs
rainer@foxrunretrievers.com

Last Revised: June 19, 2023

drill (drīl)

n.

a. Disciplined, repetitious exercise as a means of teaching and perfecting a skill or procedure.

b. A task or exercise for teaching a skill or procedure by repetition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I didn't invent 90% of the drills in this handbook.

Like most trainers, I have learned drills from other trainers, from reading articles, from watching videos, and from attending seminars and workshops.

Whenever possible I have tried to provide a source for the drills described in this booklet. This doesn't mean to imply that the author cited necessarily invented the drill – it's simply the source I learned it from. Sincere apologies to anyone who believes they should have been acknowledged – I am very happy to update this booklet with more authoritative source references if I hear about them.

Special credit goes to Dennis Voigt, whose Retrievers ONLINE newsletter was an incredible, one-of-a-kind treasure trove of information for amateur trainers. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and wisdom so generously. While the print publication has ceased to exist, Dennis makes back issues and collection of articles available for purchase on www.retrieveronline.com. He has also published some great DVDs, including "25 Essential Retriever Training Drills for Handling".

Over the last few years Bill Hillmann has put out many training videos of outstanding quality. Bill's videos are available on his YouTube channel www.youtube.com/user/hawkeyemedianet and on hawkeyemedia.net. I am also grateful to Bill for sharing many thoughts on dog training with me on numerous occasions.

The only book I am aware of that is specifically focused on drills is "Building a Retriever -- Drills and More" by Carol Cassity. Carol also occasionally offers workshops on this topic, which I recommend.

Over the years I had the privilege of attending many workshops by some of the best trainers in the country, from which I shamelessly stole some of the drills described here. Pat Burns (www.eliteretrievers.com) for one has been a constant source of insight and inspiration and has helped me understand and appreciate many of the subtleties of retriever training and competition.

Special thanks also to Alvin "Buck" Shope (www.swiftriverretrievers.com). He was the first professional trainer I worked with and got me started in the game. I still work with Buck regularly and keep profiting immensely from his thoughtful advice.

A warm thank-you goes out to the field training group of the Labrador Retriever Club of Greater Boston (lrcgb.org), not only for endless hours of throwing bumpers and ducks for me and my dogs but also great camaraderie – in training and at competitions. You keep it all fun!

And last but not least, thank you, Uta, for tolerating my obsession with dogs and for coming out to throw bumpers even though I know you'd rather be anywhere else...

VERSION HISTORY

June 2023: Added Teaching Doubles and Triples

August 2020: Added Head-Swinging Drill, Go Out Drill, Salted Area Blinds

July 2017: Original version

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1. INTRODUCTION

Drills are training exercises designed to **work on problems** (such as inadequate cast response) or to **teach, refine, or maintain a behavior** (such as teaching a dog to hold the line on down the shore blinds).

New drills are invented all the time, as are new variations of established drills. It would be a Sisyphean task to try to create a truly comprehensive compilation of drills. This handbook is a very subjective list of drills I have

- (a) actually run myself, and
- (b) found useful.

There is no well-established nomenclature for drills. Ask different trainers what a Wagon Wheel drill or a No-No drill is, and you will probably get very similar explanations. Many other drills however are much less “standardized”. Even more confusingly, different trainers may refer to the same drill with different names. So, for any drill featured in this handbook there are probably many different variations in name and execution. The names used here are what I call them. It’s how I run them, but I am sure other ways may be equally appropriate – or perhaps even better.

The drills described in this handbook are probably most helpful for improving skills in Transition dogs, and for specific problem solving with Advanced dogs. This handbook will *not* cover the sequence of components that comprise the Basics as part of the Carr/Lardy-style of retriever training, such as pile work, double-T, swim-by, pattern blinds, etc. As Dennis Voigt observes¹, almost all steps in Basics training might be labeled “drills”.

Drills are not snake oil or pixie dust. There is no magic solution to problems.

A drill may work for you and your dog, or it may not. YMMV. There’s no money back guarantee in dog training. What’s sure, however, is that running any of these drills once and expecting great results is a surefire recipe for disappointment. Almost all drills in this handbook benefit tremendously from being repeated for several sessions, within a few days or maybe weeks, and in different locations. Be mindful though that you CAN bore your dog out of its mind by overdoing it...

Most learning in your dogs will come from field setups for marks and blinds. To quote Dennis Voigt: “Always have a specific reason to do a drill. Then, focus on that objective until it is realized”¹.

My primary goal for offering this workshop is to learn, to become a better trainer myself.

The best way to do that is to interact with other trainers in a dialog. That’s why I’m looking forward to any feedback, thoughts, reflections, ideas. Best way to contact me is by email: rainer@foxrunretrievers.com.

¹ Retrievers ONLINE Vol XVIII #4, pg 4

2. ORGANIZATION OF THIS HANDBOOK

Some drills are readily categorized. Wagon Wheel is clearly a lining drill, helping to hone the teamwork between dog and handler on getting a committed line in the face distraction. The Split-Casting drill is obviously a casting drill, addressing the dog's response to the handler's signals.

Many other drills defy easy categorization. So, in this imperfect world, this handbook breaks drills into three categories:

Marking drills

Marking drills are designed improve the dog's ability to pinpoint the area of the fall, go there in a straight line, and hunt up the bird intelligently.

Lining drills

The purpose of lining drills is to help the dogs on blinds by strengthening the teamwork between dog and handler in the first phase of a blind, the commitment to a line given by the handler, despite the presence of distracting factors.

Casting drills

Casting drills are intended to hone the dog's response to its handler's hand and verbal signals, a prerequisite for successful completion of a blind.

3. ESSENTIAL DRILLS

Here is an utterly personal list of drills I believe every trainer needs to have in his or her arsenal.

ABCD Drill

Bird Boy Blinds

Four Pole Casting Drill

Influential Lining Drill

No-No Drill

Seven Bumper Lining Drill

Tune-Up Drill

Wagon Wheel

Walking Baseball

4. MARKING DRILLS

A dog's marking skills are honed by repetition. In general, this is done in field setups, not through drills. And in fact, there are far fewer (useful) true marking drills out there than there are lining or handling drills.

Yet, some marking drills have been developed aimed specifically at improving a dog's ability to pinpoint a fall and to get there in a straight line, or to address certain undesired behaviors such as head-swinging, popping, or leaving the area of the fall.

I have also included some basic approaches to teaching doubles and triples. While not technically "drills", the Teaching Doubles and Teaching Triples have become part of my training approach, and I thought they would be good to add as "how to teach multiples" is a question I get a lot.

In my experience, for dogs that have good marking skills and know how to hunt intelligently, success on multiples is less a matter of memory but teamwork. A handler who can line up her dog quickly for the memory bird(s), help the dog recapture the "mental image" of the mark, and get a commitment to go will more often find the bird promptly than a handler who just sends her dog and hopes for the dog to remember. So, for most marking drills, it's actually the teamplay between dog and handler that is being honed.

We avoid repeating marks – we don't want to encourage dogs to go back to old falls. It's better to do repeats that copy the basic concept but implement it in different places.

Dennis Voigt popularized the idea of **3-peats**:

Three setups; each setup implementing the same concept but in different configurations, different location, different influence of factors, etc.²

For example, to work on cheating marks, you may set up three marks, with each mark challenging the dog with a different angle into the water and an increasingly narrow slice of the pond.

Under certain circumstances it makes sense to repeat a mark³:

- When the setup opportunity is unique;
- When the dog gave in to a factor, not simply mismarked the bird;
- On short retired marks.

² Dennis Voigt, "25 Essential Retriever Training Drills for Handling", ybsmedia.com

³ Mike Lardy, Total Retriever Training, totalretriever.com

TEACHING DOUBLE

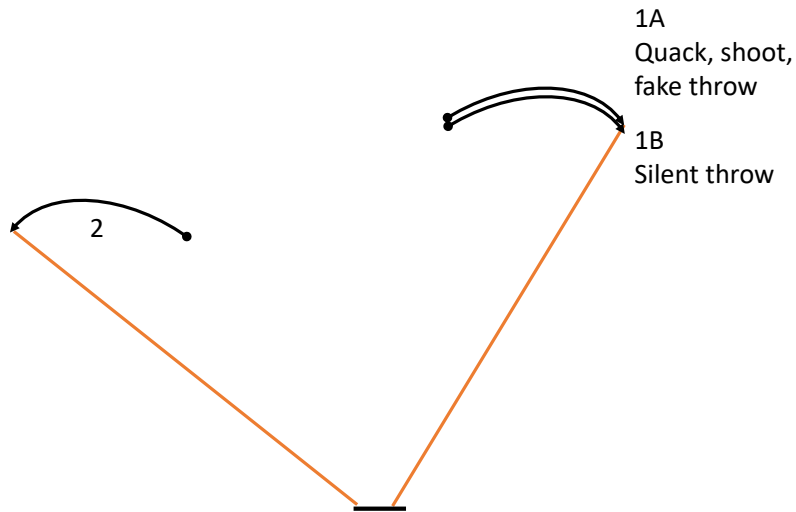
Purpose:

- Introduce the dog to multiples.
- Hone teamwork between handler and dog.

Requirements:

- 2 helpers with white bumpers and/or birds.

Procedure:



- Quack, shoot, fake throw 1A (Memory Bird).
- Wait for a few seconds. Then direct dog toward the second mark.
- Throw mark 2 (Go Bird) and retrieve it. While dog is coming back, line yourself up for the memory bird. Work with your dog to make him look out and "recall" the memory bird.
- When you think the dog "remembers", call for memory bird, which is thrown as a silent throw (1B).

Comments:

- Start off with both marks thrown to outside, widely separated, and flat throws (to discourage running to the bird boy. Wider separation between marks at the beginning.
- The fake throw makes the dog focus harder "wait, did I miss that bird?!?"
- The silent throw is a reward that encourages the dog to lock in for the memory bird.

Source: Buck Shope

TEACHING TRIPLE

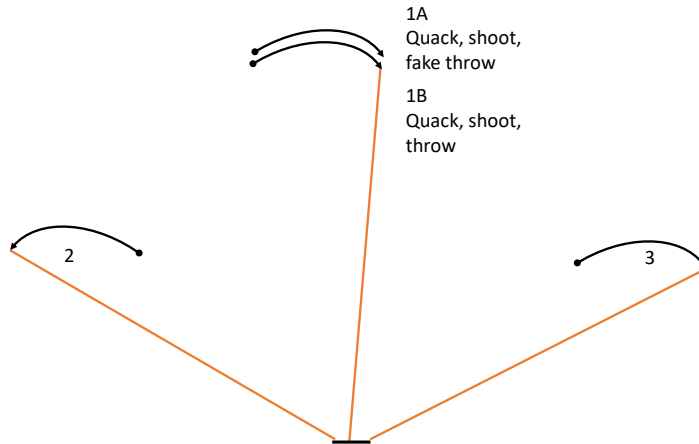
Purpose:

- Introduce the dog to multiples.
- Hone teamwork between handler and dog.

Requirements:

- 3 helpers with white bumpers and/or birds.

Procedure:



- Quack, shoot, fake throw 1A (Memory Bird).
- Wait for a few seconds. Then direct dog toward the second mark.
- Throw mark 2 (Go Bird) and retrieve it. While dog is coming back, line yourself up for the memory bird. Work with your dog to make him look out and "recall" the memory bird.
- When you think the dog "remembers", call for memory bird, which is thrown as a silent or regular throw (1B).
- Call for bird 3 and pick it up.
- Pick up 1B.

Comments:

- Transition step to Delayed Triple: Throw 1 and 2, pick up 2, throw 3, pick up 3, then 1.

Source: Rick Millheim, via Buck Shope

Y DRILL

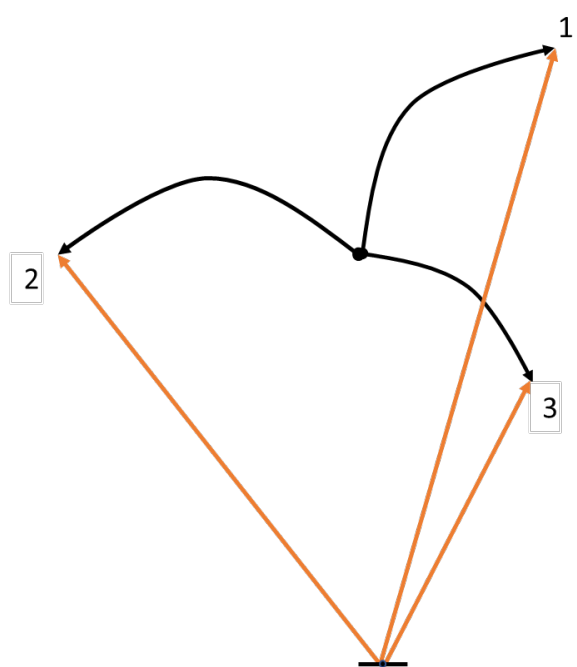
Purpose:

- Increase the dog's focus on the specific area of the fall.
- Teach dog the spots where marks can be in relation to the gunner.
- Hone teamwork between handler and dog to ease dog into picking up short birds after going long.

Requirements:

- 1 helper with 2 white and 1 orange bumper.
- If possible a field with modest factors.
- If done without help as walkback marks⁴, put a stickman where the bird boy would be. Or run as sendback marks⁴.

Procedure:



Marks are thrown in the three ways possible: angle back, flat, and angle in, in that order.

- Marks can be 50 to 100 yards long.
- Bird boy throws white bumper angle back. Send.
- Bird boy throws white bumper to opposite side as a flat throw. Send.
- Bird boy throws orange bumper to the same side as first throw as an in-throw, landing on or close to the line to the first mark. Send.

Comments:

- Can also be run in order 2, 1, 3 but in-throw is always last.
- When you set up for the third mark, make sure the dog understands it's an "easy" bird and send softly without a hand. If the dog overruns, sit, "no, easy", handle.
- It's a "Learn by Experience"/confidence drill so avoid use of e-collar or handling. Have bird boy help if absolutely needed. Let the dog work it out even if he goes behind the gun.
- This drill can incorporate simple factors such as cover or water, but be mindful not to make fighting the factor the key element of the setup.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE Vol XX #3, pg 6
Bill Hillmann, <https://goo.gl/zmGQpz>

⁴ Dennis Voigt, "Training Retrievers Alone", ybsmedia.com

HILLMANN PRECISION MARKING DRILLS

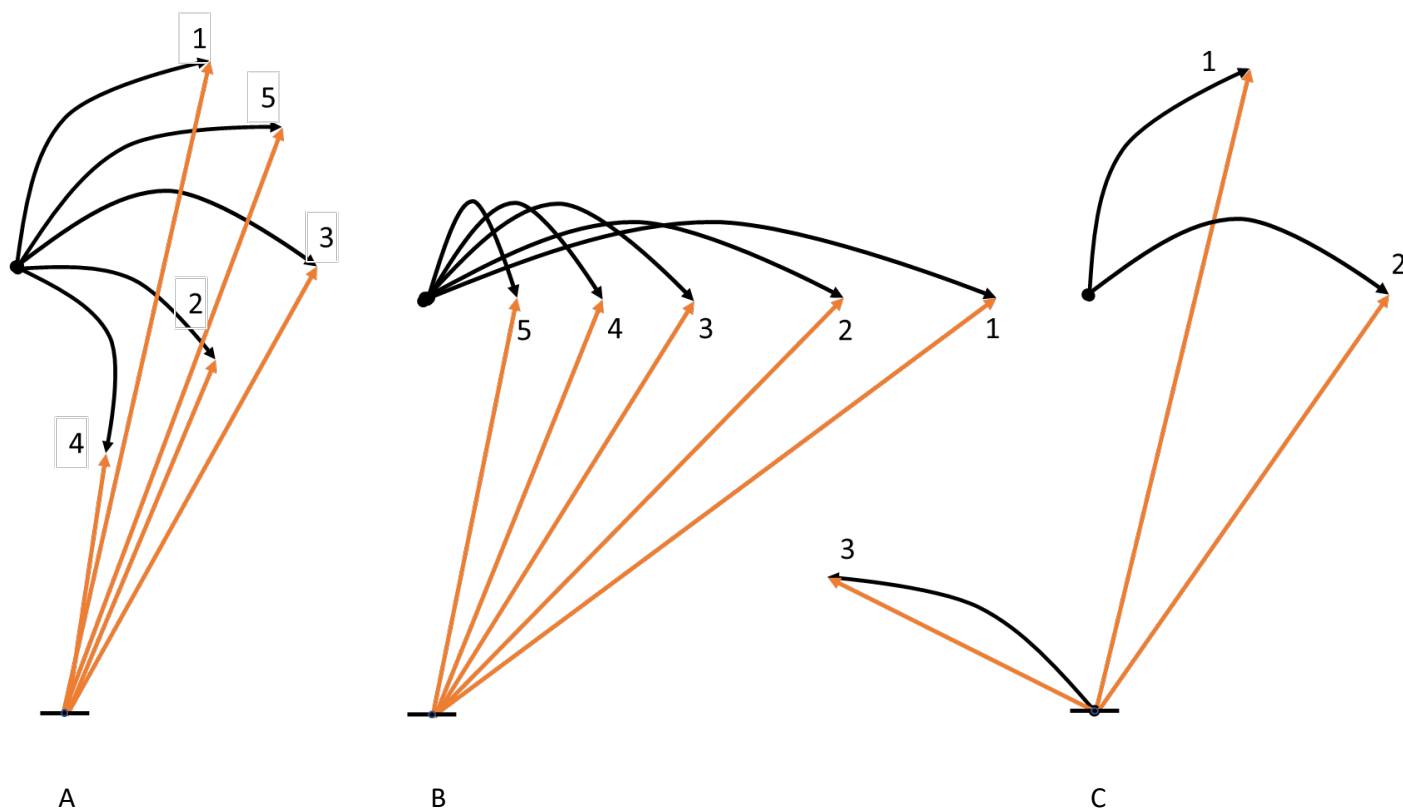
Purpose:

- Increase the dog's focus on the specific area of the fall – in relation to the thrower.

Requirements:

- 1 helper with 5 or 6 orange bumpers.
- A field with modest factors.

Procedure:



- Marks are thrown as singles from about 75 yards, in modest cover. Use orange bumpers.
- Variant A: Throw 5 or 6 bumpers as singles in random order to various places on same side, but start and end with long angle backs.
- Variant B: Throw 5 or 6 bumpers as singles as flat throws on same side, from longest to shortest. The shortest can be as close as 4 feet from the throwers.
- Variant C: Bird boy throws first mark, send. Bird boy then throws flat throw. Don't send; instead flip bumper from the line to the other side, send. Then pick up the flat mark.

Comments:

- When you flip a bumper from the line, be careful not to turn it into a wipe-out. For example, if all marks are thrown to the right, don't use the right hand to flip a bumper to the left across the line to the mark. Use your left hand instead.

Source: Bill Hillmann workshop @ LRCGB 2013

RON STANFIELD DRILL

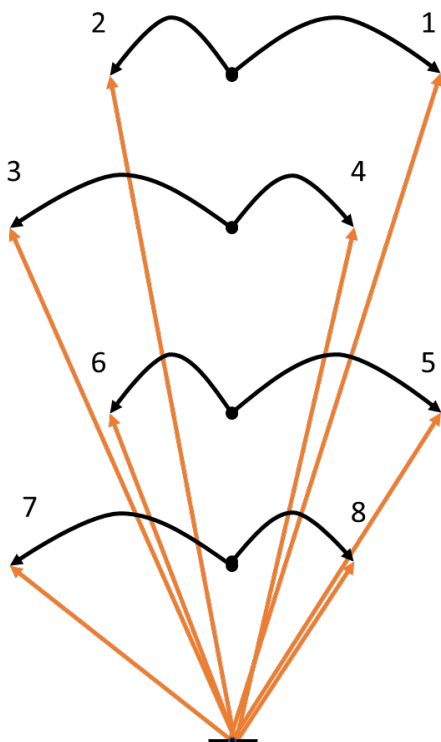
Purpose:

- Increase the dog's focus on the specific area of the fall.

Requirements:

- 1 helper with 8 bumpers or birds.
- A field with modest factors.

Procedure:



- All marks are thrown flat. Start at 100 yards, downwind. Long throw to one side. Send.
- Next throw is half as long, to opposite side.
- Next, helper moves in to 75 yards, long throw to same side as previous mark.
- Short throw to opposite side.
- Handler moves to 50 yards, repeats this procedure, then to 25 yards.

Comments:

- Don't handle – have bird boy help as needed and repeat throws until dog succeeds before you move to the next throw in the sequence.

Source: Gun Dog Magazine Oct/Nov 1991

ABCD DRILL

Purpose:

- Enhance focus and concentration.
- Improve dog's level of comfort with running close to gunners or on tight lines.

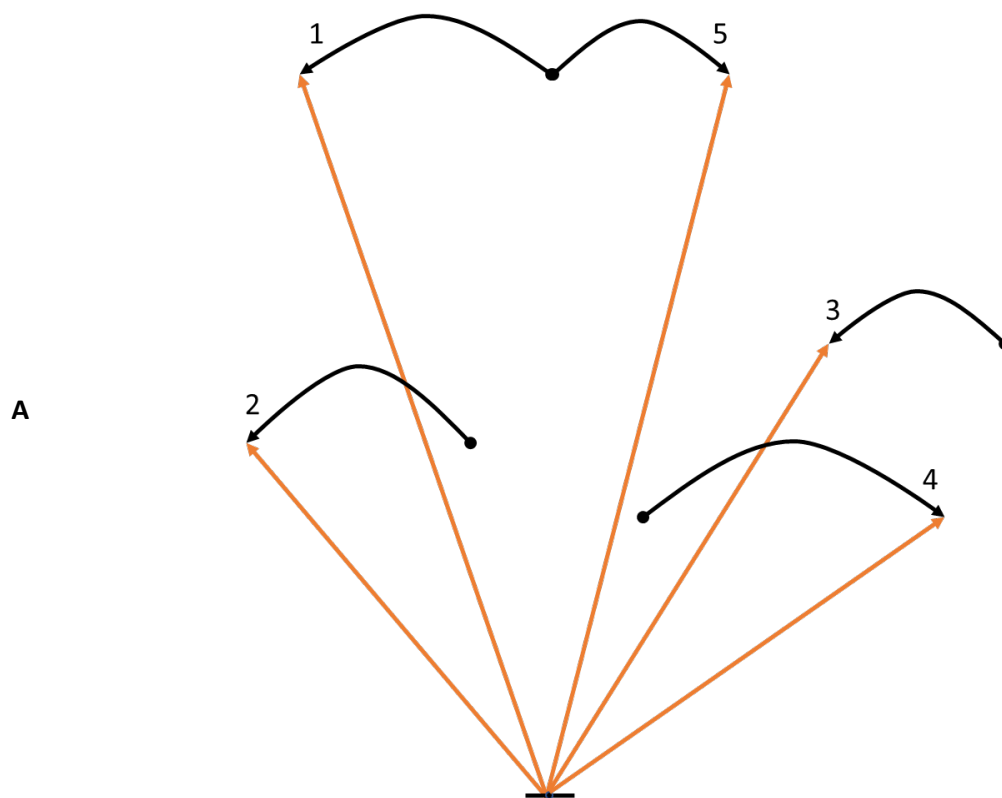
Requirements:

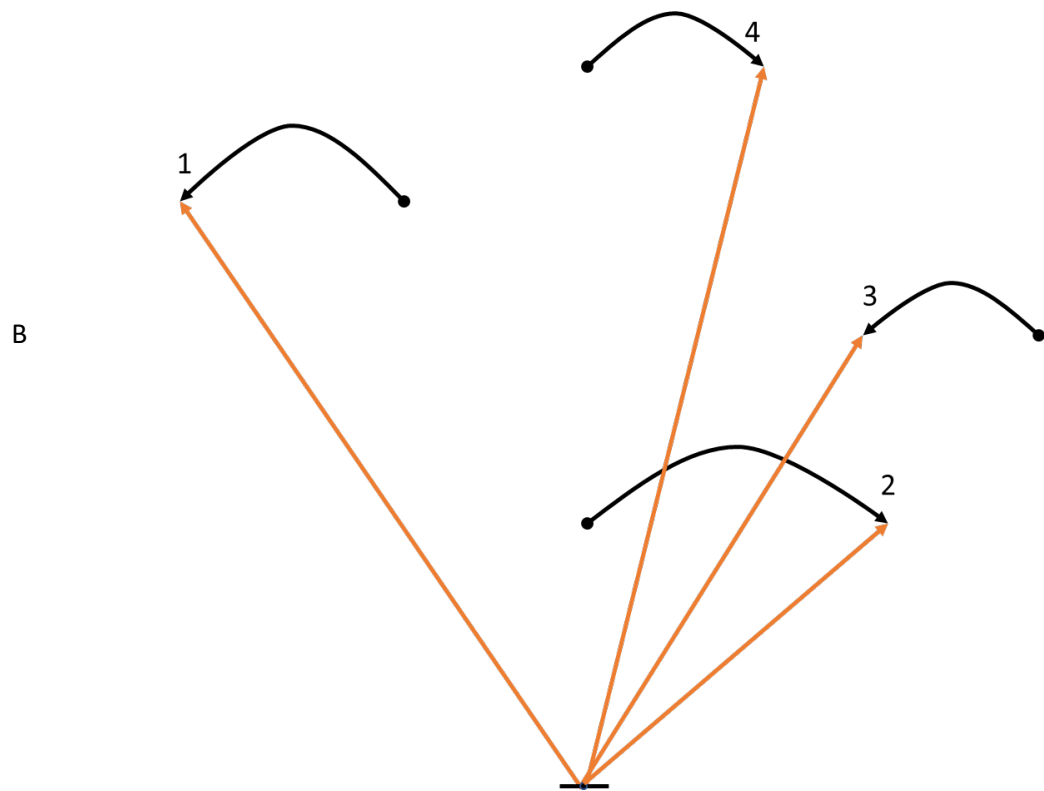
- 4 or 5 helpers with birds or bumpers.

Procedure:

- Four or five retrieves, marks can be thrown at any distance.
- Configuration can be varied widely, and can theme on under the arc, checkdowns, etc.
- Set marks up so dogs have to run close to shorter guns to get the long birds.
- Start with a long outside bird, all guns standing, to work on head-swinging. After first retrieve guns can sit down.
- Throw middle marks as flat throws, others can be angled. Dogs tend to push deep beyond middle gun and will have to check back.
- Finish with longest mark through the middle.

Examples:





Comments:

- Example A shows theming: Close under gun under arc of future marks, check down for middle birds.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE Vol. XIX #2, pg 19.
Pat Burns, YGCR workshop 2015

ONTARIO TEN STEP

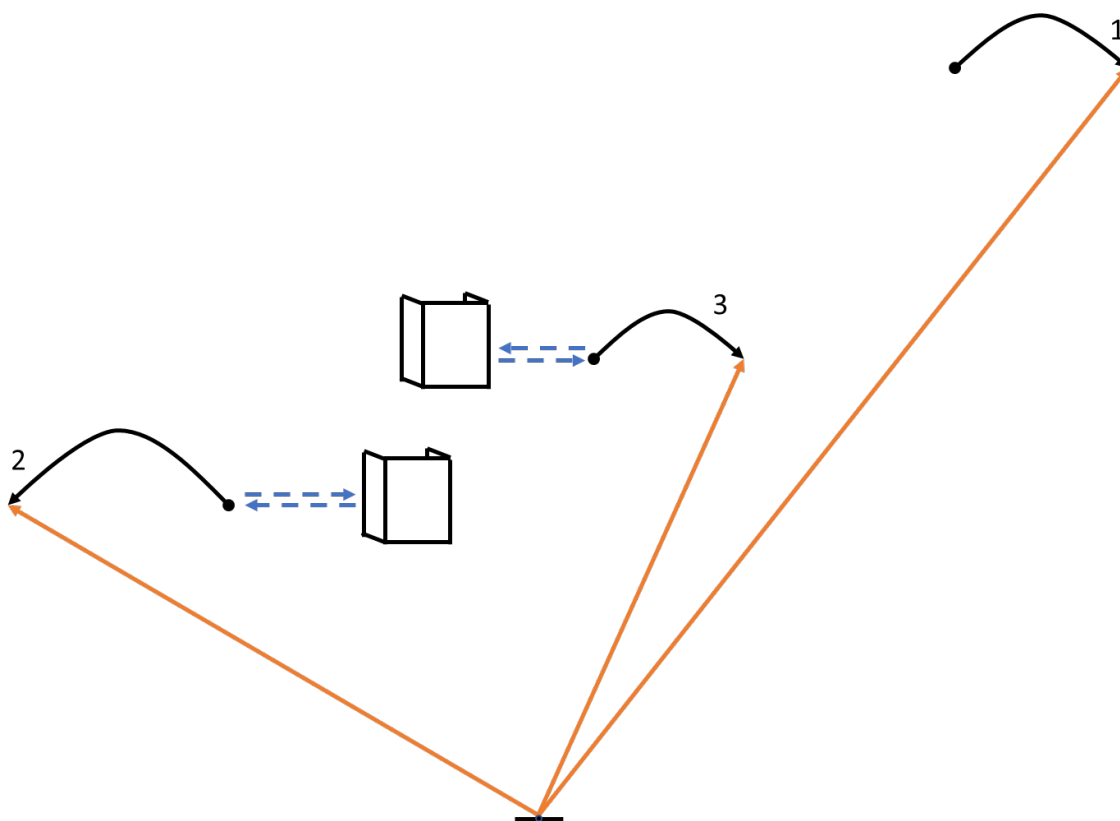
Purpose:

- Learn to check down and hunt persistently and confidently on a short bird, especially after a longer retrieve.
- Practice getting the dog to re-focus on the memory bird (not the gunner or holding blind) after a retrieve.

Requirements:

- 1 or 2 helpers with birds (ducks and pheasants) or bumpers.

Procedure:



- Start with a long single retrieve thrown out of the test, at 100 – 300 yards. Other guns hidden.
- Next, gunner 2 (75 to 200 yards) walks at least 10 to 20 steps out of the quite prominent holding blind and throws the mark flat or slightly angled in, ideally in a location where it's hard to find, such as down a slope, against an obstacle, in a ditch, etc.
- After the mark is down, the gunner walks leisurely back behind the holding blind while the dog is watching.
- Use “easy” procedure to focus dog back on the bird and send with no hand.
- Optionally, repeat with the middle mark.

Comments:

- Lardy called it the “the most significant addition to his training toolkit in the last few years”.
- If possible, use duck for long mark, pheasants for the other marks.

- The thrower's walk-away is long and slow. It's meant to get the dog to eventually glance over and look at the thrower.
- Refocus the dog and send as if it was a true memory bird.

Source: Mike Lardy/Danny Farmer Workshops 2017/2019;
Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE "Best of ONLINE" Collection: Favourite Marking Set-ups. <http://retrieversonline.com/articles/favourite-marking-set-ups>

TWO-PUNCH-BIRD MARKING DRILL

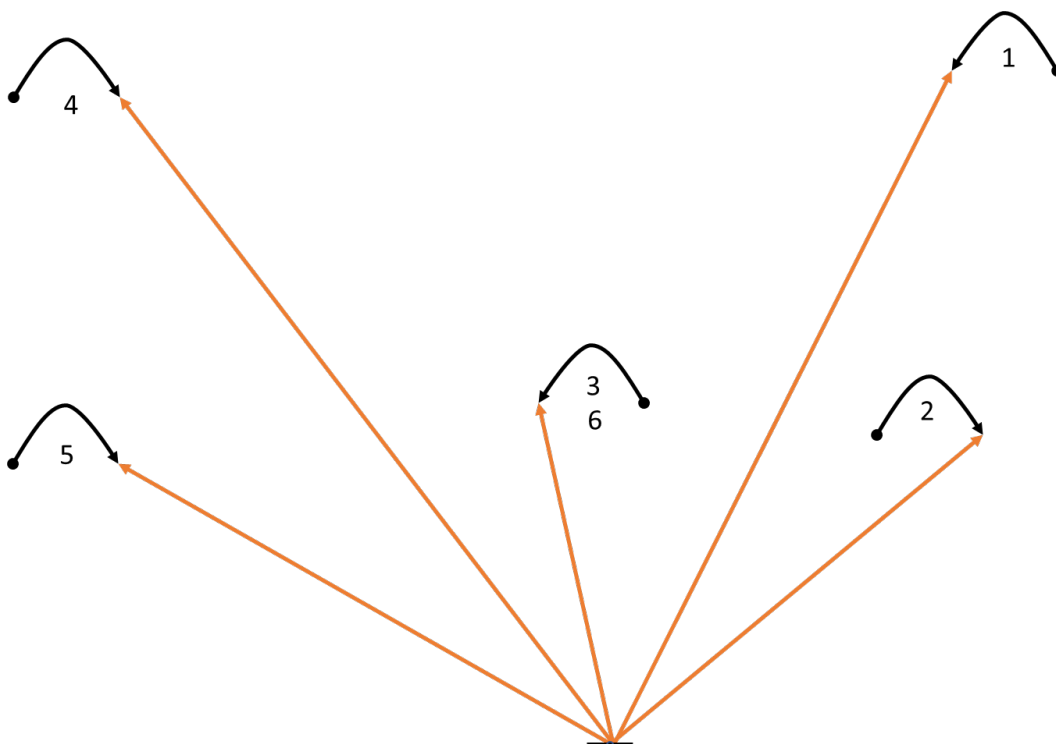
Purpose:

- Teach to drive deep despite early distractions.

Requirements:

- 2 or more helpers with birds or bumpers.
- 2, ideally 5 stickmen.

Procedure:



- Create 5 stations with stickmen. Or only put stickmen at 1 and 3, run the first half of the setup, then move stickman 1 to station 4.
- The long stations should be twice the distance of the short, from 100 to 300 yards.
- The setup is run as two delayed triples. At minimum, put a thrower at 1 and 2.
- Throw 1, then 2. Retrieve 2.
- If there are only 2 throwers, thrower 2 needs to move to 3. Throw 3 and retrieve it.
- Now retrieve the punch bird 1.
- Repeat the concept on the other side: Throw 4 and 5, retrieve 5. Throw and retrieve 6. Retrieve 4.

Comments:

- Handle as needed, or have guns help.
- Always start with the short marks throw away from each other.
- Can be adjusted to the needs of the dog: throw all short marks to the outside; retire the long gun; tighten the marks; run with strong crosswind.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XXIII #2, pg 26

LONG DISTANCE FORCE DRILL (MARKING)

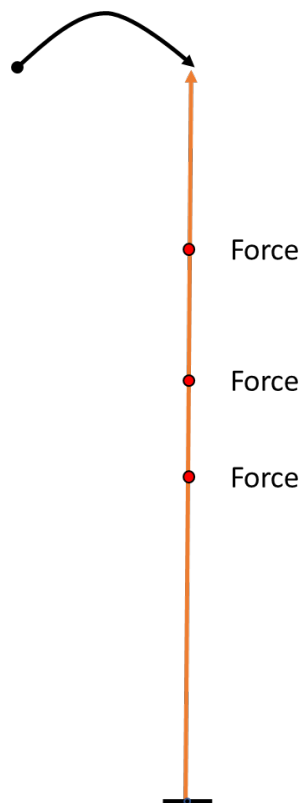
Purpose:

- Reinforce the dog's desire to go long.
- Useful when dogs break down on long marks.

Requirements:

- 1 helper with birds or bumpers.

Procedure:



- Throw a long mark at 150+ yards, send to retrieve.
- Throw again. Send and force on back (“back”, nick, “back”) en route at low level, after 40 yards (when dog has momentum) and then 2 or 3 more times along the way.
- Throw again. Retire the gunner. Send and force again as before.
- Repeat.
- Unretire gunner, force again.

Comments:

Source: Bill Hillmann, Advanced Retriever Training, hawkeyemedia.net

TWO PERSON STEADINESS AND MARKING DRILL

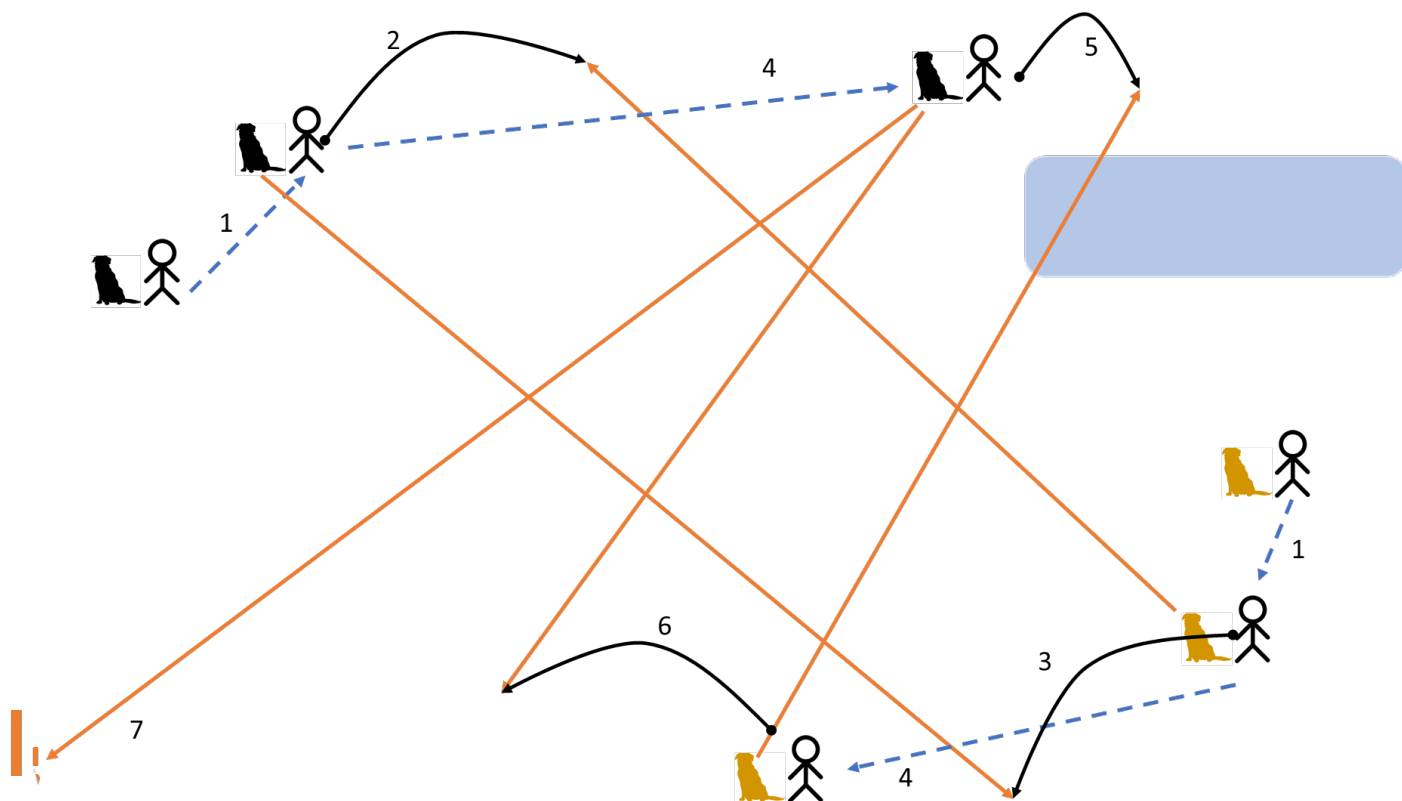
Purpose:

- Work on obedience, steadiness, noise, attention.

Requirements:

- 2 handler/dog teams and one bird or bumper
- Optionally, blind poles and orange bumpers
- Any terrain, based on training objectives

Procedure:



- The specific setup depends wholly on the training objectives.
- If you want to work on blinds, put blind poles out in the field, with one or two bumpers next to them.
- Two handlers (one with a bird or bumper) and dogs walk around to get into position (1). Along the way, enforce proper heeling and automatic sits (without commands).
- Once in place, one of the training partners (“black dog”) puts her dog in a stay, walks a few feet away from her dog, and throws a mark (2).
- The other dog (“yellow dog”) retrieves if the dog was steady. Otherwise, the black handler picks the mark up and rethrows it, or has the black dog pick it up, then rethrows it.
- Now the handler of the yellow dog walks away from his dog, throws a mark, and the black dog gets to retrieve it (or not) (3).
- Both handlers walk with their dogs to their next position (4).
- Repeat procedure but don’t spend more than 30 minutes on it.

Comments:

- You may incorporate features such as blinds, poison bird blinds, water entries, etc. In this example, the yellow dog is challenged with a cheating mark (5) whereas the black dog gets to run a blind (7) after mark (6) is picked up or perhaps runs the blind as a poison bird blind.
- This drill offers steadiness challenges to both dogs at the same time.
- Aim for a high degree of steadiness. If needed, follow standard steadiness drill procedure for de-escalating excitement level of the mark:
 - Quack, shoot, throw
 - Shoot, throw
 - Silent throw
 - Silent short toss
 - Silent drop

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XIX #3, pg 6

HEAD-SWINGING DRILL

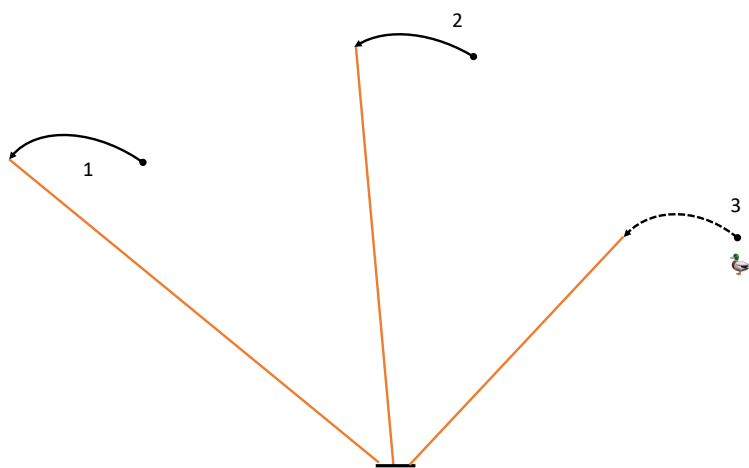
Purpose:

- Improve dog's focus on birds going down.
- Useful if dog looks away too soon in anticipation of the next mark.

Requirements:

- 3 helpers with birds or bumpers.
- Field with modest cover. Some water.

Procedure:



- Put a gunner (3) very visibly in the field, about 40 to 50 yards away, two (or more) at 100 to 150 yards.
- While the dog is watching gun 1, gunner 3 is silently waving a duck, with his arms hanging down. If needed, use verbal commands and body influence to get the dog's focus on gun 1. When the dog is focus on gun 1, call for the bird.
- If the dog swings to gun 3, "sit" and a stick or light nick. If needed, ask gun to shoot and fake a throw. If the dog still head-swings, pick up the bird and repeat the throw.
- If the dog keeps his focus on gun 1, send for the bird.
- Repeat with gun 2.
- If the dog did a nice job focusing on 1 and 2, you can reward this by calling for bird 3.

Comments:

- Can be run with only one go-bird or more than the two shown here.
- If the dog puts up a fight, do NOT reward by letting him pick up the short mark.

Source: Buck Shope

LARDY PERSEVERANCE DRILL (SIMILAR TO DIRT CLOD DRILL)

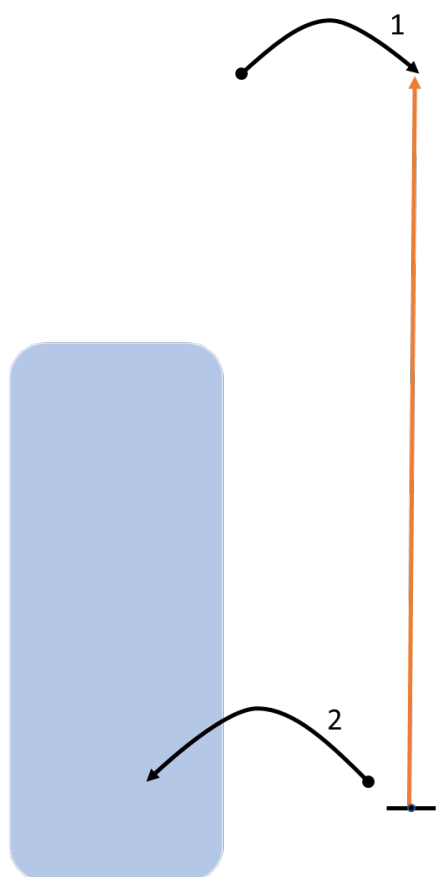
Purpose:

- Work on perseverance in hunting up a bird.
- Useful if dog gives up the hunt easily and switches.

Requirements:

- 1 helper with birds or bumpers.
- Field with modest cover. Some water.

Procedure:



- Gunner throws a standard angle back single at about 50 to 70 yards (1). Send. Optionally repeat.
- Gunner throws bird again. Instead of sending for it, handler throws a bird in the water (2) and sends the dog to retrieve it.
- While the dog is in the water, gunners quickly picks up the bird he has thrown.
- When dog delivers the water mark, send for the land mark, now a memory bird. Note there is NO bird on the ground anymore.
- If dog gives up the hunt, have thrower help. Do not handle or correct.
- When the dog has hunted for a good while, the thrower needs to slip the bird in WITHOUT being seen by the dog.

Comments:

- It is crucial that the dog does NOT see the helper slip in the bird!
- I find this version superior to the "traditional" Dirt Clod Drill. In the Dirt Clod Drill, instead of throwing a bird at (2), the gunner throws a dirt clod, and the handler sends for it.

Source: Lardy/Farmer workshop 2017
Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE Vol. XX #3, pg 7

5. LINING DRILLS

The purpose of lining drills is to help the dog take the optimal initial line to a blind, with enthusiasm and confidence. Equally importantly, lining drills help improve the partnership and teamwork between handler and dog. Lining drills serve to improve the mechanics of getting a dog ready to be sent for a blind, and to improve the dog's ability to focus on where he is being sent and not be distracted by other things going on around him.

WAGON WHEEL

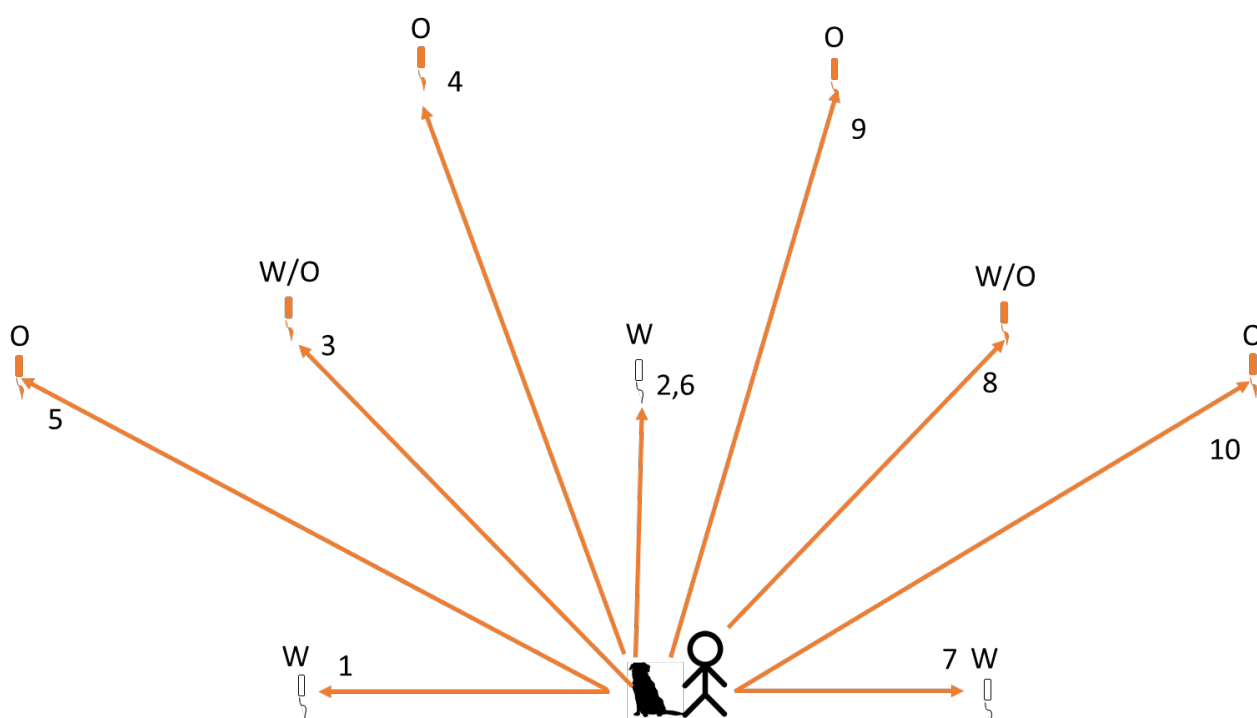
Purpose:

- Develop teamwork and finetune the dog's response to the handler's "here" and "heel" cues.
- Work on proper alignment (SHEA – Spine, Head, Eyes, Attitude) on initial send
- Improve line manners.

Requirements:

- 3 or more white bumpers
- 4 or more orange bumpers
- Mat or placeboard
- No to moderate cover, avoid factors

Procedure:



- Lay out bumpers out in the pattern shown above. The short white bumpers are about 6 to 10 yards away. The longest ones can be as far as you can reliably throw a bumper. It's okay for the dogs to see you put them out.
- The numbers show one order in which the bumpers can be picked up there's really no particular pattern, just do short white ones first.
- Receive the dog facing in the same direction it was send. Insist on proper delivery. Throw bumper back to where it came from.
- Rotate to next bumper and use "here", "heel", "sit", etc to get proper alignment (SHEA). Send.
- Repeat.
- Run the drill with dog on both sides of you.

Comments:

- This drill is a great maintenance drill, even for very advanced dogs!
- To teach the drill, start with three white bumpers. Add another ring of two white bumpers in between. Later replace those two with orange. Add another ring of orange bumpers.
- No pressure. If needed, recall and resend.
- This drill can also be run as a full circle, or quarter circle. Some people add even more rings of bumpers.
- Use collar tab as needed to adjust dog.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE Vol. XVII #1, pg. 16

SEVEN-BUMPER LINING DRILL

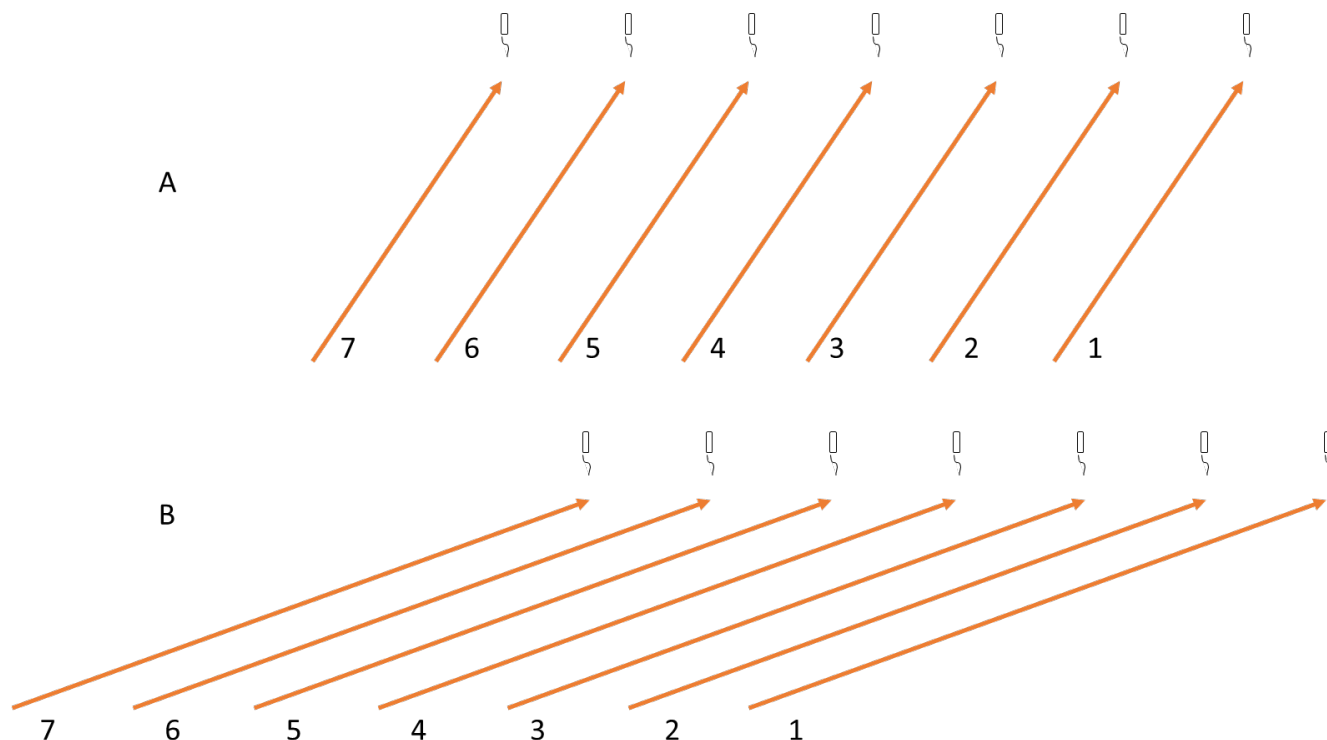
Purpose:

- Teach dog to hold initial line and ignore other “attractants”.

Requirements:

- 7 white bumpers
- No to moderate cover, dog needs to be able to see the bumpers.

Procedure:



- Lay out 7 white bumpers 15 to 20 yards apart so that the dog can see them from the starting point.
- Pick them up long to short.
- If dog goes to wrong bumper, sit, recall, send again. If needed, move up.
- To teach this drill, keep angle wide open as in A, then increasingly close the angle (B).

Comments:

- Avoid pressure on this drill.
- Run it with dog on side away from the bumpers, or – tougher – on side facing the bumpers.
- Also EXCELLENT in water, to help with down-the-shore marks (keeps dog in the water).
- No need to get hung up on 7 bumpers – 6 or even 5 are fine too.

Source: Pat Burns, YGCR workshop 2015

W DRILL

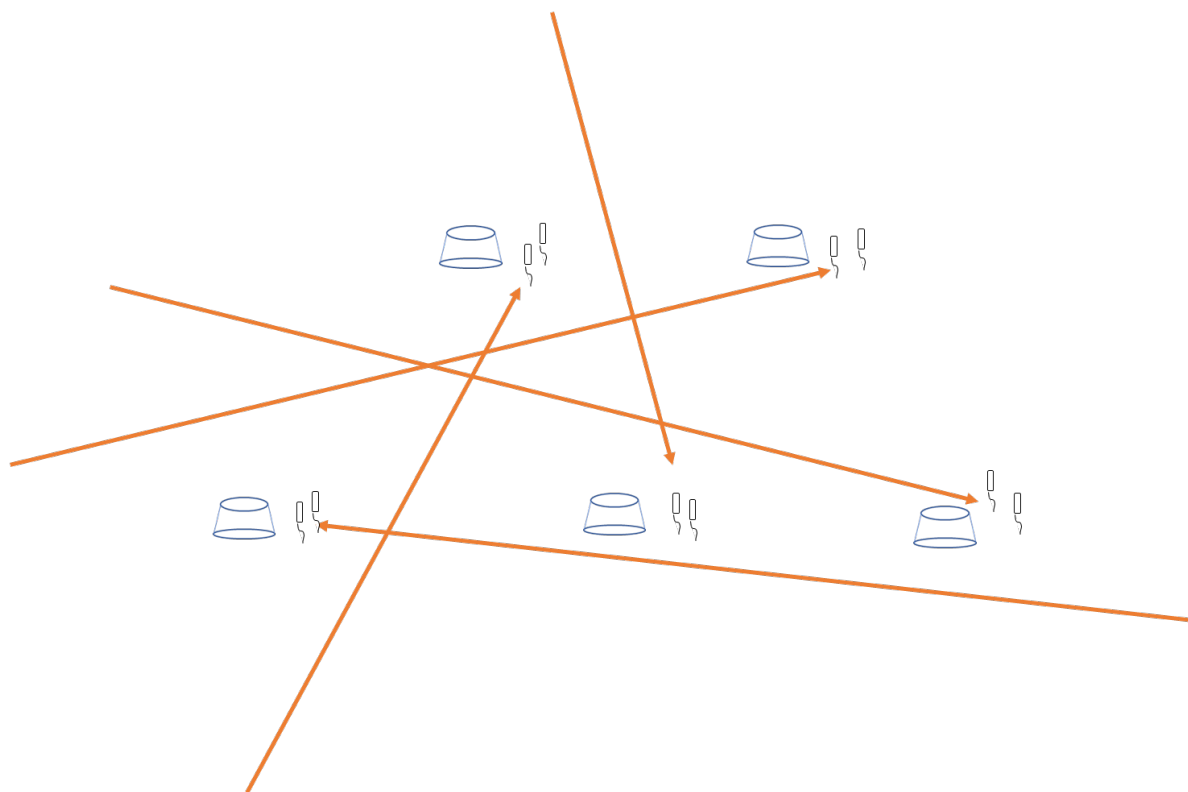
Purpose:

- Teach dog to go where send.
- Improve tight lines past suction, lines through slots.

Requirements:

- 10 to 15 bumpers
- 5 white poles, flags, or buckets
- No to moderate cover, dog needs to be able to see the flags/buckets

Procedure:



- Lay out 5 white markers 15 to 20 yards apart in a W-shaped pattern so that the dog can see them from the starting point. Put 2 or 3 bumpers at each marker.
- There's no prescribed formula for this drill. The diagram shows just one out of a myriad of ways to run it. Simply walk around the field and send your dog on lines tight to or between the piles.

Comments:

- The closer the line goes by a flag, the more suction.
- Avoid pressure on this drill. If dog gets sucked to a marker, handle or recall and resend. Move line to make it less tight.
- If dog flares a marker, don't worry but handle if dog would flare off so far that it would go to a wrong pile. Throw in sends to the nearest flag so that the dog doesn't see them all as poison birds.

Source: Carol Cassity, Building a Retriever – Drills and More

INFLUENTIAL LINING DRILL

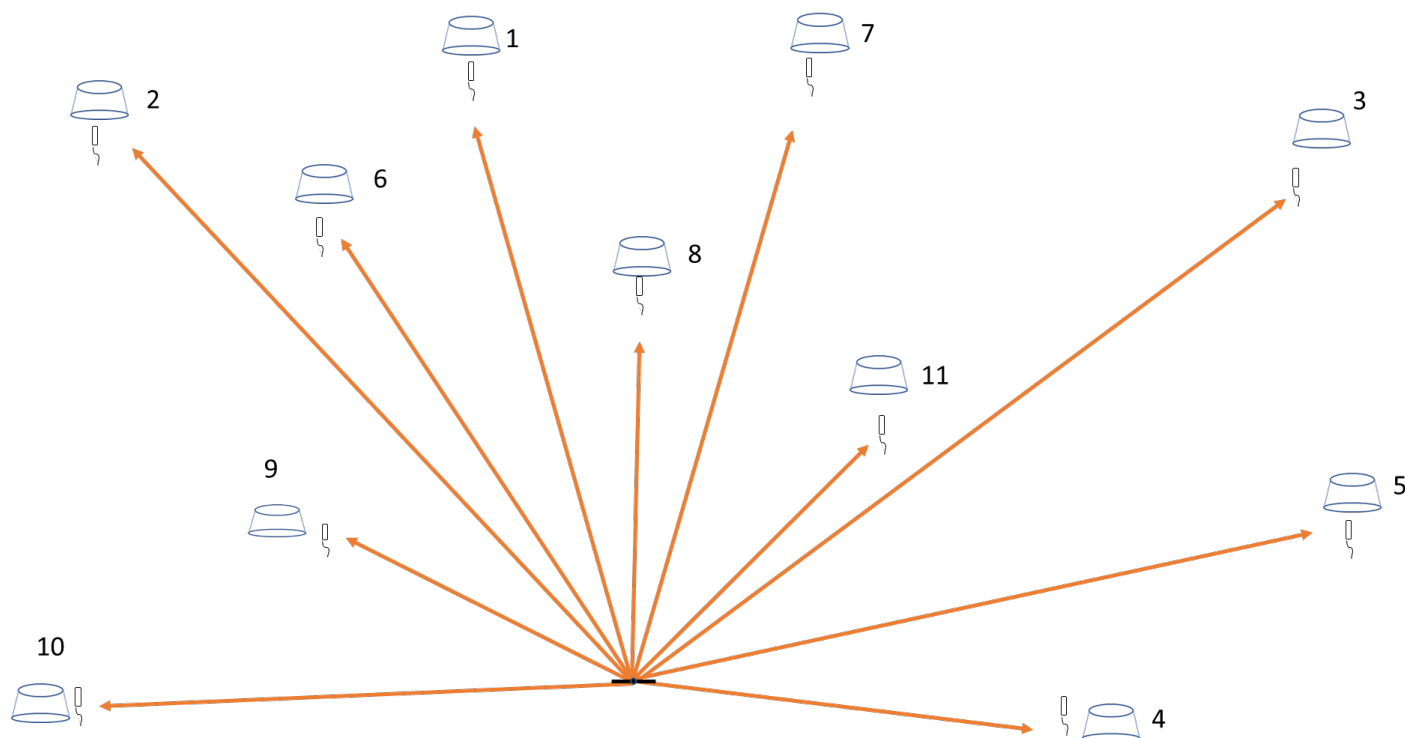
Purpose:

- Similar to W Drill but focused on teaching dogs to look long.
- Improve tight lines past suction, lines through slots.

Requirements:

- 10 to 12 bumpers
- 10 to 12 flags or buckets
- Moderate cover, may include minor factors.

Procedure:



- Place 10 or more buckets with across the field, with one bumper next to each, from 30 yards to 150 or more. The line to a bumper may include minor factors but dogs should be able to see the bucket from a distance.
- There's no prescribed way to run this drill. The diagram shows just one out of a myriad of options for setting up and running it.
- In general, run from long to short but occasionally throw in a short retrieve.

Comments:

- You can move the start line around as needed to get either tight to or away from the shorter bumpers.
- Handle or recall/resend as needed. Avoid pressure.

Source: Mitch White, Gamekeepers Retrievers, via Clint Catledge, Bear Country Kennels

GO OUT DRILL

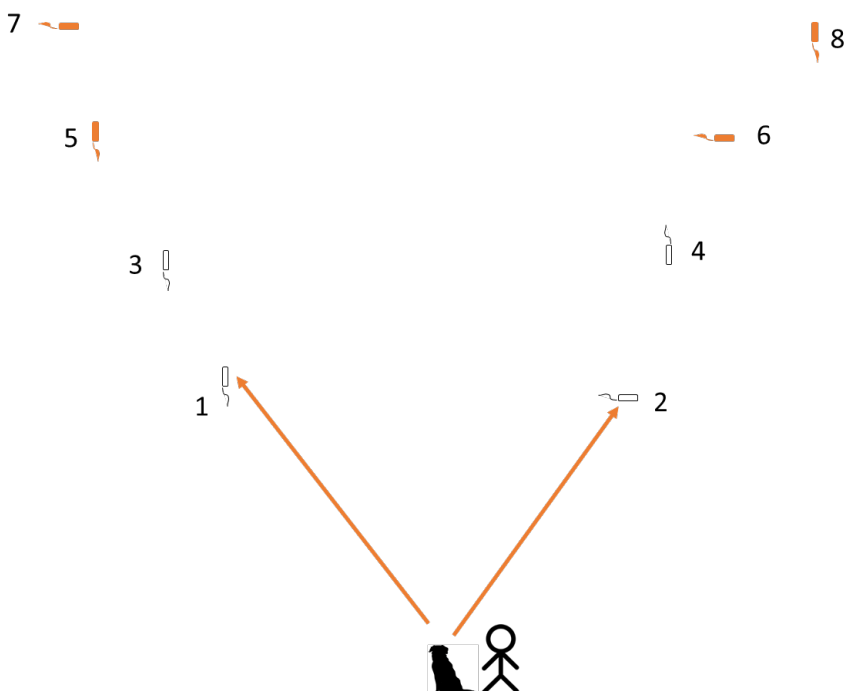
Purpose:

- Address confidence problems when sent to blind retrieve.

Requirements:

- 4 to 6 white bumpers
- 4 to 6 orange bumpers
- Moderate cover.

Procedure:



- Place white and orange bumpers along two lines. The first set of white bumpers should be visible from the start line, 20 to 30 yards away. Next sets are spaced 5 to 10 yards from the previous tier.
- Send for first white bumper on one side, then send to first white bumper on the other side.
- Alternate sides for subsequent bumpers. Don't use pressure.

Comments:

- Similar to the Salted Area drill I came up with this one to address confidence issues in dogs that are hesitant to leave their handlers when sent for cold blinds.

Source: Rainer Fuchs

No-No Drill

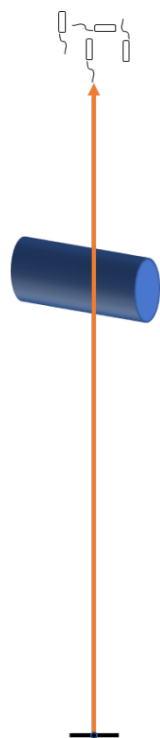
Purpose:

- Make dogs comfortable with being called back.
- Teach a dog to hold a given line and go over obstacles.

Requirements:

- A log, pipe, small horse jump, or similar obstacle
- A pile of bumpers
- No or little cover

Procedure:



- Place a pile of bumpers about 10 to 15 yards beyond the obstacle.
- Start at about 20 yards or so away from the obstacle, line your dog and send. Most dogs will try to run around it. The moment you see this intent, stop the dog. Say quietly “no no” and call back.
- Now move closer, just a few feet away from the obstacle. Toss a bumper across. Send again. If needed, simplify further, this attempt should be successful. When the dog jumps and gets to the pile, profusely praise him. Encourage proper return – over the jump! The goal at this point is to teach the dog the correct line.
- Repeat a couple of times so the dog gets the idea, then move on. Move back 10 to 20 feet and send again. If the dog tries to run around, stop, “no-no”, call back. Move up and repeat.
- In general, when you get a refusal, move up to where the dog was successful the last time, then – if successful – back up only half the distance of what you did when you got the refusal. If not successful, get even closer.
- Ultimately you should be able to run this drill 40 or 50 yards away from the jump.
- Vary the exercise by angling the jump, or by adding a second jump 10 to 15 yards behind the first.

Comments:

- Remember that teaching to jump is a secondary objective. Don't make it too easy for the dog. You need to create opportunities to call back. Balance success and failure.
- The recall shouldn't be punishment. It's just a “no, that didn't work, try again”. Adjust your tone accordingly. Praise when successful.
- Careful with corrections. Okay to use collar for insufficient response to sit (indirect pressure on sit) or recall command (direct pressure on here). The exercise should be low key, not create anxiety in the dog. For advanced dogs that repeatedly willfully avoid the obstacle, indirect pressure may be warranted.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE Vol. XXI #2, pg. 12

INTRODUCTION TO POISON BIRD DRILL

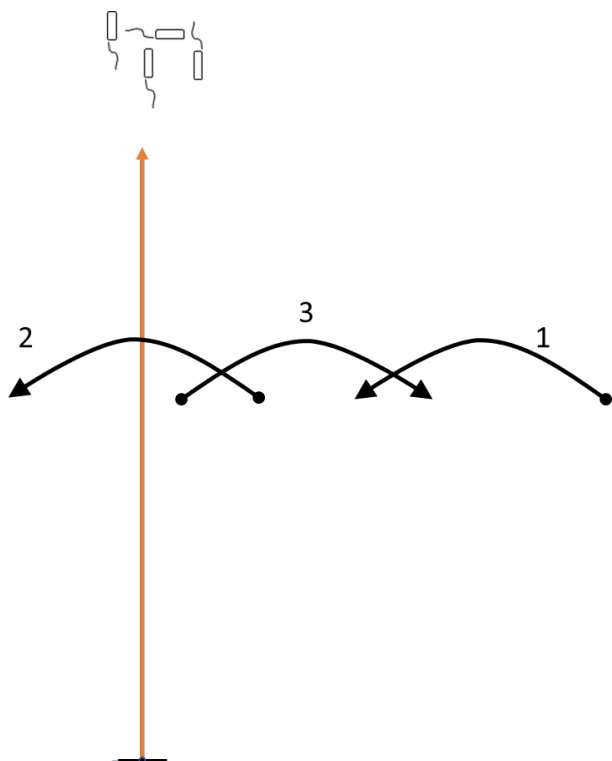
Purpose:

- Teach the basic concept of poison birds

Requirements:

- 1 helper
- Pile of white bumpers
- White bumpers or birds
- Field with no features

Procedure:



- Put a pile of visible white bumpers out at about 80 to 100 yards.
- Line to pile several times.
- Stop halfway, cast back.
- Put gunner in field, about 50 yards away from the line to the pile (“center line”). Line to pile.
- Gunner shoots and tosses a bumper toward the center line, landing about 40 yards away from that line. Let dog pick it up.
- Line to pile.
- Throw again a bumper toward center line.
- Cue for poison bird, line to pile. Handle if needed.
- Repeat line to pile until dog can do it, then line one more time. Now let him pick up the bumper.
- Next bumper is thrown across the center line (under arc). Repeat procedure.
- Finally, repeat the same procedure with bumper thrown away from center line. Gunner should be about 10 yards to the side of the center line.

Comments:

- Use proper cuing for poison bird. “Leave it. Dead bird”. Make sure dog gets out of the sit position to line up for poison bird.
- First throws are toward the center line so handles are away from the bird, not from the gunner. We don’t want to teach “don’t go to the gunner”.
- Careful with any corrections around the bird boy.
- After dog is successful with bumpers, repeat with birds.

Source: Clint Catledge, Bear Country Retrievers, modified to make the first throw toward the line.

MAINTENANCE POISON BIRD DRILL

Purpose:

- Improve teamwork and proper poison bird cuing.

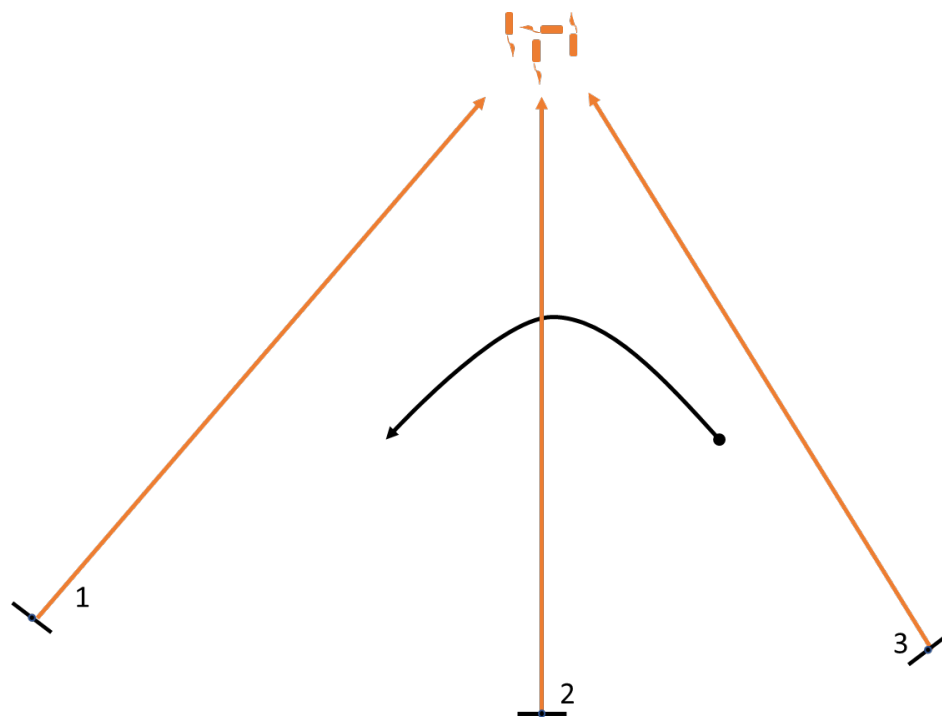
Requirements:

- 1 helper, 3 piles of orange bumpers
- Birds
- Field with modest features

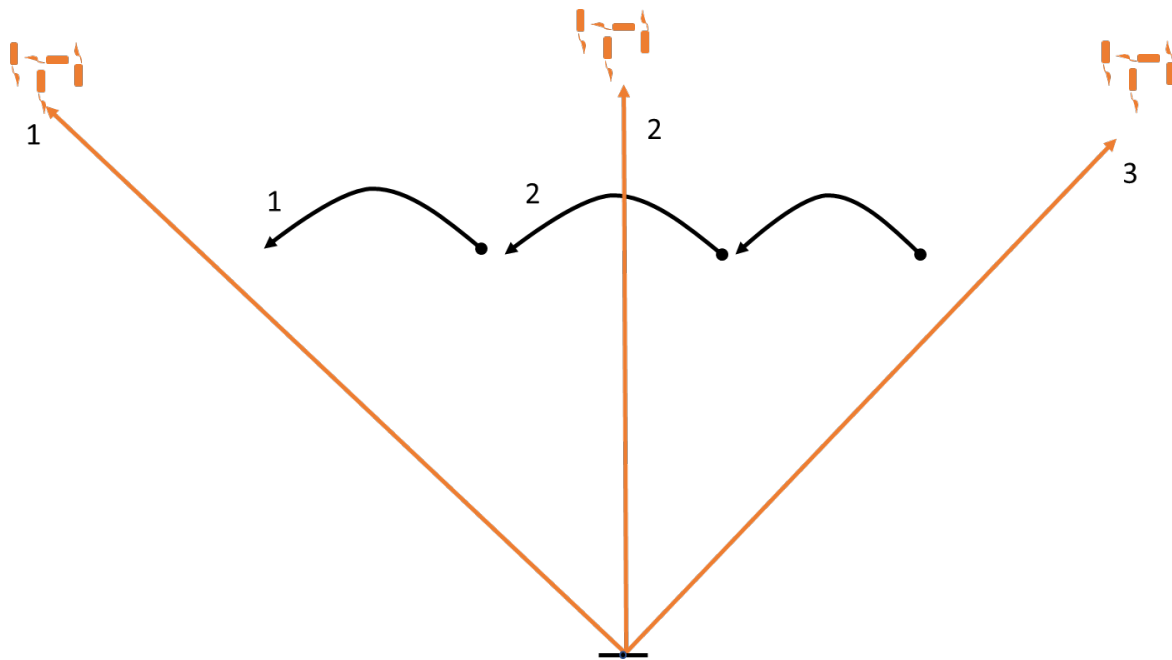
Procedure:

- This drill can be run in several configurations, with stationary or moving gunner.

A



B



- Put one pile of orange bumpers (A) or three piles (in configuration B) out at about 80 to 100 yards.
- Start with the line to the pile in front of the bird (1). The bird should land about 20 to 30 yards away from the line to the pile.
- Cue dog for poison bird, line to pile. Handle as needed.
- Pick up poison bird. Repeat as needed.
- Next mark is thrown across the line to pile (under arc (2)). Repeat above procedure.
- Finally, repeat with mark thrown away from the line to the pile. Gunner should be about 10 yards to the side of the line.

Comments:

- It's okay for the dog to see the piles planted or for the dog to come along.
- First throws are toward the line so handles are away from the bird, not from the gunner. We don't want to teach "don't go to the gunner".
- Careful with any corrections around the thrower.
- If dog swings away from gunner to autopilot for poison bird, send for the bird instead of running the blind.
- Use birds instead of bumpers for the mark if you can, to make it more enticing.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XVII #1, pg 16

SIX POINT DRILL

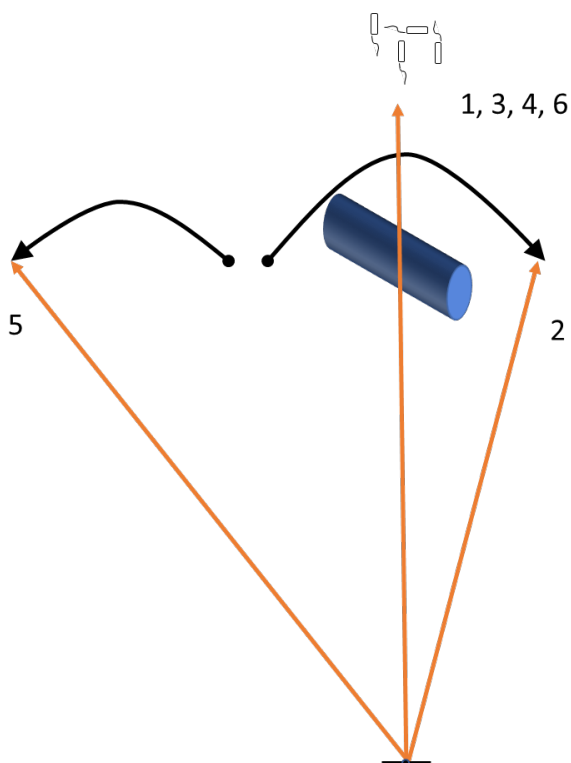
Purpose:

- Hone lining, practice no-no, and improve poison bird skills – in one drill.

Requirements:

- 1 helper
- Pipe, log, or similar obstacle
- Pile of white bumpers
- Field with modest features

Procedure:



- Put obstacle out at about 30 yards. Place pile of bumpers about 10 yards behind.
- Line to pile.
- Throw mark, pick it up.
- Line to pile.
- Throw mark.
- Cue for poison bird. Line to pile.
- Pick up mark.
- Line to pile.

Comments:

- A good “discipline” drill for dogs that are on auto pilot.

Source: Buck Shope, Swift River Retrievers

GO CLOSE TO GUNNER CHAIR DRILL

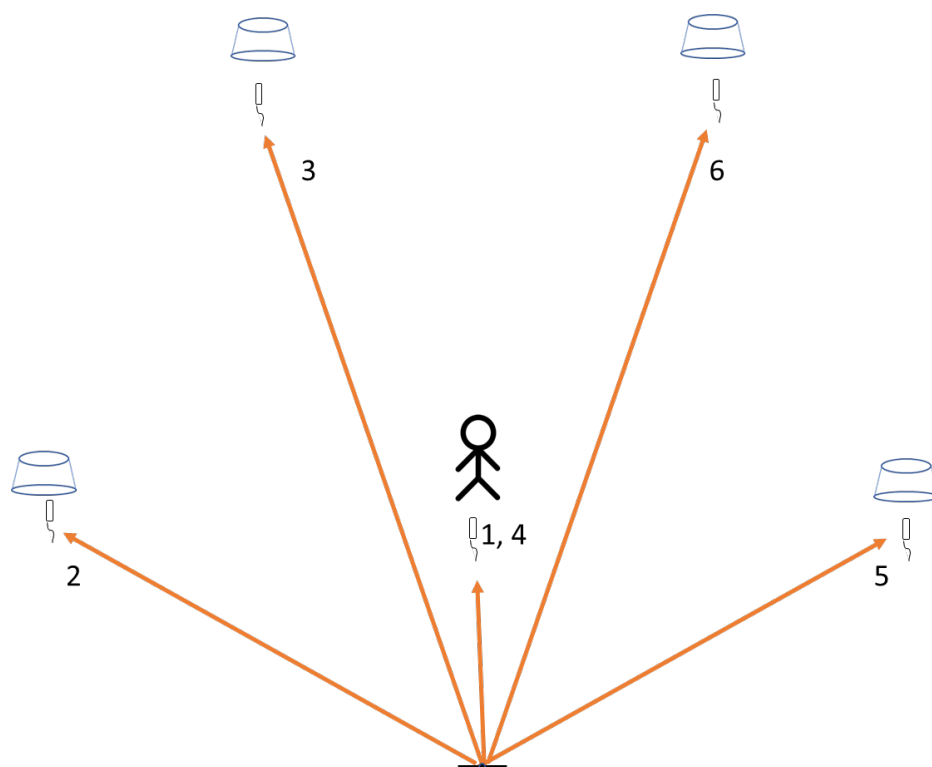
Purpose:

- Teach a dog to go close to a gunner.

Requirements:

- 1 helper, chair
- White poles or buckets, 6 white bumpers
- Field with modest features

Procedure:



- Put poles or buckets out as shown. Short ones are about 30 yards away, long about 50 to 60 yards. Leave one bumper at all stations.
- Gunner takes a seat at around 15 yards in front of the dog and plants a bumper directly in front of his chair. Send for it.
- Line and send dog to left short bumper.
- Line and send dog to left long bumper.
- Repeat on other side.

Comments:

- Go very easy on corrections, use attrition instead unless it's for a go/stop/here infraction.

Source: Bill Clark, Graycroft Kennels

LONG DISTANCE FORCE DRILL (BLINDS)

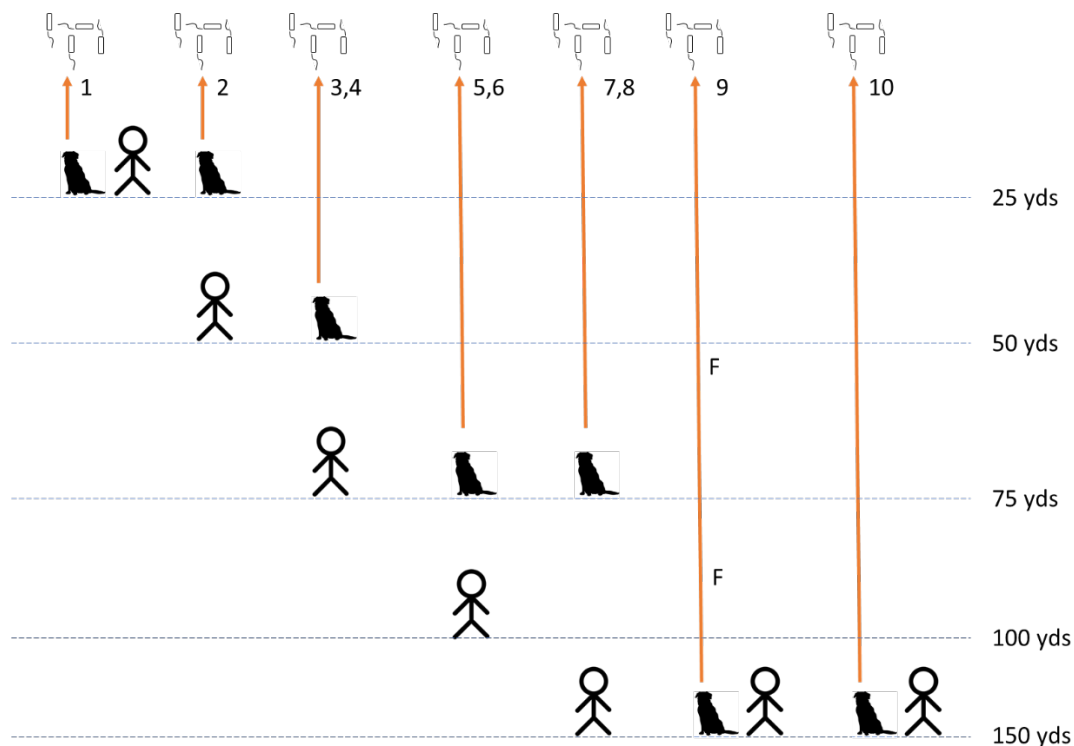
Purpose:

- Deal with popping issues or “break-downs” (e.g., going through a gap) on marks or blinds.

Requirements:

- Pile with a dozen bumpers and a blind stake
- Field with modest features and at least 150 yards in length.

Procedure:



- Sit your dog at 25 yards from the pile and identify the pile. Send twice from your side. (1)
- Front-finish at 25 yards, walk to 50 yards, and cast from remote position. (2)
- Front-finish at 50 yards, walk to 75 yards, and cast from remote position. (3)
- Front-finish again at 50 yards, walk to 75 yards, cast from remote position with “back”-nick-“back”. (4)
- Front-finish at 75 yards, walk to 100 yards, and cast from remote position. (5)
- Front-finish again at 75 yards, walk to 100 yards, and cast from remote position with “back”-nick-“back”. (6)
- Front-finish at 75 yards, walk to the 150 yard baseline, and cast from remote position. (7)
- Front-finish again at 75 yards, walk to 150 yards, and cast from remote position with “back”-nick-“back”. (8)
- Receive at your side on the 150 yard baseline. Send from your side and force en route at 25 and 75 yards. (9)
- Finish with one or two freebie sends from your side. (10)

Source: Mike Lardy and Dennis Voigt

6. CASTING DRILLS

The purpose of casting drills is to improve the interactions between dog and handler on blinds and to work on problems caused by inappropriate response given by a dog in response to its handler's cast.

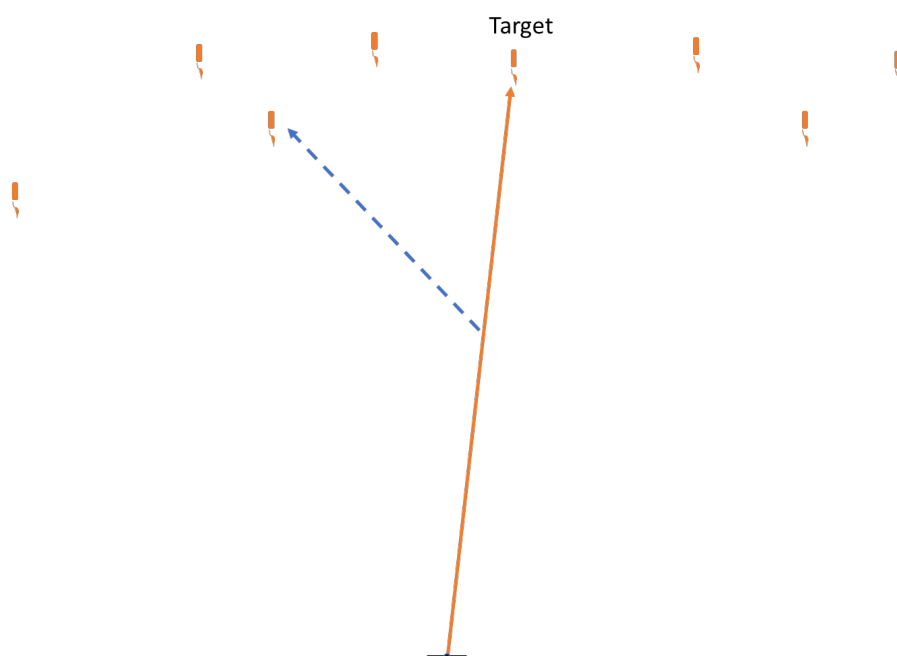
SALTED AREA BLINDS

Purpose:

- Develop confidence and desire during transition from pattern blinds to cold blinds.

Requirements:

- 6 to 10 orange bumpers
- Field with no or modest features



Procedure:

- “Salt” the area near the actual target (100 – 200 yards from the line) with the bumpers. Don’t put them too close together. There should be at least 6 to 10 yards between each of them.
- Send and handle to blind.
- If you see great go-out momentum from the start line, let him go and even pick up the wrong bumper initially, to reinforce confidence and desire.
- If you notice that response to casts gets sluggish and confidence seem to wane, allow the dog to go to one of the extra bumpers instead of the original target. The dog should be excited to find something!
- Repeat the blind once or twice.

Comments:

- Some dogs seem to lose (or never gain) confidence when they go from pattern blinds to cold blinds. I came up with this drill to give them more opportunity to “succeed”. For dogs that leave willingly, run with confidence, and respond well to stops and casts, this drill would be unnecessary.
- If the dog shows little desire to even leave the handler for fear of the unknown, you may want to start this drill even very close up, e.g. 30 yards or so.

Source: Rainer Fuchs

BIRD BOY (BB) BLINDS

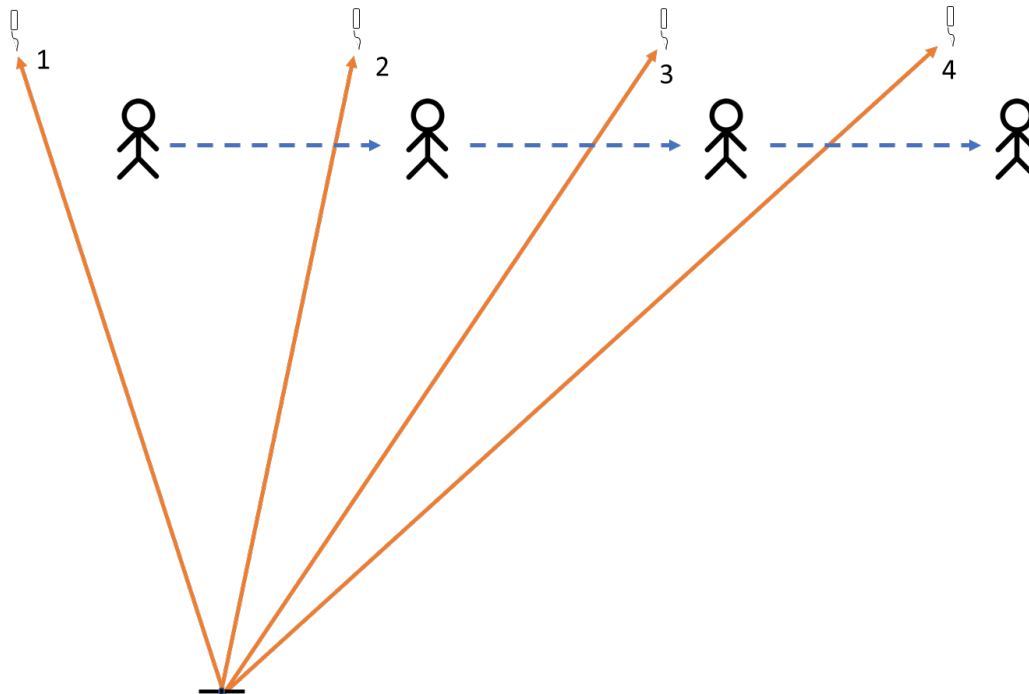
Purpose:

- General-purpose drill to work on slow and crooked sits, loops, popping, flaring guns, etc.
- “Back to the yard” to isolate issues and remove confounding factors.

Requirements:

- 1 helper, 4 to 10 orange or white bumpers
- Field with no or modest features

Procedure:



- Bird boy moves on a line 40 to 100 yards away from the dog and handler.
- The bird boy tosses an orange bumper angle back without the dog seeing it. Then moves about 10 yards away from it.
- Send your dog and stop, handle, as needed.
- While dog is coming back, bird boy plants another bumper and moves on the same line another 10 yards.

Comments:

- The specifics depend on what you’re working on. If you’re working on slow sits, for example, position bird boy farther away and stop dog two or three times. If working on flaring gun, handle toward gunner.
- Careful with collar corrections close to the gunner!
- Have bird boy walk in opposite direction in the next session.
- As needed, simplify, e.g., use white bumper, let the dog see the bumper being tossed, move up, make line less tight, etc.

Source: Mike Lardy, Total Retriever Training

CROOKED SIT DRILL

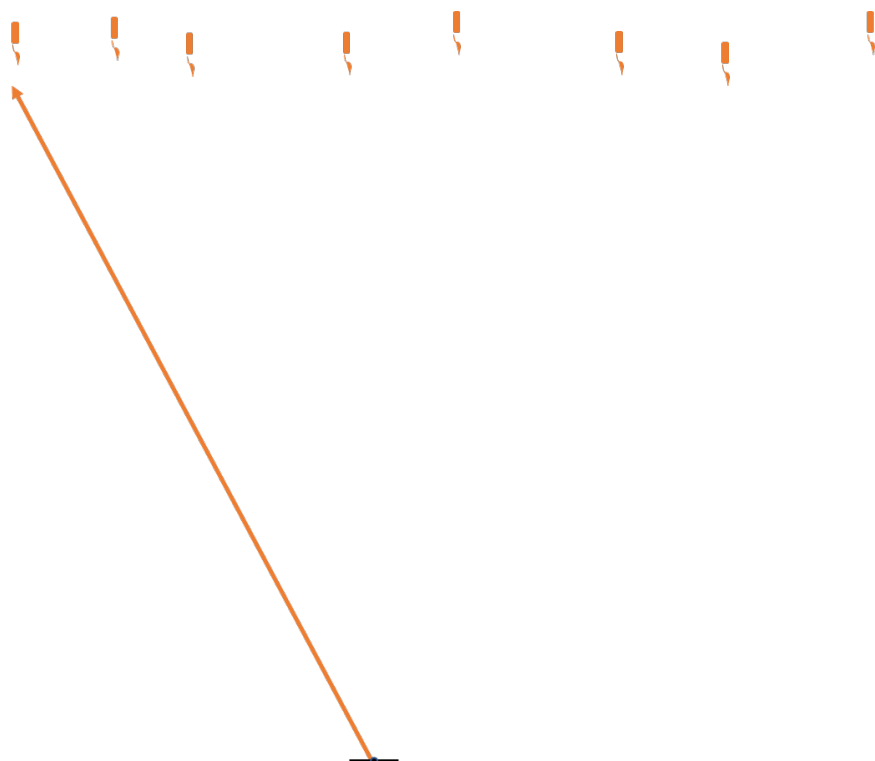
Purpose:

- Address persistent crooked sits on blinds.

Requirements:

- Mostly featureless field
- 8 to 10 orange bumpers

Procedure:



- Put a line of bumpers out, about 10 yards apart and about 150 yards away from the line.
- If your dog is persistently sitting more turned toward your left, send for the leftmost blind. If the dog is leaning to the right, send for the rightmost blind.
- Handle as needed. Always handle such that the dog has to turn more than 180 degrees! If he completes the turn instead, “sit”-nick-“sit”, “here”
- Don’t nitpick the blind. Let the dog get any of the other bumpers if that allows you to get several sits and casts in for the blind.

Comments:

- Repeat for several days, including in new fields.
- The central idea is that the dog will straighten himself out through attrition.

Source: Evan Graham on Retriever Training Forum (www.retrievertraining.net)

WALKING BASEBALL

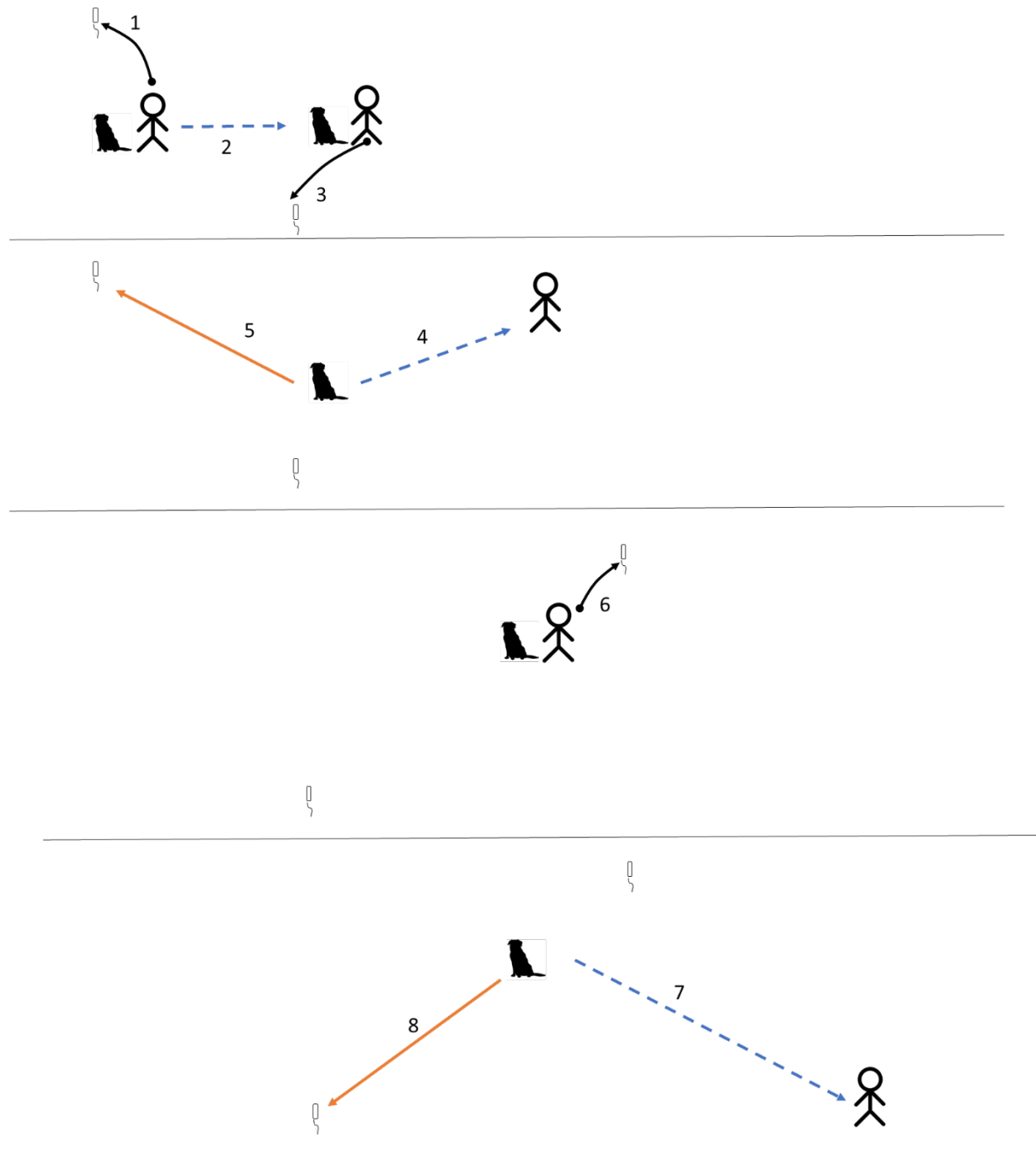
Purpose:

- Highly flexible drill to maintain casting teamwork and work on specific issues.

Requirements:

- 2 white or orange bumpers
- Field with modest features

Procedure:



- With your dog by your side, toss a bumper 10 to 15 feet to the side (1). Make sure your dog is watching you do it.
- Walk with your dog the distance you want for your first cast (2), say 15 to 30 yards, then toss bumper to other side (3).
- Leave your dog in a sit and walk away (4) to a location where you can give the desired cast to the first bumper you dropped. Walk the distance you'd like for the second cast.
- Cast your dog (5). Receive in remote position. Toss the bumper you just received to the side. (6)
- Leave your dog and walk away (7) to a location where you can give the desired cast to the second bumper you dropped.
- Cast your dog (8). Receive in remote position. Toss the bumper you just received to the side and move to the next location.
- Repeat.

Comments:

- Easier to do than to describe!
- You can vary distances and angles so you get the casts you need. You can even do come-in casts.
- As you plant bumpers and walk away from your dog, you will need to think ahead a bit so you don't end up somewhere in a corner! As needed, simply restart.

Source: Evan Graham, Smartwork System

FIVE POINT CASTING DRILL

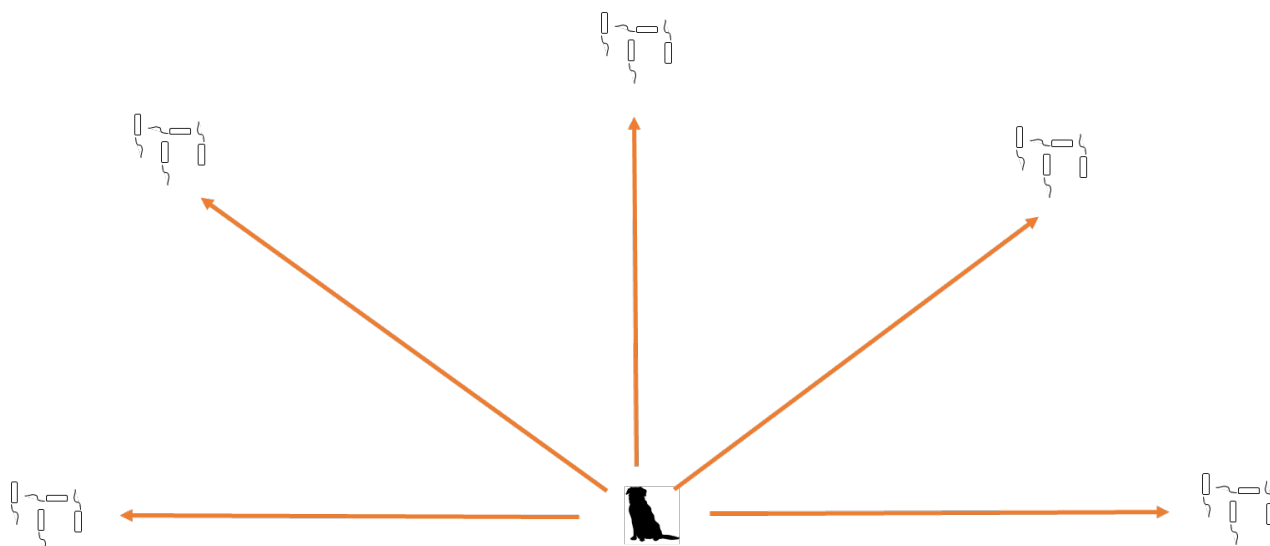
Purpose:

- Teach a dog to go distinguish angle, straight, and over casts.

Requirements:

- 5 piles of bumpers

Procedure:



- Set up five piles about 20 to 30 yards away.
- Put dog in remote position and back 5 to 10 yards away.
- Possible sequence: Indicate back pile with a bumper. Throw bumper over dog's right shoulder.
- Give a left straight back cast with a "back". Receive in remote position at dog's original starting point. Toss bumper back over dog's right shoulder. Back away to your original handling position.
- Give a silent left angle back cast. Receive and toss bumper back to pile.
- Give a verbal left straight back cast.
- Continue with left angle back, left over (verbal), left angle back.
- Then repeat same pattern on right side.

Comments:

- Go very easy on corrections, use attrition/recall instead unless it's for a go/stop/here infraction.
- Mix up the casts.

- For less experienced dogs or to introduce the drill you can simplify in a number of ways. For example, toss bumper back to back pile over dog's left shoulder followed by a left over (shoulder away from the cast). Follow a left over with a right angle back, etc.

Source: Mike Lardy, Total Retriever Training
Dennis Voigt, 25 Essential Retriever Training Drills for Handling

FOUR POLE CASTING DRILL

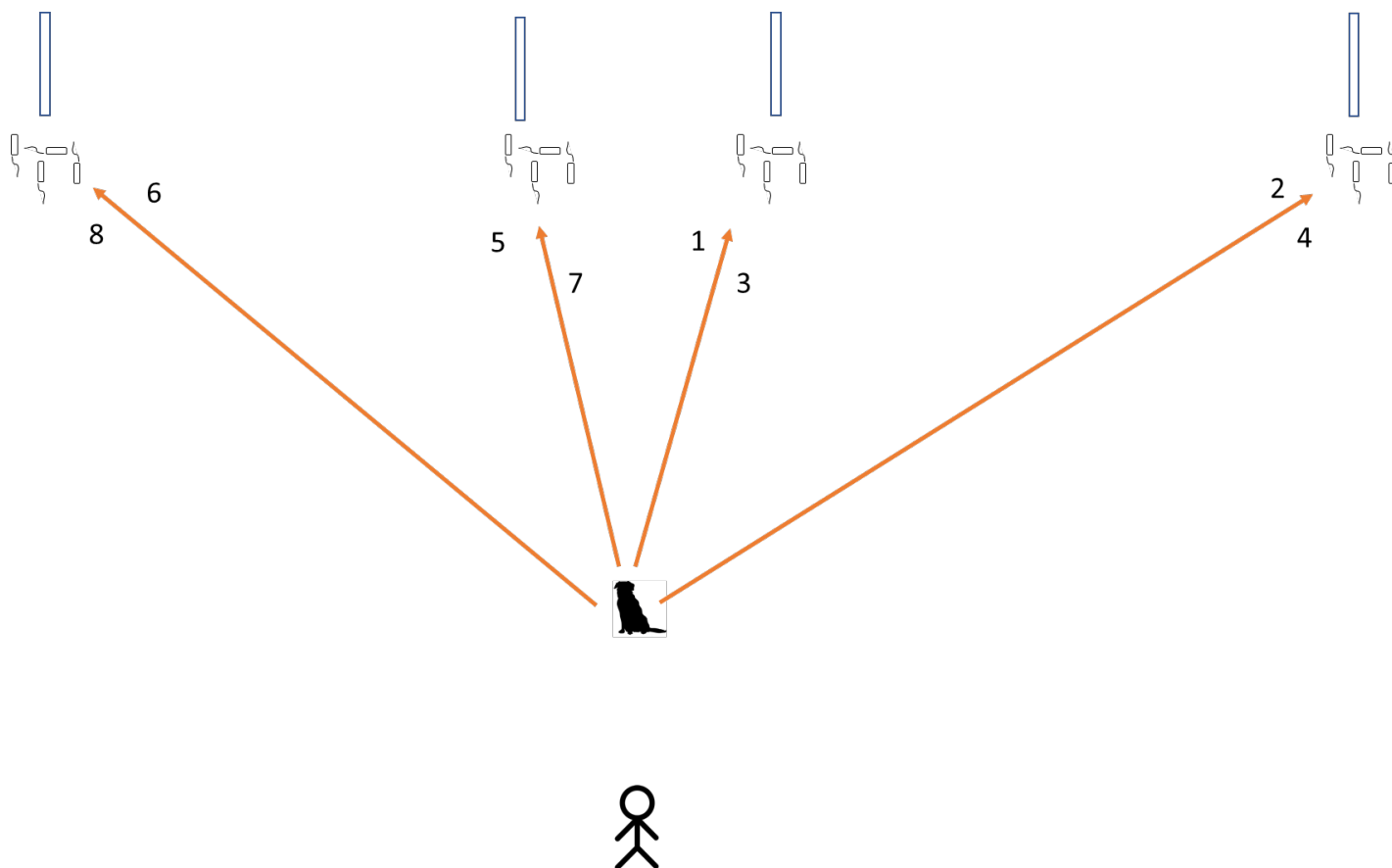
Purpose:

- For dogs that don't carry lines or dogs that don't yield to angles/change of direction.

Requirements:

- 4 white poles and 4 piles of white bumpers
- Terrain may include factors, such as hillside

Procedure:



- Setup is similar to five-point casting drill but at larger distances. Put out piles of white bumpers at 60 to 100 yards, in a line orthogonal to center line. Center piles are about 20 yards apart, outside piles about 30 to 50 yards from center piles. The idea is to accentuate the back vs. angle casts. Put a white pole at each pile.
- Run the drill initially in short cover, then taller cover or including terrain factors such as a hillside to encourage squaring the hill.
- All casts are literal, silent, and from remote position, with the dog about 20 yards in front of handler. As soon as dog makes a lead change on the way to the pile, stop, call back (attrition); you may have to change location to maintain the same cast.
- First identify the right straight back pile with a bumper or by lining the dog to it. Identify the right angle pile.

- Give a right straight back cast. Next, cast right angle back. Then repeat the straight and angle back casts on that side.
- Follow the same procedure on the left: Identify the two piles, then alternate left straight back and left angle back casts.

Comments:

- Go very easy on corrections, use attrition instead unless it's for a go/stop/here infraction.

Source: Pat Burns workshop @ Bear Country Kennels, 2016

TWO HANDED WAGON WHEEL CASTING DRILL

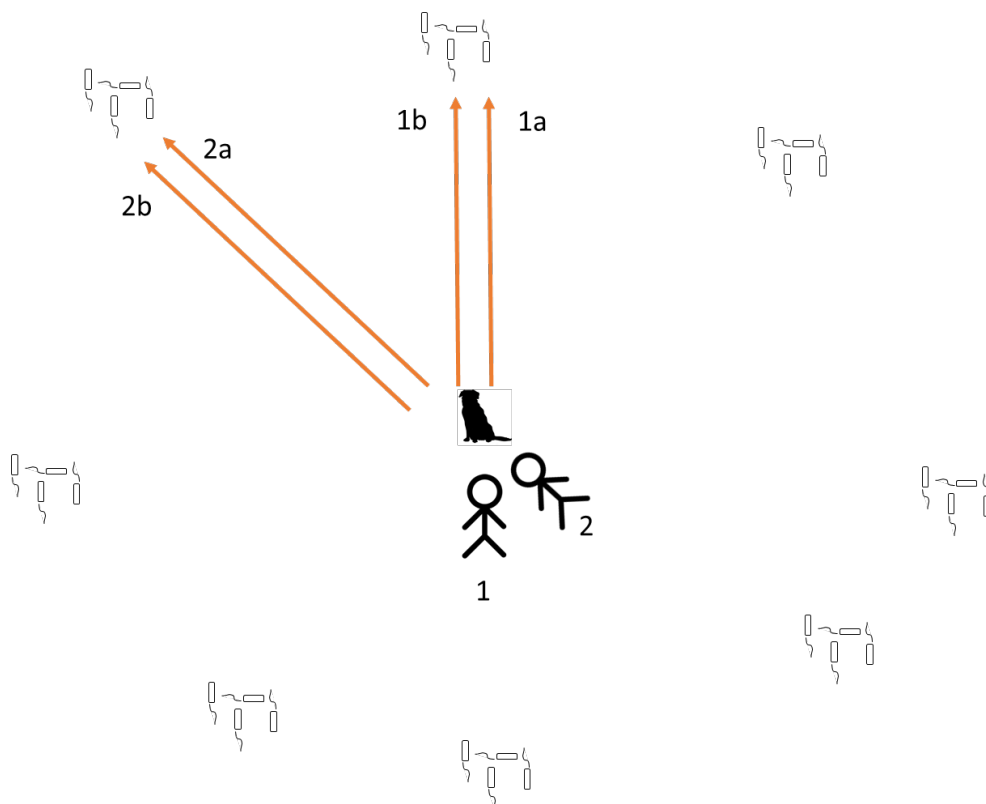
Purpose:

- Reinforce straight backs.

Requirements:

- 16 or 24 white bumpers.

Procedure:



- Place 2 or 3 white bumpers in an 8-pile wagon wheel setup, 50 yards or so from the center point. You can incorporate terrain factors, not necessarily just a flat field.
- From the center of wagon wheel, send the dog from a remote position with a straight right verbal back. Receive in remote position. Toss the bumper back.
- Send with a straight left verbal back to the same pile. Receive in remote position. Toss the bumper back.
- Turn to the left to line up for the next pile. Repeat right, then left cast. If the dog tries to return to the previous pile: no, attrition, step closer. If needed re-identify the pile with a bumper.
- Continue to go around the wheel.

Comments:

- Simpler version is to give cast away from where the bumper was tossed back.
- Go very easy on corrections, use attrition instead unless it's for a go/stop/here infraction.

Source: Pat Burns workshop @ Bear Country Kennels, 2016

SPLIT-CASTING DRILL

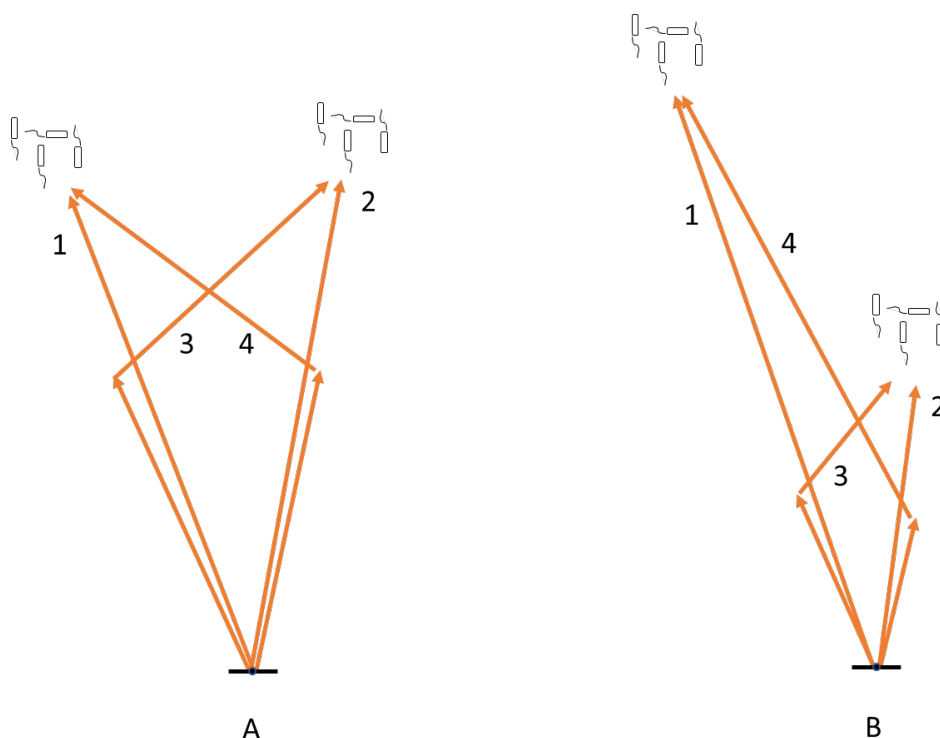
Purpose:

- Address the problem of not getting enough cast response or scalloping.
- Address the problem of getting too much cast response (and perhaps ping ponging).

Requirements:

- 2 piles of white bumpers
- Field with no or modest features

Procedure:



- Put two piles of white bumpers out. In setup A (insufficient cast response), the piles are at about 60 to 70 yards from the dog and about 20 yards from each other.
- Clearly establish each pile by sending from your side.
- Next, stop the dog about 2/3 on the way to the pile and cast to the other pile. Alternate between the two piles and between lining to the pile and casting to the other pile. Vary the point where you stop the dog and cast according to the angle of cast you want to work on.
- In setup B (overcasting), one of the piles is at about 100 yards. For casts to the shorter pile, use silent angle back, for casts to the longer pile, use a more straight back, verbal cast. On another day, do the same drill with the longer pile on the opposite side.

Comments:

- Use attrition instead unless it's for a go/stop/here infraction.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XVIII #1, pg 14

LONG DISTANCE BLIND DRILL

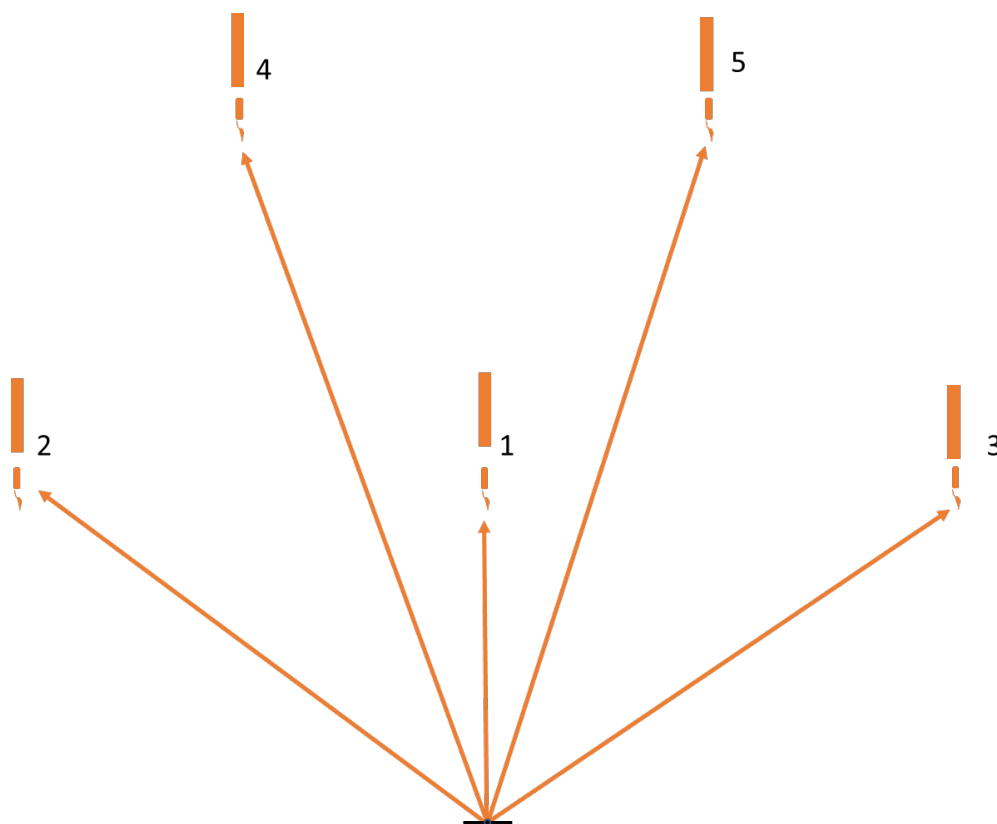
Purpose:

- Refine casting skills in the field.

Requirements:

- 5 orange stakes/flags
- 5 or more orange bumpers

Procedure:



- Place orange stakes and bumpers out in an M-shaped pattern. First row about 100 yards from the line, second row 150 to 200 yards. For less experienced dogs leave one bumper at each of the closer stakes, for more experienced dogs you can leave a pile.
- Pick up the bumper that are closer first, then pick up the ones in the second row. If the dog tries to a previous blind, just handle out of that area. Younger dogs won't be rewarded if they disobey the casts because there's no bumpers there.

Comments:

- More of a 5-peat in the field than a drill. Great for inexperienced dogs.

Source: Pat Burns workshop @ Bear Country Kennels, 2016

TUNE-UP DRILL

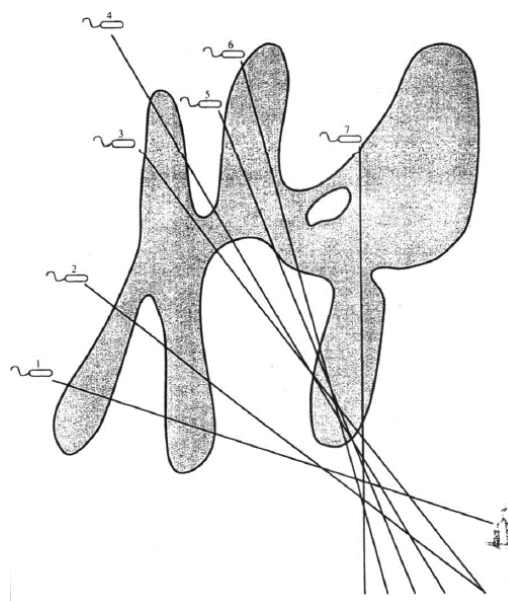
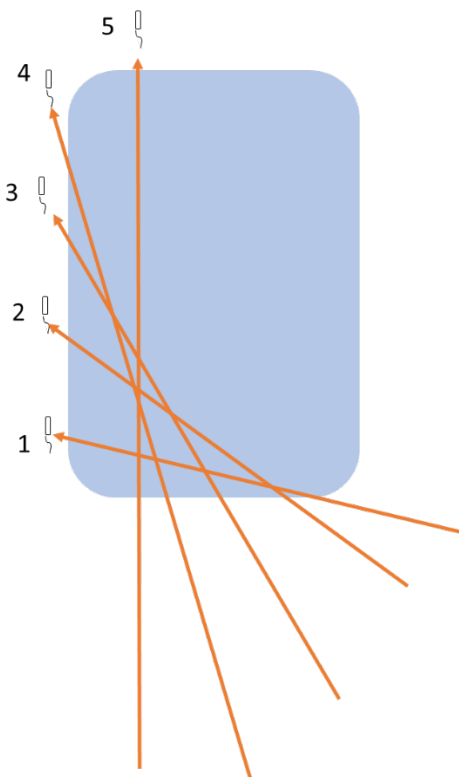
Purpose:

- Improve precision lining and casting by repeating certain concepts from different locations.

Requirements:

- Pond (about 40 yards across)
- 5 to 10 white and/or orange bumpers

Procedure:



- Based on your pond and the concepts you want to work on, place white bumpers around the pond. Mark positions clearly so that you can repeat the drill over the next few days. The figures show a simple and an advanced tune-up.
- After a few days, you may want to replace the white with orange bumpers.
- Try to get to the point that you can pick up the bumpers with 1 or 2 handles.

Comments:

- Should be run at least annually. Great at beginning of the season.
- Try to design the blinds to repeat certain concepts and move the line. E.g. angled entries, over point, by point, reentries, etc.
- Run the drill for 3 to 5 days.
- Have a high standard with literal casts, even if it means a lot of whistles. Avoid collar corrections, use attrition instead.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XX #5, pg. 6

SWIM-BY TUNE-UP DRILL

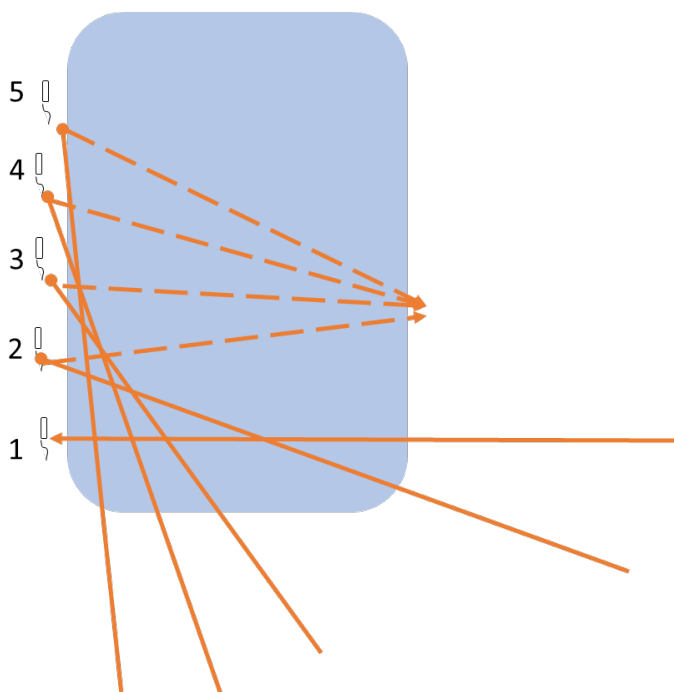
Purpose:

- Teach angle entries, corner cheats.
- Improve water attitude.

Requirements:

- Pond (20 – 40 yards across)
- 5 to 7 white bumpers

Procedure:



- Place white bumpers around edge of the pond, clearly visible, about 5 yards apart. It's okay to see your dog plant them.
- Pick up closest to farthest. When dog picks up the first, walk over to the swim-by point to recall your dog and establish the exit point.
- Start very close to shoreline and make sure dog is locked in. Send your dog for the bumper. As soon as he has picked it up, cast over to the exit point. Help find the exit point with swim-by casts as needed.
- Every day back away farther from the water until you're at 50 to 75 yards, with high success.

Comments:

- Great transition drill right after swim-by.
- Run the drill for 3 to 5 days.
- Avoid collar corrections, use attrition instead.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XXIII #2, pg. 7

OFF A POINT CASTING DRILL

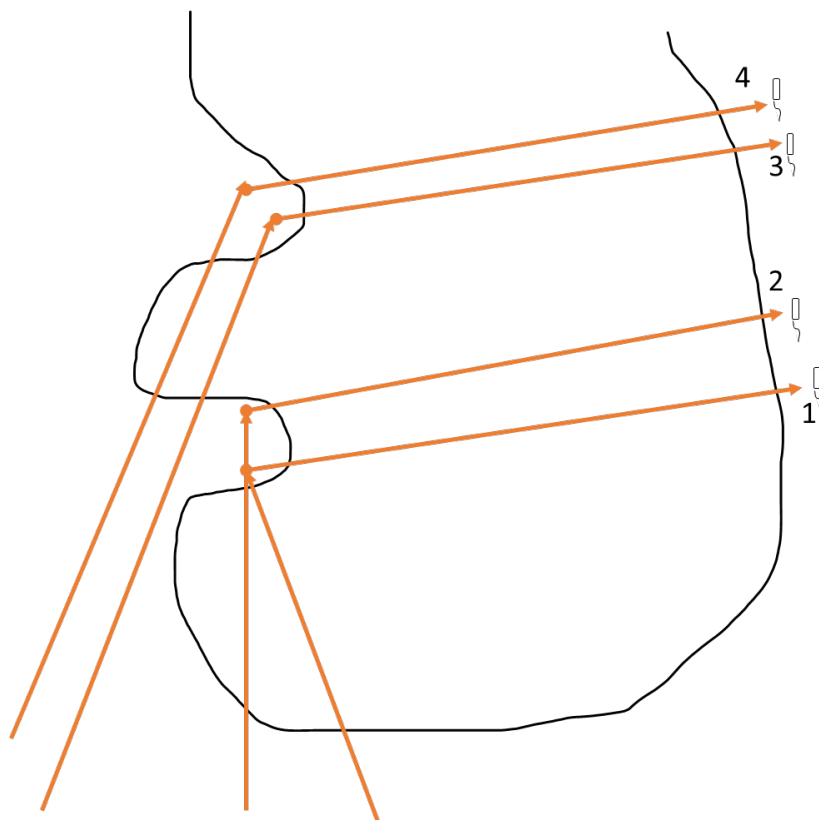
Purpose:

- Hone the dog's ability go cast off a point and not dig back around points.

Requirements:

- Pond with ideally 2 or more points and 30 to 40 yards from one side to the other.
- White bumpers

Procedure:



- Place bumpers on side opposite the points.
- Send dog and stop on the point. If possible, let the dog run a few yards on the point. Give a slow silent over cast. If dog digs back, stop immediately, call back, repeat the cast. Use attrition as needed to get the dog in the water. If you get repeated dig backs, use a stern verbal "over". Then use overs to help the dog across the pond.
- Repeat with the next blinds. After a couple or so, use a light nick with the sit whistle if the dog digs back.

Comments:

- Ideally, the over casts would be INTO the wind.
- Like other tune-ups, repeat for 3 or 4 days.

Source: Dennis Voigt, Retrievers ONLINE, Vol. XXIII #3, pg 36

CAST INTO THE WATER DRILL

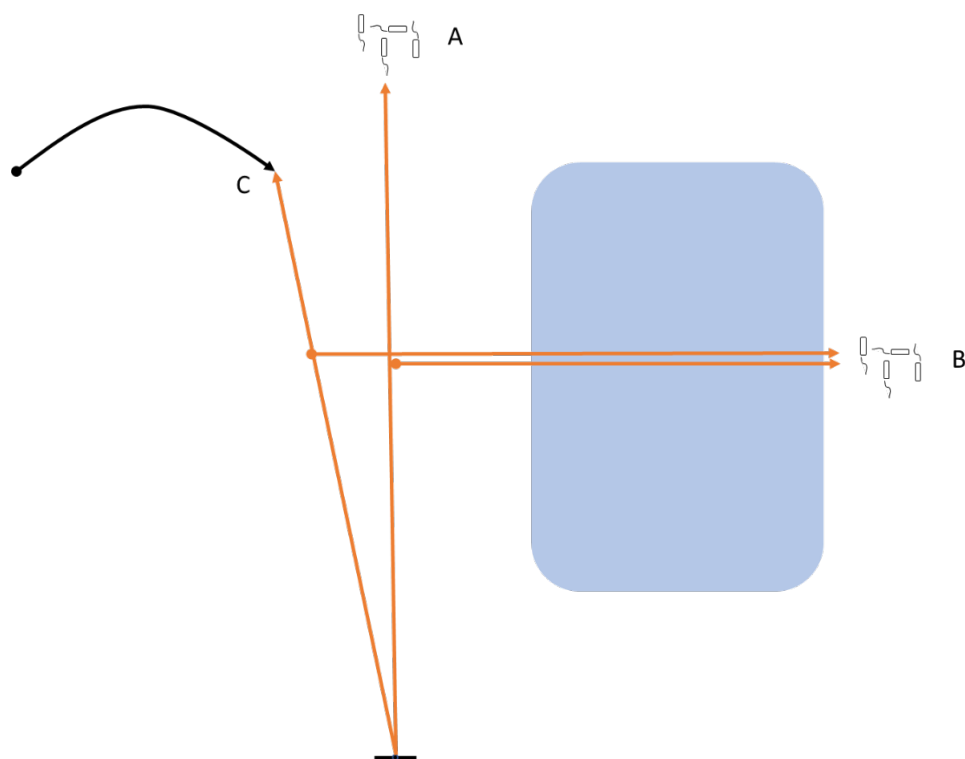
Purpose:

- Improve response to casts into water at a distance.

Requirements:

- Simple land next to a pond
- Two piles of white bumpers
- Bird boy

Procedure:



- Plant a pile of bumpers (A) about 150 yards out.
- Teach the line to the pile.
- Go to the over location and teach the over to the second pile across the water (B). Slowly back up to the start line while maintaining the over.
- Line to A.
- Send to A, stop and cast into the water to B. Correct with “sit”-nick-“sit” for failing to take the over cast.
- Alternate between lining to A and casting to B.
- After a couple of days, have helper throw a mark (C), send for it, stop en route and cast to B. Pick up mark if successful.

Comments:

- Repeat for 3 or 4 days

Source: Dennis Voigt, 25 Essential Retriever Training Drills for Handling

ABOUT ME

I live in Sudbury, MA, and train and compete with my Labrador Retrievers in field trials and hunt tests. I also dabble in obedience and tracking. I am an active member of the Labrador Retriever Club of Greater Boston, where I am on the board, chair the field committee, and teach retriever classes at various levels. I can be reached at rainer@foxrunretrievers.com.

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