

Weaves Without Worry

By Nancy Gyes

Want to turn a “solid” weave pole performance into something extraordinary? Tired of babysitting entries or having to stay right at your dog’s shoulder while he weaves? Will your dog pull out if you get too far away? Want to try one of those 60-weave-pole challenges or to look forward to Masters gambles that have weave poles in them? Maybe you’re just dreaming of year after year of competition without ever making a weaving error.

The following are advanced weave skills that should be started as soon as your dog has the basics of a reliable weave performance on both your right and left side while you remain next to him. If you have already started to teach these techniques while your dog is still in channels or wires, so much the better. These skills can become second nature to you and your dog if you teach them right from the beginning.

- Weave coming toward you
- Weave independently while going ahead of you
- Weave at a lateral distance
- Weave while you leave to move forward or laterally
- Severe entries
- Challenging exits
- Tough rear crosses from all entries
- “Seamless” front crosses before and after poles
- Different numbers of poles, (odd numbers, short sets, as well as 24, 36, and 60 poles)

PHOTO BY ALISSA BEHN



Weave Coming to You

Start with a set of 4 to 6 weave poles.

Step 1—Place the dog on a stay at least a few feet from the start of the poles. Stand at pole #2, blocking the dog's access to the wrong entry gate, and facing the dog (see **Figure 1A**). Call the dog to the weaves (*Come, Weave*) and point at the first gate. If the dog enters correctly, as he reaches your side at pole #2 (the dog will be on your right), immediately turn into the weave poles (dog will now be on your left) and finish them parallel with the dog.

Step 2—Move to a position halfway between weave poles #2 and #3 (see **Figure 1B**). Repeat the recall to the weaves: you may still point to the correct gate for the dog to begin weaving. As the dog reaches your side, you should turn into the weave poles and move parallel with the dog to complete the set of weaves.

Step 3—Move to a position at pole #3 (see **Figure 1C**). Stand about 1' off the side of the poles so that you do not block the dog as he comes through the gate at your side. Place the dog in a stay at least 5'-10' from the poles. Repeat the recall to the weaves. As the dog reaches the handler's side, the handler should turn and move parallel with the dog. If the dog is competent at this level, vary which side of the poles you recall the dog from and vary the distance the dog is from the beginning of the poles.

Step 4—Move to a position between weave poles #3 and #4 (see **Figure 1D**). Repeat the above directions. Continue increasing the distance that you place the dog from the poles so that you are adding forward momentum to the weave pole entry.

Progression

- Continue to move your recall position down the line of weaves, incrementally, one pole at a time. Always wait for the dog to reach your side before beginning to move parallel with the dog. Remember: you are teaching the dog to weave coming to you so you want the dog to see you facing him until he reaches your side.
- Add a jump or tunnel before the weaves
- Place yourself farther from the exit of the weaves
- Call your dog with enthusiasm to his toy that you are holding in your hand

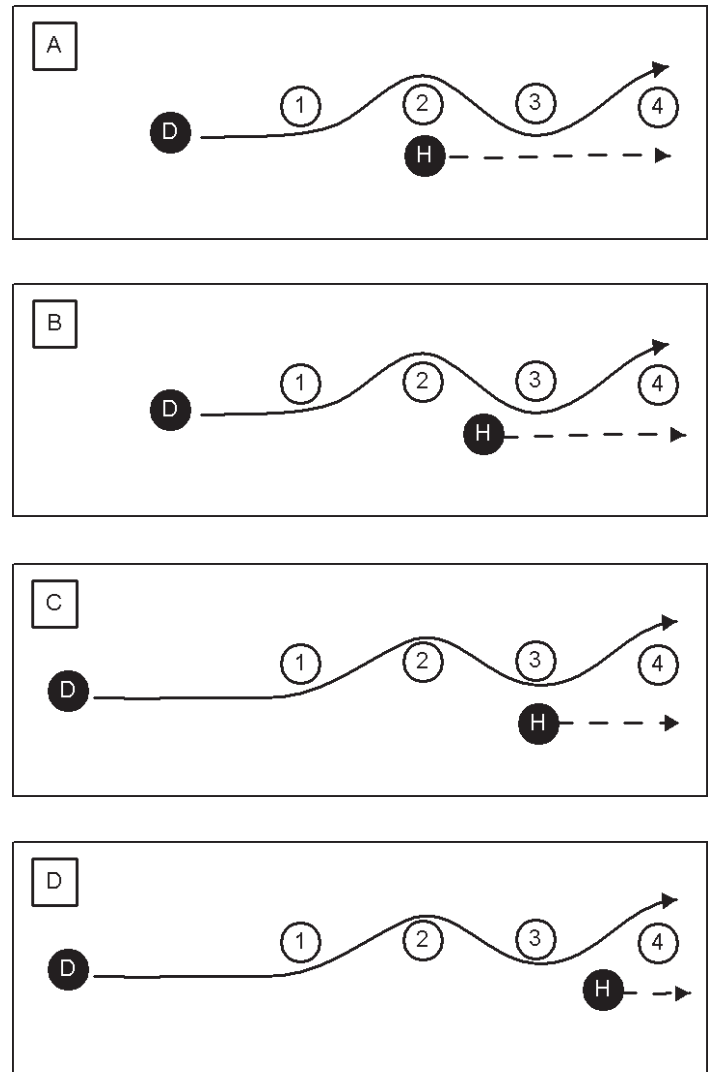


Figure 1



PHOTO BY MARK GOSE

Weave Going Away from You

Start with a set of 6 weave poles. You will be backchaining the dog to a target (either a toy or a Tug 'N Treat) starting at the last weave pole.

Step 1—Hold the dog, facing away from you, at the last gate, between poles #5 and #6 (see **Figure 2A**). If your dog is tall enough that you can hold on to his collar (or a harness) easily, then do so. If not put a short leash or a tab on your dog's collar or harness. Restrain the dog at the gate. Throw the toy or Tug 'N Treat to the end of the poles. After it lands, release the dog with the command, *Weave*. If using a clicker, click as the dog passes through the gate with pole #6 on his right. You are not moving with the dog. Stay in your position at pole #5. Remember: you are teaching the dog to weave away from you and drive forward to a toy, Tug 'N Treat, or target of some kind.

Step 2—After the dog catches on to the game of traveling through the last gate to grab the toy, move backward to pole #5 so that the dog's body is touching the pole and his head is still pointing through the last gate (see **Figure 2B**). Restrain, throw, cue *Weave*, and release the dog. If using a clicker, click as the dog passes pole #6 on his right.

Step 3—Guide the dog into a position close to pole #4 (see **Figures 2C and 2D**). This is the first time the dog will need to make the choice of whether to go around pole #5 to weave or to go straight to the toy, bypassing the pole. Gently restrain the dog until you see that his inclination is to go around pole #5 and weave through the last gate. If using a clicker, click as the dog passes pole #6 on his right.

Step 4—If your dog is successful for many repetitions when starting from pole #4, move to a position close to pole #3 (see **Figures 2E and 2F**). Now the dog will negotiate through three gates: poles #3 to #4, #4 to #5, and #5 to #6.

Stay at this level until the dog never makes an error. Remember to keep your position at pole #3, and send your dog to the toy or Tug 'N Treat.

Step 5—Continue to backchain 1 pole at a time. When you can do 6 poles from beside the dog, start moving farther away from the poles to send the dog. Restrain the dog, throw the toy, let it land, send the dog to the poles from at least a few feet behind pole #1, and continue indefinitely.

Progression

Add a jump before the poles and a table or tunnel after. Stay behind the poles and send the dog ahead through the poles. Start throwing the toy to the dog *after* completion of the poles as a reward, rather than a bribe (which is placed ahead of time).

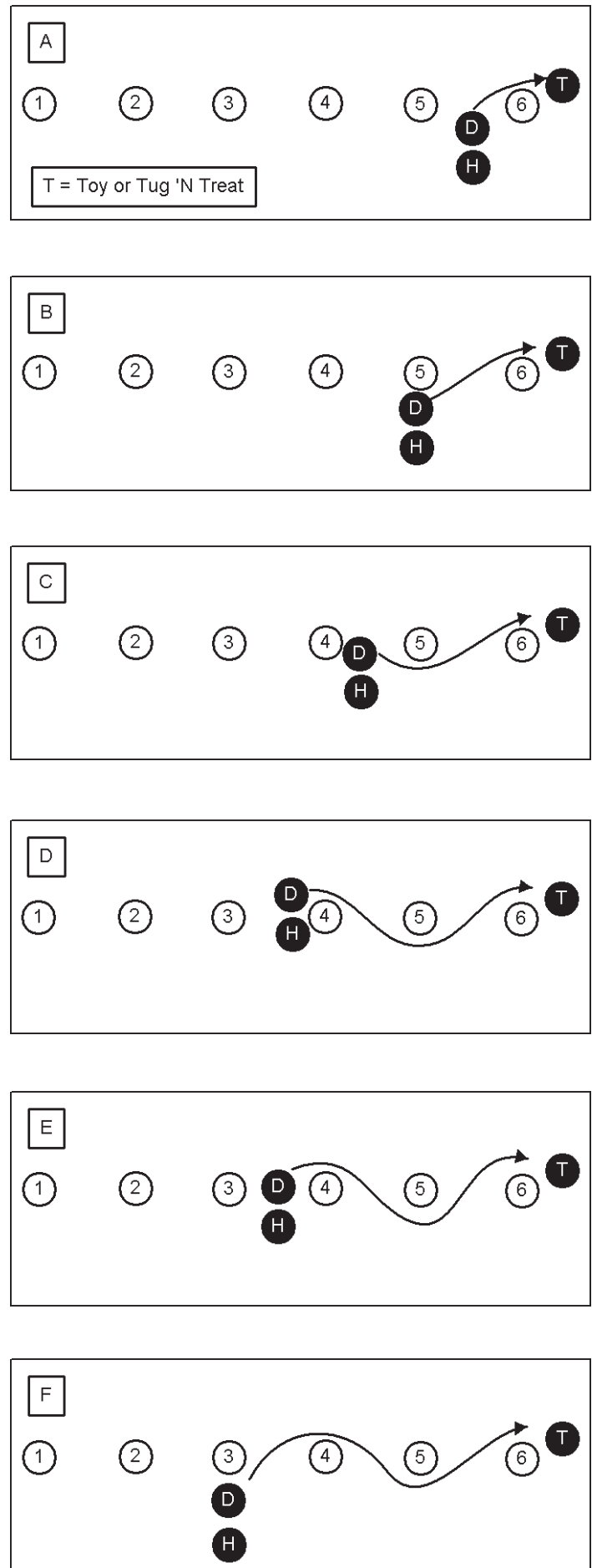


Figure 2

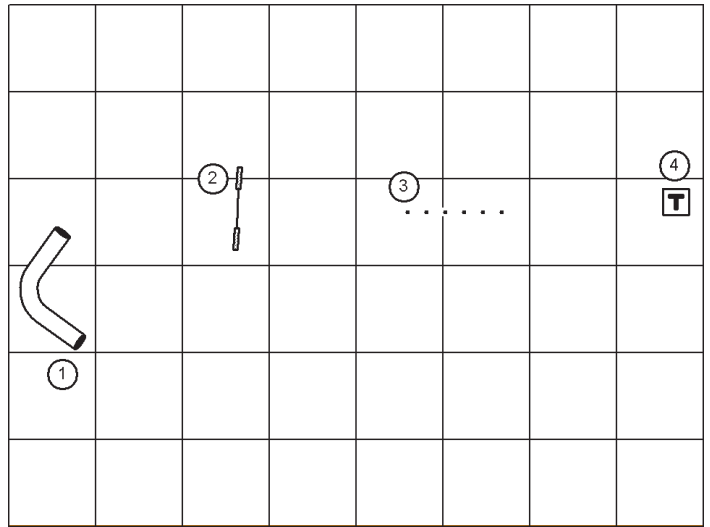


Figure 3

Lateral Distance on the Weaves

Start with straight-line lateral work. Set up the exercise shown in **Figure 3**.

Step 1—Show the dog his toy or Tug `N Treat and then place it on the table or on the ground at the end of the weaves. If your dog will pull out of the poles to get the target, then follow the directions to backchain weaving away from you (Figure 2) before you begin. Start with the tunnel to accelerate the dog toward the weaves and the inevitable reward on the table. If your dog is comfortable only a few feet from your side on the poles, move laterally one foot farther than your normal distance, and be at that distance *before* the dog exits the tunnel.

Step 2—Continue moving farther off your dog’s line. Take your position while the dog is still in the tunnel and stay on a straight line that is parallel to the dog.

Progression

Use speed-building tunnels and loop exercises, such as those illustrated in **Figures 4A through 4C** to increase your dog’s confidence at weaving with you further from his side. Start with an “accelerator” tunnel going toward the weave poles. Increase your distance away from the dog laterally (sideways) by a foot or two each time you negotiate the weave circle. If your dog falters, just drive on to the next tunnel and move in a bit closer.

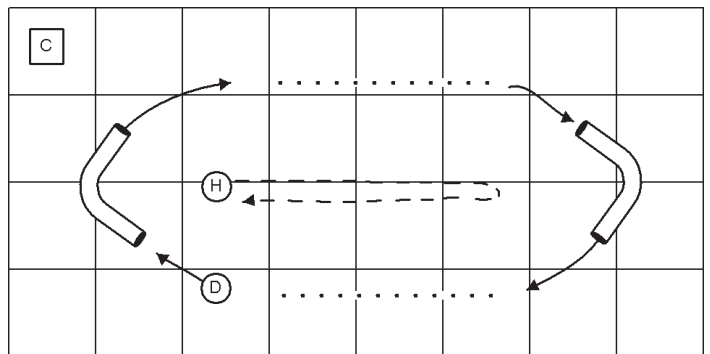
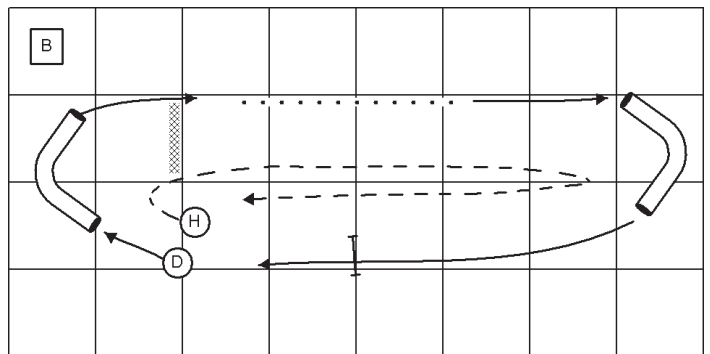
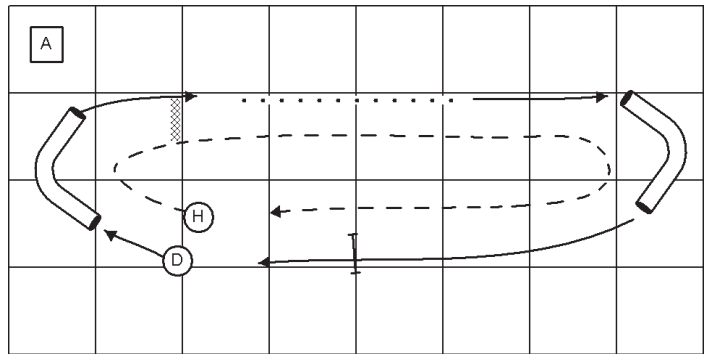


Figure 4

Severe Entries

As you and your dog become more confident on an entry, *slightly* increase the difficulty of the entries you practice. This is *incremental* weave training—you will add difficulty a foot, or sometimes just inches, at a time.

Be patient. If your dog cannot accomplish the next level of difficulty, drop back a step and reward the dog many times at the lower level, then slightly increase the difficulty. *You might find finishing a session on an easy entry will give your dog confidence.* Don't make your dog nervous about weaves because you are asking for too much too soon.

If repetitive training is not fun for your dog, keep your sessions short, and always end on an entry the dog can successfully accomplish.

- Practice around-the-clock weave entries. Start at each position on the clock to give you and your dog a different angled entry to work on (see **Figure 5**). From each angle of entry around the clock, you can practice four distinctly different ways to approach the poles with your dog—dog on your left side, dog on your right side, dog starts on your right side and you cross to the opposite side, and dog starts on your left side and you cross to the opposite side (see **Figures 6A through 6D**). Practice each of these four ways starting from each position on the clock. Work front crosses at the entry as well as rear crosses.
- When you start working severely angled weave entries like those shown in **Figures 7A and 7B**, begin with an entry that the dog can hit competently without your help, and then incrementally make the entry more difficult. It might take a few weeks of incremental training to teach your dog the entries shown here without your loading the dog into the poles.
- In the entry game shown in **Figure 8**, move the jump in a straight line closer to the poles by one foot after each successful set of poles. See if your dog can slow himself down enough to get the entry even when the jump is very close to the poles.
- Each practice session, start with a slightly easier entry than you ended with in the last session. During the session, move the jump one foot closer to the weave poles after every third repetition of weave poles you complete (see **Figures 9A through 9E**).

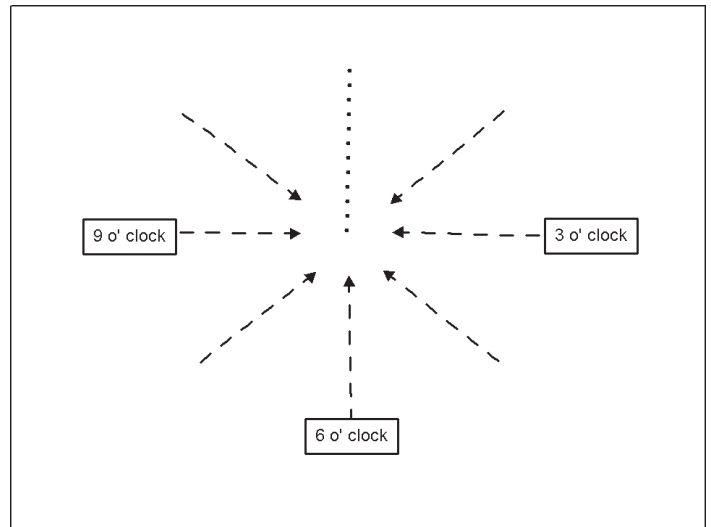


Figure 5

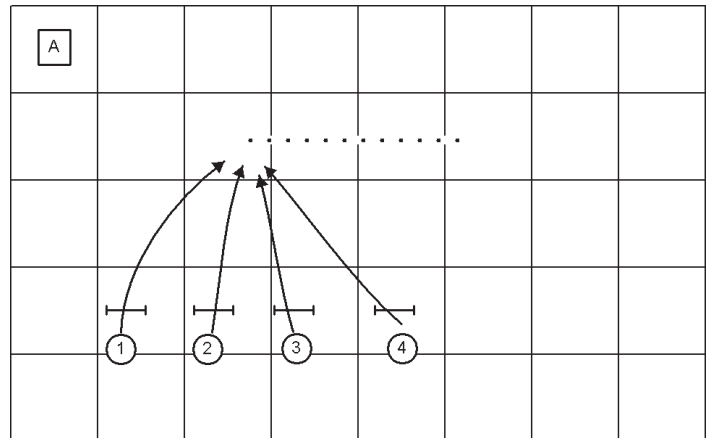


Figure 7

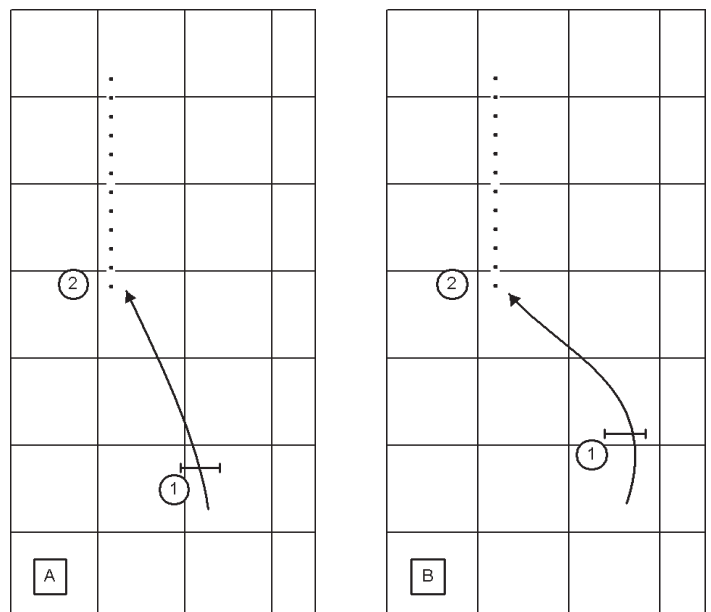


Figure 9

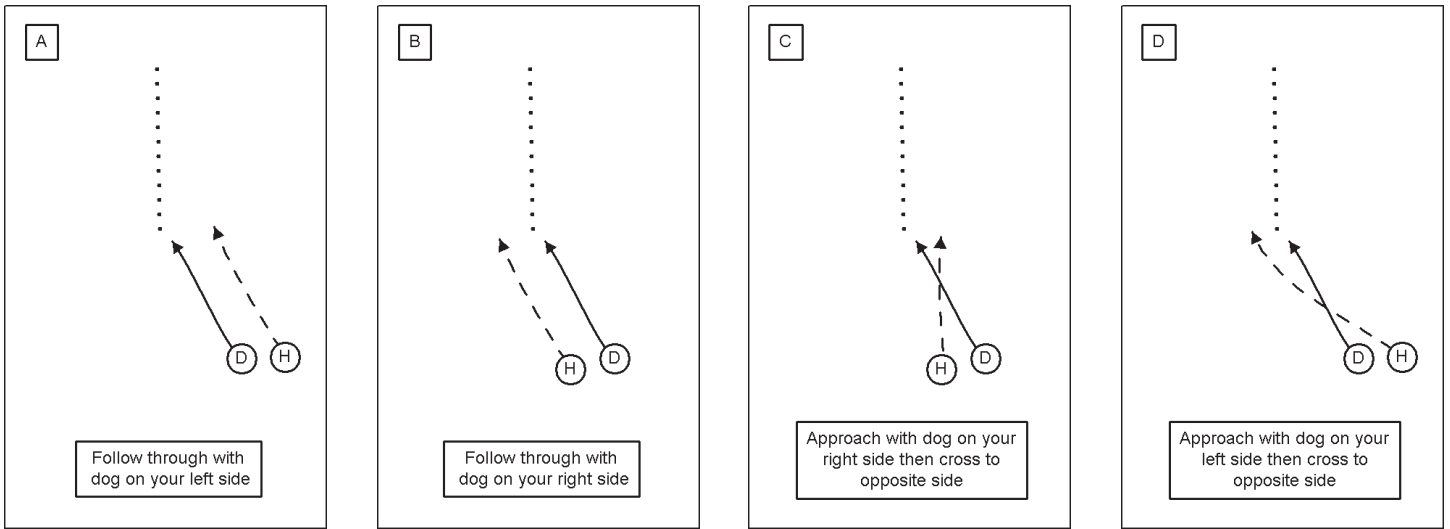


Figure 6

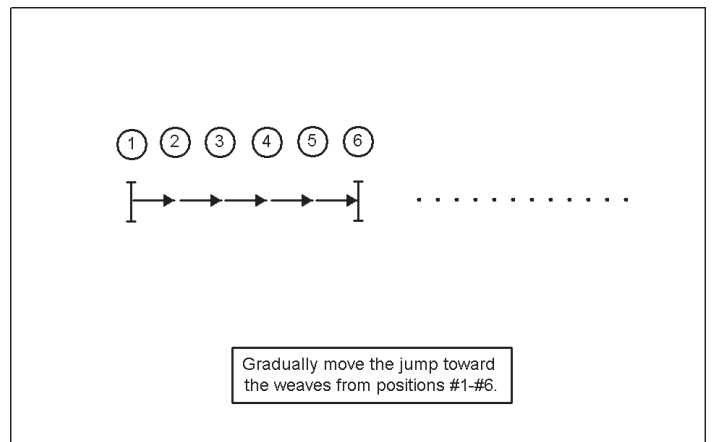
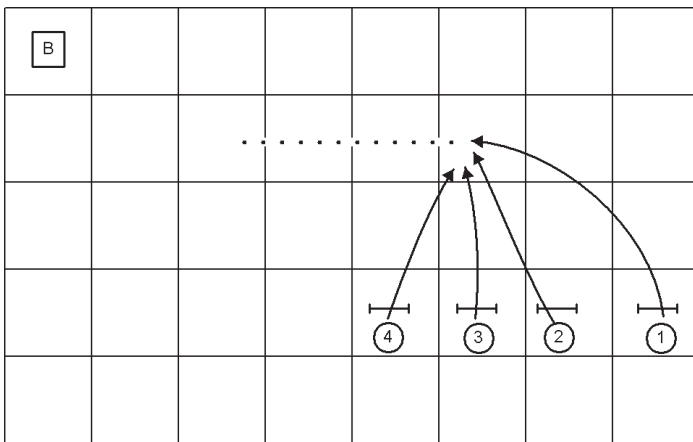
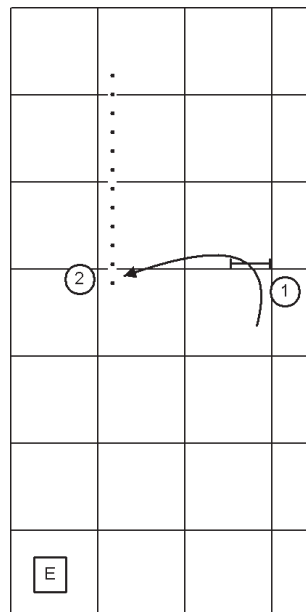
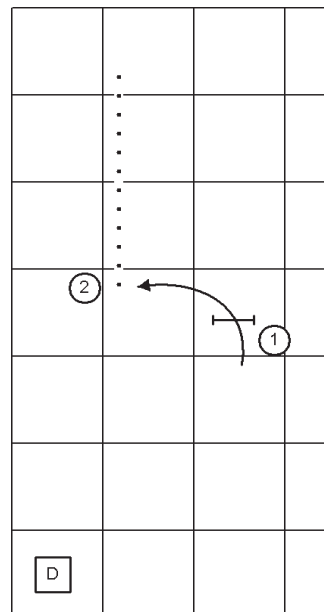
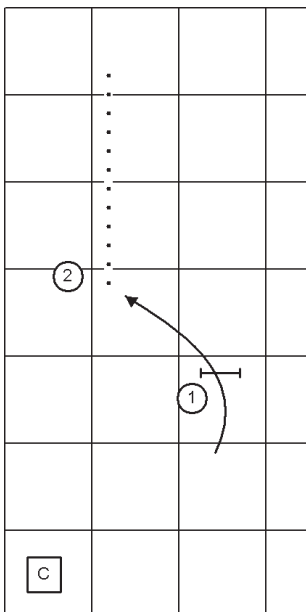


Figure 8



This is *incremental* weave training—you will add difficulty a foot, or sometimes just inches, at a time.

- Changing sides to your dog as you approach the weave poles, especially executing a rear cross, is a guaranteed distraction unless you have practiced crosses. That is why it is important to regularly expose your dog to the rear cross options shown in Figure 6 and to gradually increase the angle of your turn as shown in **Figure 10**. It helps to have a target ahead of the weave poles and to have the dog drive ahead of you, so that the dog ignores your rear cross.

Run-By Weaves

Before teaching the dog to tolerate your running past him in the weaves, you must first teach the dog to “weave coming to you” as described earlier in this article. Then, while doing weave poles normally, start getting ahead of the dog, one pole at a time (see **Figures 11A and 11B**) over a few weeks time. Do this until you can run past the poles and execute different front crosses or pushes at the exit of the poles as in **Figures 12A through 12C**.

Challenging Exits

Each time you practice your weave poles, you should be working on specific skills. Plan your practice and walk the drill appropriately. For each set of weave poles you practice, you want not just to do a tough entry, but a different exit from the poles. Tight front crosses at the end of the poles, 90° pushes out of the poles, running ahead of your dog to be in position for a front cross, or exciting your dog with a toy while you are leaving him are essential skills if you're going to be able to handle the weaves in different ways on a course. **Figure 13** presents some options for front crosses as your dog exits the weave poles. The poles are the #1 obstacle. Do any one of the #2 obstacles after you complete the weaves. Do a different #2 obstacle on the next repetition and so on. The dashed lines on the diagram indicate the handler's path to each of the #2 obstacles. A tunnel trap is added just for fun!

Different Numbers of Poles

- Occasionally, change the number of poles that you train on. If your dog is accomplished on a set of 14 poles, then 12 poles will be a piece of cake.
- Sometimes judges set courses with an odd number of poles. The dog exits on the opposite side on an odd number of poles (that is, pole #5, #9, #11).
- Put two sets of 12 poles together and see how you do on a set of 24. Most dogs who have been taught weaves properly will weave until they get to the end of the poles, no matter how many poles there are. If you can do 24, you are ready to try a 60-Weave-Pole Challenge! 🐕

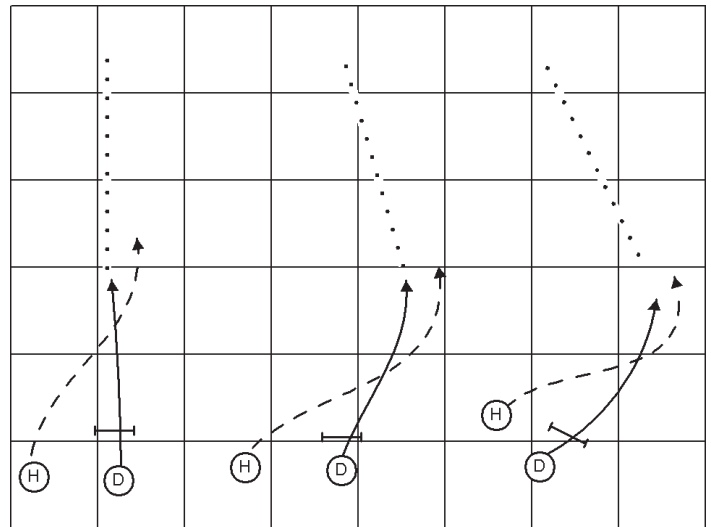


Figure 10

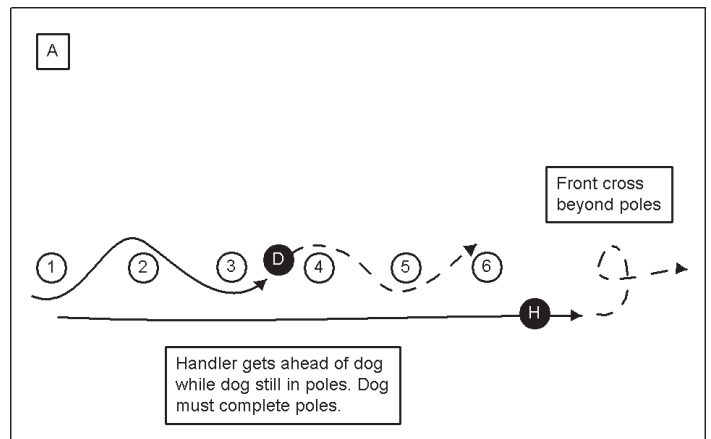


Figure 12

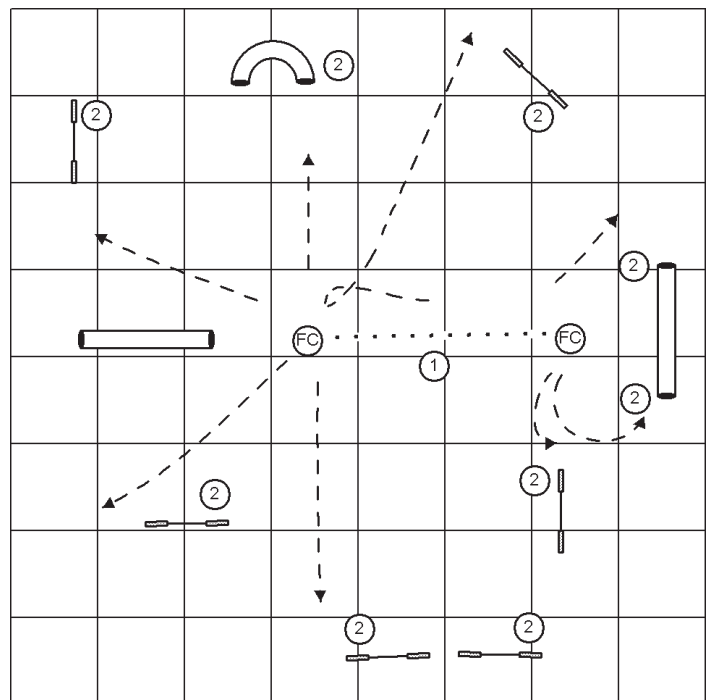


Figure 13

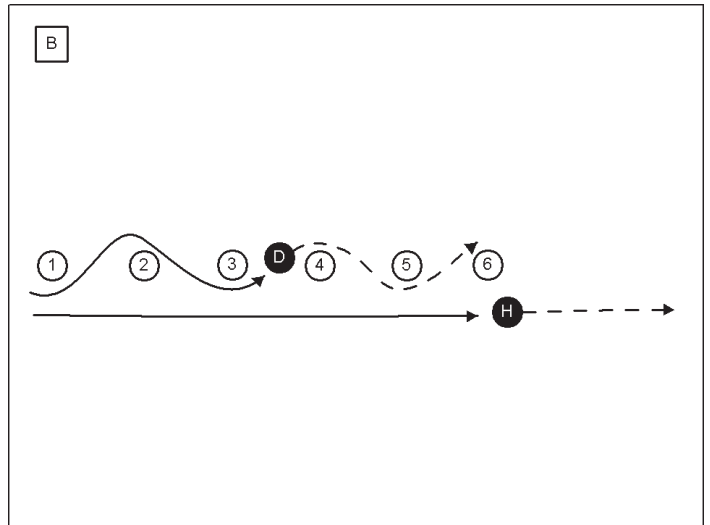
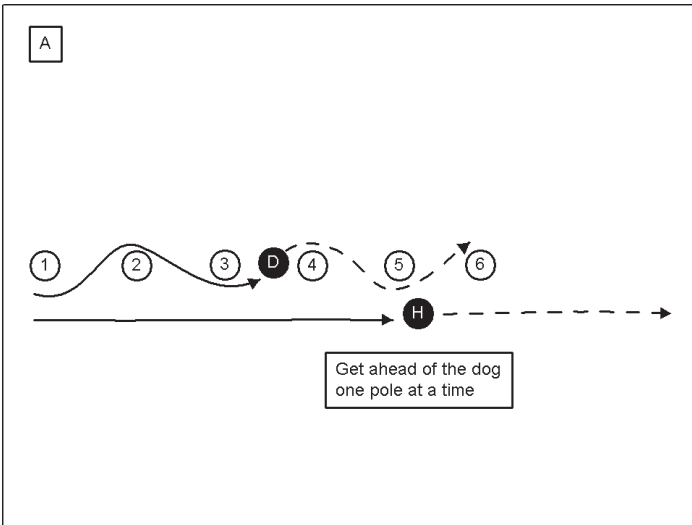


Figure 11

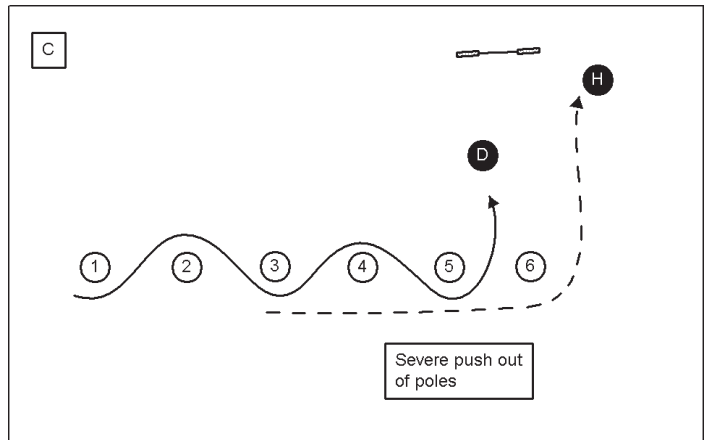
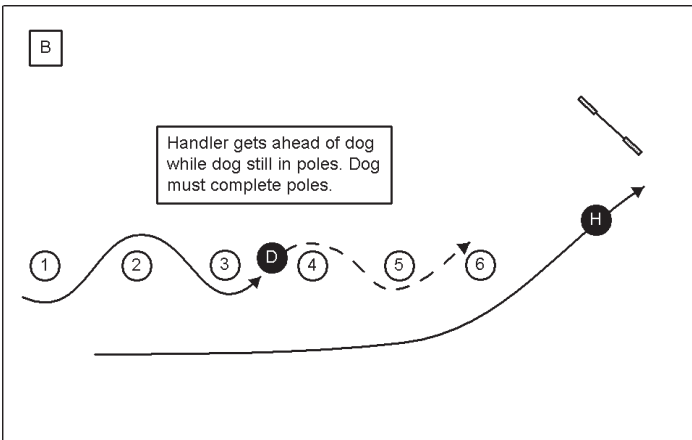


PHOTO BY LISA SPONSLEER

