



Virtual Nosework Exercise

Virtual Trials and Competitions

Opening up a new world of sports for you and your dog

By David Gallant

The COVID pandemic limited many of us from attending in-person dog training classes and competitions. It canceled dozens of trials and events in 2020 and 2021. And for these events that were not canceled, we asked ourselves, “Is it safe to attend? Are the precautions enough for me to feel comfortable and keep both me and my dog safe?”

Most of us stayed home with our dogs, think-

ing the pandemic would be over soon. However, the months passed. CDC warnings persisted amid spikes and outbreaks. Friends and family got sick, or worse.

Meanwhile, the lack of socialization and training was also taking a toll on our dogs. They became edgier, bored and destructive.

YouTube and the internet provided many opportunities for adding training skills. But

what about recognition for the relationships we were building with our dogs? Looking back over my pre-pandemic achievements with my four-legged friends, I wanted more. We earned those accolades and titles and would like to continue to do so.

Enter virtual trialing! This area of dog sports grew exponentially during 2020 with many people limited from participating in crowded trials.



Novice Trick Dog Exercise



Virtual Parkour Class

The required application and video submission for a title can be completed at home or in the backyard, one-on-one with the dog in a relaxed environment. It works wonderfully during pandemic-associated isolation.

It is also great if you have a dog that is not ready for a busy, highly stimulating environment if your work schedule prevents you from attending, or if there are no trials that are convenient where you live.

Training for titles or learning new skills (Treibball, anyone?) keeps your dog's mind busy. He will have less time for destructive behaviors. While it doesn't solve the social interaction needed for dogs, some creative planning of trips with your dog to local pet-friendly hardware stores and pet supply stores can help.

The Benefit of Online Classes and Competitions

Dogs are often challenged to acclimate to the distractions in a trial environment. The noise, new people, other dogs, smells and more, add to the dog's nervousness. Some dogs have a personal history that requires years of socialization and training before they are ready to attend an in-person event. A nervous dog, in turn, makes the handler tense. The dog then senses the handler's unease, which becomes a cycle of increasing stress.

Some dogs and handlers never get past the unease of unknown places and new people. In the past, it would limit these teams to what they can do with their dogs. With more and more organizations offering "video titles," even very shy and skittish dogs can earn bragging rights with titles that show how much they know!

With the growth of virtual titling opportunities, many handlers can now begin attempting titles much earlier in their relationship with their dog. In fact, with in-person trials slowly making a comeback in 2021, many people continue to use virtual titling as preliminary opportunities to receive expert feedback from judges as part of their in-person trial preparations.

When working toward in-home virtual titles, the participation requirements are like traditional in-person organizations. The dog and handler will need to be registered with the organization. You pay a submission fee for each entry, and they assign a judge to evaluate the video submission.

For most titles, the dogs are not competing against other dogs. They are competing against a published standard without the added stress of trial location distractions and only their handler and video-friend present. Some titles only require one successful submission (i.e., AKC Trick Dog, International Dog Parkour) while others require multiple successful submissions, also known as "legs."

Virtual Dog Sport Titles

There are virtual titling options for many dog sports. There are obedience and rally obedience



Advanced Trick Dog Exercises

options where an expert judge will provide feedback while evaluating your applications. A herding dog—or any dog—could learn Treibball, which consists of pushing exercise balls into a soccer goal. Interested in getting started in Nosework? YouTube videos help with that, and there is even an organization that has created the ability to title in Nosework virtually.

Dog Parkour is a fun way to train your dog to become familiar with a multitude of surfaces, and they can earn all titles virtually with the International Dog Parkour Association.

Virtual titles are readily achievable for many dogs and their handlers. Whether you have a puppy or an experienced competition dog looking for new challenges, there is something online for just about every dog training interest.

A quick internet search will present you with a grand world of virtual titling opportunities. Here are some to consider:

- **American Kennel Club** (akc.org) presents virtual title opportunities that include Rally, Obedience, Agility, FitDog, Water Test and Trick Dog.
- **Canine-Work and Games** (c-wags.org) offers virtual opportunities that include Rally and Obedience.
- **Australian Shepherd Club of America** (asca.org) is open to all breeds and offers virtual title opportunities in Rally and Obedience.

- **Cyber Rally-O** (cyberrally-o.com) only offers online titling in Rally Obedience.
- **North American Dog Agility** (nadac.com) offers virtual title opportunities in Agility.
- **International Dog Parkour Association** (dogparkour.org) encourages you to introduce your dog to the world of jumping, climbing, balancing over, crawling under, and going around different obstacles in his or her everyday world. You can do these exercises anywhere.
- **American Treibball Association** (americantreibballassociation.org) will allow you to earn titles in Treibball, a sport where dogs push balls into soccer goals.
- **National Association of Treibball Enthusiasts** (NATE) (nationaltreibball.com) provides more fun with Treibball titling.
- **Do More With Your Dog** (domorewithyour-dog.com) provides many trick resources and titling options.
- **Fenzi Academy** (fenziteamnosework.com, fenziteamtitles.com) offers Nosework titling and obedience titling.

Virtual titles are very achievable from the comfort of your home. Another super benefit, unlike competing at a trial—you get to take several videos until your dog gets it right! Also, many of these titles translate into "regular" titles should you decide to start competing in person. 🐾