

**The Musical Dog Sport Association  
Performance Guidelines  
August 20, 2008**

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**I. The Musical Dog Sport Association's Definition of Canine Freestyle:**

*Canine Freestyle is a dog sport in which training, teamwork, music, and movement combine to create an artistic, choreographed performance highlighting the canine partner in a manner that celebrates the unique qualities of each individual dog. It is built upon the foundation of a positive working relationship of a dog and handler team.*

- An MDSA Canine Freestyle performance is always presented with the above definition in mind.
- The dog and handler seem intangibly linked in the performance. The relationship and bond the team shares is clearly illustrated.
- The *music* is selected to enhance and showcase the movement of the dog. All movement is choreographed with the music and presented in an artistic and creative manner. The performance should not look like an obedience routine set to music.
- The *movement* of the handler compliments the dog's movement.
- Canine Freestyle is the creative expression of teamwork, training, willingness and joy shared by a dog and handler.

**II. ELIGIBILITY**

- MDSA Freestyle events are open to all dogs, purebred or mix breeds.
- Dogs must be at least one (1) year of age at the date of the competition or event.
- Bitches in season may not compete at live events.
- Dogs with disabilities may compete as long as they are able to perform in a safe and joyful manner.

**III. EQUIPMENT**

- All classes except FLEDGLING and ROOKIE GROUP are performed off lead.
- Dogs may be shown with a properly fitted collar, a slip collar, or without a collar. Decorative collars or bandanas may be used. No tags may be hanging from the dog's collar.
- No special training collars, such as prong collars, electronic collars, head halters, etc., may be used.
- All dogs on the show grounds must be on leash or crated except when in the performance space.

**IV. SIGNALS AND COMMANDS**

- The handler may use both verbal and/or visual cues. Verbal cues should be quiet and not distracting. Visual cues should be smooth, should not detract from the performance and when possible seem to be a part of the choreography.
- No force real or implied should be used, including multiple signals and commands or grabbing and physically positioning the dog. Any touch should be a demonstration of praise.

- The handler's attire should not interfere with the dog as the focus of the routine.
- Food, toys, or clickers are not allowed in any class other than the FLEDGLING class.
- Handler signals appearing to lure the dog into performing are not allowed.
- Props are allowed in the STANDARD and PREMIER classes designated "WITH PROPS."

## **V. MUSIC**

Music is a necessary part of Canine Freestyle. The music shall be carefully chosen to compliment and showcase the movement of the dog and the dynamics of the team. Music is a powerful tool for communicating emotion, energy, joy, bond, relationship and teamwork.

- Choreography may reflect the style of music (country, swing, 50's, etc) chosen.
- Handlers are required to work within the time ranges for the class.
- Music more than 5 seconds over/under time limit for the class may be scored as a minor error. Music 10 seconds or more over/under will be scored as a major error and will NQ the performance.

## **VI. PERFORMANCE SPACE**

- The performance space is based on a proscenium stage. The ideal space should be rectangular and measure 40 x 50 feet. When space is an issue, a 30 x 40 foot ring may be used. The size of the ring shall be included in the show announcement or premium list.
- The space shall be designated with markers approximately 12 inches in height. (Small cones or potted flowers may be used). The markers will be placed at the corners and the center points of each side. Markers may be identified with small letters on the corner markers and numbers on the center markers. Letters and numbers should be about 3 inches tall.
- The space may be gated on three sides (the back and the two sides) or may be left free of gating. The front shall remain open and will always be on the long side of the ring. This is the side where the judges (or the camera in the case of video performances) shall be placed.
- The judges table will be placed a minimum of 6 feet from the edge of the front of the space.
- For video events the camera should be positioned in the same space as the judges table.

### **PERFORMANCE SPACE**

## **VII. PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS**

Creative movement is an essential element of Canine Freestyle. Handlers are encouraged to explore the unlimited possibilities. These movements should fit the music and the dog's personality and strengths. The dog should never be overfaced (asking the dog to perform movements which are beyond its level of training) or required to perform beyond its physical capability.

The movements should flow smoothly one to another. The choice of what movements to use and how to present them is important. More is not always better. There are no required moves in either the REGULAR or NON-REGULAR classes. A pleasing balanced presentation is the goal. Each movement itself may be performed in an almost endless variety of ways. Creativity is encouraged.

Examples include but are not limited to the list below:

- Bow
- Left Side Heelwork
- Right Side Heelwork
- Front work
- Circles
- Distance
- Down
- Jumping
- Serpentine
- Spins
- Switches
- Pivots
- Recall
- Rollover
- Weaves
- Zig zag

## **VIII. ATTIRE**

- The handler's attire shall reflect a respect for the dog, the audience, and the sport.
- Attire shall compliment the dog, the theme of the music, and choreography.
- Dress shall not overshadow, detract from, or interfere with the performance of the dog.

## **IX MISCELLANEOUS**

- Timing of the performance begins and ends with the music.
- Only CDs' will be used at live events. CD should be marked with owners name, track number and exhibition number.
- It is the handler's responsibility, prior to entering the ring, to arrange a subtle signal for music steward to start the music.
- At the beginning and conclusion of the performance, the handler shall acknowledge the audience with a courteous nod, bow or wave. Handlers may choose to acknowledge their dog at the conclusion of the performance before acknowledging the audience.

## **X. NOVICE, STANDARD & PREMIER CLASSES**

Note on titles: Those wishing to earn MDSA titles, must start in the Novice (single-dog) class.

### **NOVICE CLASS (intermediate level) Single dog**

- The purpose of this class is to show that the team is proficient in the foundations of creative heelwork - left and/or right side, front work and interactive attention.
- The team shall present a creative performance using the elements of floor pattern design, interesting changes in pace, changes in direction, interesting combinations of movements, etc.
- The team shall cover the performance space.
- Optional elements are encouraged but the handler should not overshadow dog nor ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not confident and happy performing.
- Music time range: approximately 1:15 - 2:15 minutes.

- The title of Novice Freestyle Dog (NFD) will be earned by a dog and handler earning 2 qualifying legs (Qs). Performances for each qualifying leg must be earned with a new routine with new choreography and new music. Legs may be earned at video or live events. One entry per dog per titling event is allowed.

#### **NOVICE CLASS (intermediate level) Multiple dog-GROUP (non-regular)**

- GROUP routines are made up of two (2) to a maximum of eight (8) dog and handler teams.
- The GROUP may include dogs of any breed or breeds. Class level of a GROUP should be determined by the level of the least experienced dog.
- The guidelines for the NOVICE level Single dog class shall apply to NOVICE Multiple dog GROUP routines.
- To be eligible for the NOVICE GROUP class at least three members of the group must be members of MDSA.
- An additional 30 seconds to the music length may be added to GROUP routines.
- Leashes may not be used in a NOVICE GROUP.

#### **STANDARD CLASS (advanced level) Single dog**

- The purpose of this class is to showcase the dog and the relationship between the dog and handler.
- In addition to the foundations of right and left side creative heelwork, front work and attention, the object in the STANDARD Class is to build a creative performance based on floor pattern design, interesting changes in pace, direction, contrasts, combinations of movements, etc., as well as increased use of creative optional movements within the choreography.
- The choreography shall be built on the foundations shown in the NOVICE class, and more emphasis shall be placed on musicality of the choreography.
- The team shall use the entire performance space.
- Optional elements are encouraged but the dog should not be overfaced
- Music time range: approximately 1:30 - 2:30 minutes.
- The title of Standard Freestyle Dog (SFD) will be earned by a dog and handler earning 2 qualifying legs (Qs). Performances for each qualifying leg must be earned with a new routine with new choreography and new music. Legs may be earned at video or live events. One entry per dog per titling event is allowed.

#### **STANDARD CLASS (advanced level) Single dog - WITH PROPS (non-regular)**

- The performance shall meet the same criteria as the regular STANDARD Class with the exception that the use of props will be allowed.
- The use of a prop shall in no way detract from or overshadow the performance of the dog.
- The use of the prop shall enhance the routine and its use should be choreographed.

#### **STANDARD CLASS (advanced level) Multiple dog- BRACE (non-regular)**

- The BRACE class shall consist of one handler with two dogs. The dogs need not be of the same breed. The requirements are the same as the regular STANDARD Class.

#### **PREMIER CLASS (advanced+ level) Single dog**

- The purpose of this class is to focus on the positive relationship between the dog and handler showcasing it in a creative and artistic manner. The training, connection and bond should be clearly apparent.
- Emphasis is placed on the musicality and the development of interesting choreography.
- The team shall use the entire performance space.

- Optional elements are encouraged but the dog should not be overfaced.
- Music time range: approximately 2:00-4:00 minutes.
- The title of Premier Freestyle Dog (PFD) will be earned by a dog and handler earning 2 qualifying legs (Qs). Performances for each qualifying leg must be earned with a new routine with new choreography and new music. Legs may be earned at video or live events. One entry per dog per titling event is allowed.

**PREMIER CLASS (advanced+ level) Single dog– WITH PROPS (non-regular)**

- The performance shall meet the same criteria as the regular PREMIER Class with the exception that the use of props will be allowed.
- The use of a prop should in no way detract from or overshadow the performance of the dog.
- The use of the prop should enhance the routine and its use should be choreographed.

**PREMIER CLASS (advanced+ level) Multiple dog- BRACE (non-regular)**

- The BRACE class shall consist of one handler with two dogs. The dogs need not be of the same breed. The requirements are the same as the regular PREMIER Class.

**XI. VETERANS, ROOKIE & FLEDGLING CLASSES**

**VETERANS CLASS (beginning – advanced level) Single dog**

- The purpose of this class will be to showcase the dog and the relationship between the dog and handler.
- The VETERANS class shall be for dogs that are at least seven (7) years old at the date of the show.
- Music time: approximately 1:00-2:30.

**ROOKIE CLASS (beginner – intermediate level) Single dog (non-regular)**

- The purpose of this class will be to showcase the dog and the relationship between the dog and handler and to give the team performance experience in a competition setting or for exhibition.
- The handler should not overshadow dog nor ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not confident and happy performing.
- Only MDSA members are eligible to show in this class.
- This class is not scored but the team will receive an evaluation by the judge(s).
- Teams may only compete in the ROOKIE class three (3) times.
- Handlers are encouraged to talk to and praise and encourage the dog.
- Music time: approximately 1:00 - 2:15.

**ROOKIE CLASS (beginning – intermediate level) Multiple dog– GROUP (non-regular)**

- GROUP routines are made up of two (2) to a maximum of eight (8) dog and handler teams.
- The GROUP may be made up of dogs of any breed or breeds. Class level of a GROUP should be determined by the level of the least experienced dog.
- The guidelines for the ROOKIE level Single Dog class shall apply to ROOKIE Multiple Dog GROUP routines, with the following exceptions:
  - 1) Dogs may be on leash in ROOKIE GROUP, however, all dogs in the GROUP shall be on leash if leashes are used;
  - 2) Leashes must not be continually tight and never used to force or manipulate a dog through any move.

- To be eligible for the ROOKIE Class at least three (3) members of the group must be members of MDSA.
- An additional 30 seconds to the music length may be added to GROUP routines.

**FLEDGLING FREESTYLER CLASS (beginning level) Single Dog (non-regular)**

- The purpose of this class will be to give the team performance experience in a competition setting or for exhibition. This class is offered at live events only.
- The handler should not overshadow dog nor ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not confident and happy performing.
- Only MDSA members are eligible to show in this class.
- There are no placements. At the handler's request at time of entry, the team's performance may be evaluated and critiqued by the judges or evaluators and they may offer training tips and suggest areas of improvement.
- Treats, toys and training aids may be used.
- The dog may be shown on lead or off lead.
- The lead shall not be longer than 6 feet.
- The lead should be handled in a graceful manner and not interfere with the performance of the dog. The lead may be dropped as necessary.
- Continuously tight leads or using the lead for corrections are not allowed.
- At live events this class shall be held after the competition.
- Music time: approximately 1:00 – 2:15.
- This class may be entered no more than twice by any dog/handler team.

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