

# Course Design - Part One

**Where to begin?** This should be fairly straight forward. Firstly, what level is the course? Secondly, what size and shape of ring? Thirdly, indoor/outdoor and surface? This third parameter is more important from level 4 upwards, when jumps can be included in the course. So, taking a closer look at the course level, all the information we need is in the Rally Regulations booklet (page 17), plus a little common sense (we'll touch on that later on). I've gathered the principal information in the table below.

Level	No of exercises		Max no of static positions	No of exercises from Level						No of Linked exercises together	Additional information.	
	Min	Max		1	2	3	4	5	6			
1	10	12	6	All	Not applicable						None	Separate sets of cones for exercises
2	12	15	8	2/3rd	1/3rd	Not applicable				None	Same set of cones.	
3	12	15	8	2/3rd		1/3rd	Not applicable			2	Cone junctions permissible	
4	15	17	12	Remainder		1 to 4	1 to 4	N/A		More than 2		
5	15	17	12	Remainder			1 to 4	1 to 4	N/A			
6	16	18	16	Remainder				1 to 4	1 to 4			
<b>Must be on lead</b>												
Levels 1 – 2, Course time allowed 4 Min,												
Level 3, Course time allowed 5 Min. Maximum of 1 distraction exercise including bonus.												
Levels 4 – 6, Course time allowed 5 Min. No more than 2 jump exercises.												

Ring size is handy to know before you start designing your course, but if you are not told this information you have to assume that it will be the minimum size for the level you are judging.

Thus, if you are the lowest two levels you should expect nothing less than a 100 Square Metres in area, and the ring must not be less than 8Ms in length. Although, if it is 8M in length it must be at least 12.5M in width to have an area of 100SQM. If it doesn't then make a complaint to the Chief Steward and if nothing happens, get it put into the Incident Book.

From L3 onwards the ring size should be a minimum of 150SQM, so 8M by 18.75M or 12.5M by 12.5M. If it doesn't come up to scratch – complain!!

**Which exercises to use?** Well obviously you are limited to the specifications of the above table, but the choice of exercises and the order is a personal choice, you just have to make them fit into the ring. So this is where common sense and individual life experiences can come into play. Always, be aware that the ring may be a different shape to the ideal one you see for your course, so have some flexibility in your course; an exercise or two that can be moved to another line. Remember to leave the appropriate distance for all exercises, i.e. Fast pace needing 4M or 4.5M for exercise 44 (Sit- Leave dog-Call to heel while moving). I tend to decide which exercises I want to use from the level I have agreed to judge.

Then I will roughly decide on what I'm going to use from the next level down. Once I have these in mind, I will look to see, which needs the most space and which elements I can link together. Linking exercises is a great way of saving space. I also want to have a course that is technically challenging but flowing at the higher levels and flowing at the lower levels.

I tend to work on a 3M – 4M spacing when I design the course as this allows me to squeeze the exercises closer together if I need to, when I get to the ring. It also gives the larger dogs more room and allows me more time to judge.

If I'm going to include a jump or cones, I'm definitely going to make the most use possible of them, due to the space that they take up, so usually I'll use the jump twice and the cones twice. These will then be the key elements I lay out when I lay the course. I will then work out how I can connect the exercises.

**Directional exercises** - Astute use of exercises that will change direction is a must to make the most of the space available; the obvious are the R & L turns, pivots, 1 Steps, 270's and the variety of about turns. Then we have the recall exercises, which send us back on ourselves. The static ones can be linked to static turns i.e. exercise 36 (Sit – Leave Dog – Recall – Finish Right), linked with exercise 39 (Sit – About Turn Left - Forward), which will continue us in the same direction as before the recall, or if we used 30, we would be heading off at 90 degrees to our original track. We also have moving exercises that alter direction of travel, the figure 8 and the two spirals. There are also the exercises that track us over by approximately a third of a metre onto another line.

These are notably, the moving side step right (It's just occurred to me that if renamed Track over Right, more people would probably do it correctly), the Serpentine (if straight forward from exit), Weave through distractions, and finally Loop around distractions. Many times, I've walked a course as Chief Steward, and rued the appalling

placement of these exercises. Where it seems no consideration has been given to the working line, before or after the exercise.

There are two recall exercises that I haven't mentioned yet. Exercise 46, (the Angled Recall) which can both change our direction and our track across the ring as it requires 3 static positions - it is often best linked with other static exercises. Finally, exercise 62, (Call Front - About Turn Right - Forward), which merely sends us back on ourselves and has no static element that we can link with another exercise.

**Linked exercises** - When using these we must be mindful, that if a handler wishes to perform them separately they may do so by taking a step forward, so thought needs to be given to the position of signs to allow this possibility. As judges we should also be mindful that if they do not correct an out of position sit from the end of say exercise 31, (Sit-Send Around-Sit), linked to exercise 23, (Sit- Walk Around) then we should mark that sit for both exercises. The onus is on the handler as they have the opportunity to correct errors. They also need to think carefully as to where they should position themselves, particularly if a turn is involved.

**Extra Considerations** - Is there an area before the Start sign, where the handler can gain the dog's attention to work? Personally, I don't think this needs to be huge, as they really should have warmed their dog up, before coming into the ring. I've seen almost a quarter of the working space devoted to this, accompanied by a very squashed course. Not particularly helpful for the vast majority of competitors and dogs. Where to put the Bonus exercise? Preferably as a straightforward follow on after the Finish sign.

Where are you, and your scribe, going to stand? You need to have a clear view of the Start and Finish signs for timing. You also need a good view of all the exercises without having to move too much. Finally, if the Bonus requires intervention by the judging party: i.e. positioning of dumb-bells and mats, you can't be too far away.