

# Shorebreaking

By Jim & Phyllis Dobbs and Alice Woodyard

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In our last column we introduced the dog to the idea of not running around obstacles, and strengthened his ability to hold lines. Now you can build on that foundation as you begin shorebreaking.

## Water is One More Obstacle

To the dog, water is an obstacle. The untrained dog sees water as easier to run around than go through on his way to a retrieve. For success in hunt tests, field trials, as well as when hunting, you often need the dog to understand that he should go straight through water to the fall, rather than try to run around on land instead.

"Obstacle training" on water is the first step in teaching a dog to hold a line through water. More advanced steps will be covered in later columns. For example, we will cover teaching the dog to handle in water, including advanced handling concepts that help dogs learn to "hold the line" in any water situation.

But we don't use handling to begin a dog's shorebreaking, because we've found that the Positive Comparison Method works better, reduces the stress on dog and handler, and causes the dog to learn more quickly.

## What Is the Positive Comparison Method?

Remember, simply correcting the dog for being on land doesn't tell the dog where he should have been. To give the dog the information he needs, many people will try to stop the dog and handle him into the water. They're trying to show the dog that he should have taken the line through water instead. This entire handler input can slow down the young dog's learning by making the task more complex for the dog than it needs to be.

The other disadvantage with this approach is that handling issues can override shorebreaking issues. Often young dogs do not handle very well around water, and they make mistakes. The trainer begins correcting for disobedience, and shortly, that first "shorebreaking" session may have deteriorated into a mess. Repairing the dog's confusion and attitude problems after this type of session can require many more sessions.

So our rule of thumb when beginning shorebreaking is the same as beginning other obstacle training: *whenever the dog makes a wrong choice and receives any sort of correction, IMMEDIATELY show the dog where the correct route is.* This is easy to do with water work, because you simply throw one or two bumpers for the dog into the water, along the line he should have taken. Often, these can be "fun bumpers," which will re-animate the dog if he became worried by the correction.

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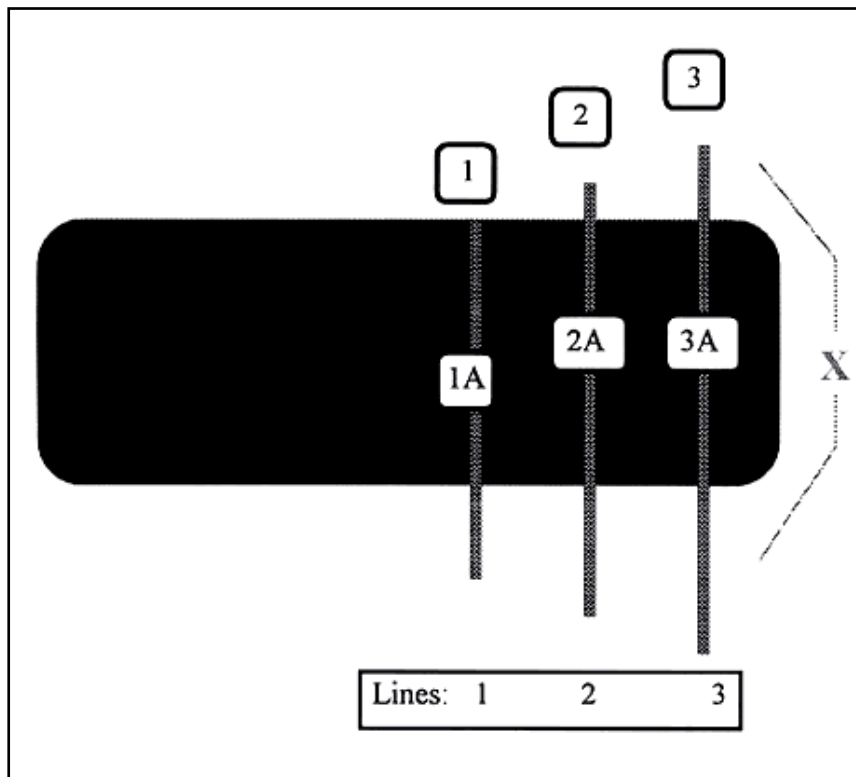
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We prefer this method for beginning dogs, over the traditional handling method. We recommend it REGARDLESS of what type of correction you use to communicate to the dog that running around the water is the wrong choice. (Corrections might include "NO-ing" the dog and calling it back for a re-send, stopping it with a whistle [with or without the e-collar], or the "environmental correction" that we use in certain situations.)

In all these cases, if you now toss a bumper on line and in the water, you will be giving your dog the information he needs in an easily understood way. He can make an immediate comparison between the consequences of his two choices — run around, or go straight through water. The whole idea is to do this right away, BEFORE he gets confused.

### The Procedure

In this column, covers the introduction to shorebreaking using the "corner" and "channel" pictures, we will correct the dog WITHOUT express handler input. When the dog runs around, you make one small area of the land route consistently uncomfortable for the dog using your e-collar, saying nothing as you press the button. Momentary stimulation works especially well for this purpose, although you can use a quick "tap" of continuous if your e-collar doesn't have momentary stimulation.



### Drill No. 1 — Trimming Corners

- Line 1.** Dog first retrieves a bumper from the water (1A), then one thrown to location 1.
- Line 2.** Dog retrieves a bumper thrown to location 2.
- Line 3.** Dog retrieves a bumper thrown to location 3.

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Make sure the dog can do a line without trying to run around, before advancing to the more challenging line.

Any time the dog runs around, use momentary stimulation at the red X (the "apex" of the route around the water, Then throw the next bumper on line in the water to the "A" location.

Help the dog return through water with a "Here" command, and your body motion away from the land route, the moment the dog picks up a bumper.

If the dog becomes worried, throw more than one bumper to the "A" location before placing one on land again.

In a different session, trim the corner the other way (where the land route is on dog's left instead of right).

Allow the dog to complete the retrieve. (No, completing the retrieve does NOT "reward the dog for his mistake;" dogs don't think that way — only people do. Remember that his "mistake" was choosing to run around on land, and you already corrected for that. Letting him complete the retrieve helps keep his attitude up.)

Then throw the next bumper on line into the water, showing the dog where the more comfortable route is.

Encouraging the dog to return straight to you will help him learn, because dogs generally tend to re-use earlier routes. The best way to encourage a straight return in a beginning dog is to let him see your body motion moving AWAY from the land route. The moment he picks up the bumper and starts to return, call him and move rapidly in a direction to pull him away from the shore. This timing gets him swimming back toward you before he can commit to swimming toward land.

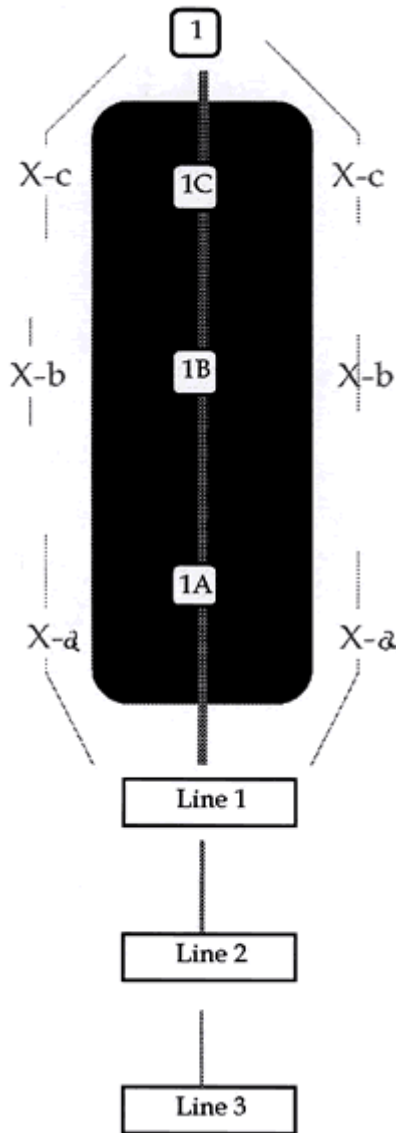
## **The Importance of "Concept" Water**

The Positive Comparison Method keeps the dog's attitude good, and allows him to make his own decisions and take responsibility for his own choices. It is designed to work with certain "picture" concepts, such as trimming corners, channels, and parallel shorelines. (You should NOT use this type of correction simply because the dog avoided water. That's not its purpose.)

The location of the correction is also important, and it relates to the shape of the water. Typically, the correction is made at the "apex" of the dog's route around the water. (If you correct in other places, you can create the "mine field syndrome" in a dog, where he fears random "hot spots" that he does not know how to avoid.)

At the Dobbs Training Center, we use "technical ponds" so we can present the dog with the same picture in several locations and at increasing levels of difficulty. But you don't need this kind of pond to start your shorebreaking. The type of oblong pond that many trainers use for swim-by training can be very suitable for first lessons. You can present the dog with corner trimming and a channel picture very readily in this simple type of pond.

## Drill No. 2 – Channel



Running from Line 1, have the dog retrieve once from water at 1A. Throw the next bumper on land to Location 1.

Any time the dog runs around on the way out, correct with momentary stimulation at the red X-a. Throw the next bumper in water to Location 1A. Then repeat the throw to Location 1.

Any time the dog runs around on the way back, correct with momentary stimulation at the red X-c. Throw the next bumper in water to Location 1C. Then repeat the throw to location 1.

Any time the dog gets out early, going out or coming back, correct with momentary stimulation the moment his feet touch shore (for example, at X-b). Throw the next bumper in water adjacent to where you corrected (in this example, at 1B). Then repeat the throw to Location 1.

Help the dog return through water with a "Here" command and your body motion, if necessary, the moment the dog picks up a bumper. When the dog can do Line 1 without avoiding the channel in either direction (this may take more than one session), increase the challenge by lengthening the entry (lines 2 and 3).

If the dog is becoming worried, do more than one water retrieve for every land retrieve. For example, throw to 1B and 1C before trying Location 1 again.

Doing the water throws as "fun bumpers" can help keep the dog animated if he's the worrying sort.

Remember, once the dog understands "go straight" in one piece of water; repeat your lesson in different water, presenting the same concept but in other locations. Then the dog will generalize the concept, and learn to go straight in that type of water picture.

## More Water Concepts

In our next article, we'll describe how to apply this method in other water "pictures," such as parallel shorelines, slots and swimming past points of land.