

New Enthusiasts: Information and Support

The Golden Retriever is such a wonderful breed! And they are good at so many games and events! We hope you will be interested in trying some out. The bond you will develop between you and your Golden will truly be special. We have pulled together some important tips to help you get started and stay involved in the fabulous world of Canine Sports.

First, [JOIN the Golden Retriever Club of America](#) and, if available in your area, [join your local Golden club](#). Being active with these clubs gives you immediate access to events in your area. You will be able to connect with fellow enthusiasts and stay informed about a variety of events and breed issues.

Now that you have joined, **Get involved!**

- VOLUNTEER! Volunteering introduces you to others who share your passion
- Attend events from different venues. You may find a game that you love which you previously knew nothing about
- When attending events, introduce yourself, but be respectful. The competitors are very involved in the show and may request to speak with you at a later time when they are not focused on their entry/performance/etc.
- Join the social media lists available to you!

NOTE FROM A NOVICE COMPETITOR:

A little reflection is important when considering participation in dog events, regardless of which venue you choose.

- *What do you hope to accomplish? Set goals for yourself and your dog. Aim high, but also set some short-term goals as you progress.*
- *Have you ever participated in competitive sports? Did you enjoy the experience?*
- *There are costs associated with all endeavors, some minimal, some very steep. Do you have available financial resources?*

Find a Mentor. A mentor is crucial for your successful participation. A mentor will provide training tips and feedback and will help you navigate the complexities of the event. Good choices for your mentor may be:

- Your breeder or another experienced breeder
- Your instructor/teacher
- Professional handler or trainer
- A friend who shares your interest

Some general information about showing and competing

- How old must my puppy be, to compete in an event?

For many events, a dog is eligible to be shown at 6 months of age. But beware, just because a dog is eligible to be shown, does not mean the dog is ready to be shown. Your mentor and trainer can help you evaluate the readiness of your dog for competition.

For shows offering Beginner Puppy Classes, a conformation puppy may be shown at 4 months.

Obedience, rally, tracking and field events require the dog to be six months of age, but it is a rare dog that is ready to compete at that age. Don't rush it!

Agility requires the dog to be 15 months of age before competing.

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- What do all those abbreviations mean before and after a dog's name? Looks like alphabet soup, doesn't it? Check out the links below for more information
AKC Titles: <http://www.akc.org/events/titles/>
GRCA Titles: <http://www.grca.org/events/grca-titles-awards-and-designations/>

NOTE FROM A NOVICE CONFORMATION COMPETITOR:

Training and Mental Preparation

- Be prepared to develop your own skills; all events will require you to do this. This will take time and patience.
- Are you in condition to physically participate? You and your dog will be working as a team, both of you need to have reasonable physical ability.
- Do you have the mental ability to train and "know" your dog and what makes him tick?
- People of diverse backgrounds and skills compete in all venues. Do you enjoy meeting others, even in a competitive situation?
- Be observant of the Top Handlers and competitors. Their actions offer great learning opportunities.
- Be prepared that not every dog can be successful in every event; sometimes a change of careers is necessary. The "show puppy" may not like the show ring, but may love retrieving ducks. The obedience prospect may prefer the agility ring. You both need to be flexible.
- Do you enjoy being competitive? Some venues, like Conformation and Field Trials are competing dog against dog. Others like hunt tests or tracking are competing against a standard.

What are the available areas of competition for my Golden Retriever?

- **Conformation:** <http://www.akc.org/events/conformation-dog-shows/>
4 to 6 month puppy: <http://www.akc.org/events/4-6-puppy/>
Owner-Handled Series: <http://www.akc.org/events/nohs/>
Junior Showmanship: <http://www.akc.org/events/junior-showmanship/>
Sweepstakes (Puppy &/or Veteran. Offered at Golden Retriever Specialties)
CCA – GRCA's Certificate of Conformation Assessment
<http://www.grca.org/events/conformation/cca-certificate-of-conformation-assessment/>
- **Obedience:** <http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/>
- **AKC Rally:** <http://www.akc.org/events/rally/>
- **Agility:** <http://www.akc.org/events/agility/>
- **Tracking:** <http://www.akc.org/events/tracking/>
- **AKC Field Events (Retriever Hunt Tests & Retriever Field Trials):** <http://www.akc.org/events/field-events/>
- **GRCA Sponsored Field Events** <http://www.grca.org/events/field-events-field-training/wcwcx-grcas-working-certificate-wc-and-working-certificate/calendar-for-wcwcx-tests/>
- **Non-GRCA or AKC Events**
 - Nosework
 - Barn Hunt
 - Flyball
 - Dock Diving... and many other games!

How Do I Get Started?

Look for local training classes and matches where you can practice with your Golden companion. Attend Shows, Trials, Matches, and any event you can!

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Attend seminars, read books, watch videos on your chosen venue. And talk, talk, talk to people in the sport. Don't be afraid to ask questions: everyone was once a beginner.

Know the rules!

Get a rulebook and read it before entering. Most Rules are available through web sites of the parent organization at no cost.

Premium Lists

A premium list is basically the announcement of a show or trial. It contains all the information about the date and time, the classes offered, the judges, the club committee members, and the trophies offered. ("Premium" is the old word for "prize".) These are either printed or mailed by the show secretary or superintendent or, increasingly, are available electronically. Some events offer online registration. Others require it to be mailed. Do not wait until the last minute to enter an event. If there is a mistake, a last minute entry will not offer any time for correcting, prior to the closing date.

The most important part of a premium list is the Entry Form. But, read through the entire document. It can only help you be more prepared for the event.

How to fill out an entry form/Where to find an entry form

Although one can wait until the eleventh hour to send in an entry form, it's always best to send them in early. If mailed, mail can get lost. If sent electronically, power can go out or computers can crash just at the critical time. Save yourself a lot of worry, and enter as soon as you know you'll be going to the event.

Final Confirmations, confirming your entry, are available for all competition events. These documents will contain information about your entry, as well as information about the event itself. It is wise to review these documents carefully. These documents may be provided to you in hard copy, or electronically.

Arriving at your first trial/show/test (What to expect)

For all events, there is a check-in procedure when you arrive. Conformation/Obedience/Rally all require you to check in at ringside. You will have a Judging Program provided to you by the Superintendent/Secretary to tell you what ring you will be in at these events. It is helpful if you know your ring number and armband number, which were sent with the judging schedule after the entries have closed. For field events, you can look up the running order on the Internet through the entry service you have used.

For Tracking and Field events, you will be checking in with the Trial Secretary or stake marshal. Agility events typically have self check-in, where you get an armband sticker, and check that your dog is attending.

Conformation

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Championship Shows. These are licensed completions where dogs are competing for points and placements towards a Championship or Group Placements and National Rankings.

Matches (A B, C, show-n-go, rent a ring). These are practice events, where handlers and dogs can practice in a “show-like” atmosphere. Each type of Match has various levels of training allowances, which you should verify before entering the ring.

Specialties and National Specialties. These are shows that are limited to Golden Retrievers only.
<http://www.grca.org/events/golden-retriever-specialties/>

Sweepstakes. These events are often available at Specialty shows for Puppy Classes and Veteran Classes. Occasionally there may be additional Sweepstakes Classes offered. This information will be listed in the Premium List for the event. See the Sweepstakes Regulations for the GRCA National Specialty and any GRCA Regional Specialties. They are recommended but not required for local Golden Retriever Clubs:
<http://www.grca.org/events/conformation/sweepstakes-regulations/>

Owner/Handler Series: The AKC National Owner-Handled Series celebrates the dedication and enthusiasm of owner-handler exhibitors and allows them to compete head-to-head against one another in the conformation ring.

Certificate of Conformation Assessment: Noncompetitive Conformation Assessment Program. Hosted by GRCA Member Clubs for purposes of evaluation and education. <http://www.grca.org/events/conformation/cca-certificate-of-conformation-assessment/>

Junior Showmanship

Most AKC Titling Events now have special recognition for Juniors (exhibitors under the age of 18 years). Check Premium Lists for any special entry fees and recognitions that may be available to Juniors.

Junior Showmanship in AKC Conformation Events is divided by age and experience. Top Juniors can compete at Westminster and other National Events for Top Honors, and Scholarships

4-H. Many local communities have very active 4-H programs. Check with your local County Extension office for contact information.

<http://www.grca.org/events/activities-for-juniors/>

Obedience/Rally Trial

Titling Shows. These are Licensed completions where dogs are competing for titles, points and placement.

Matches (A B, C, show-n-go, rent a ring). These are practice events, where handlers and dogs can practice in a “show-like” atmosphere. Each type of Match has various levels of training allowances, which you should verify before entering the ring. <http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/getting-started/>

Tracking Tests

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Tracking Dog, Tracking Dog Excellent, Urban Tracking and Variable Surface Tracking Events are all title earning events in AKC. The various levels and surfaces showcase the dog's ability to use scent discrimination to follow a path walked previously and to find items (articles) left behind by the track layer.

<http://www.akc.org/events/tracking/>

Agility Trial

Run, jump, climb, and weave! It is always a thrill and is a highly popular sport with Golden owners. Owners and their canine team members compete for titles and rankings. Read our Introduction to Agility.

<http://www.grca.org/events/agility-trials/introduction-to-agility-ann-stetson/>

Retriever Hunt Test, Retriever Field Trial, WC/WCX

The Golden Retriever is primarily a hunting companion. These events test the various skills used in hunting, with the ability to compete for placements and titles. You should at least expose your dog to swimming and retrieving. Watching your Golden "turn on" to retrieving is a joy not to be missed.

See "Separate Outline - FIELD"

NOTE FROM A FIRST TIME COMPETITOR:

Ultimately, what is your goal?

- Do you love the Golden Retriever breed enough to put up with the hardships that come from competition?
- Is your dream strong enough to carry you through to the end? Is that dream charted out?
- Are you willing to keep that dream alive when no one else believes in you?
- Can you see the diamond in your dog and are you willing to be the person who fights to protect that diamond and bring it to its fruition?
- Do you have the heart of a Champion?
- Most importantly, you define what is success for you and your companion.

Regardless of titles earned, the true reward in participating in Canine Sports is working with your dog. Together you will form an unbreakable bond and the time you spend together will give you great satisfaction and lasting memories.