

In the Ring: Field Research

Visit a local dog show, and don't forget to take notes.

By Anne H. Bowes

You can't earn a college degree in dog handling, and you won't find a school, per se, where you can learn all the aspects of the sport of dogs. In addition to attending handling classes and seminars, where can you go to hone your skills? A dog show. Dog shows provide a wealth of information, free for the taking. (Well, some shows require a modest spectator entrance fee, but many do not.)

When you're new to the sport, the best way to attend a show is without a dog so you are free to concentrate. Take a chair, a notebook, a pen, the standard for your breed and a friend who ideally has more experience in the sport than you do. Plan to spend the entire day at the show so you can watch everything from start to finish.

Watch the handlers

Because one of your goals going into the show is to improve your own handling, start by watching the excellent handlers. (Find out who the successful handlers in your breed are before you go to the show by reading all-breed and breed-specific magazines.) But don't just watch the handlers who are showing your breed; watch handlers who show breeds similar to yours or breeds that require some of the same handling skills that your breed does.

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