

The Art of Proofing: Preparing Your Dog For Obedience Trials
by Adele Yunck
A review by Lori Drouin

I was already a fan of Adele's based on her previous projects, *Competition Obedience: A Balancing Act*, and *Positively Fetching*, both produced with Judy Byron. This latest work is a fitting companion to the earlier productions, and will help you take your training up a notch on virtually every exercise, while ensuring that you and your dog are well prepared for all of the usual and the unusual things we encounter in the ring.

While the author briefly discusses her training philosophy regarding teaching, chaining, and corrections, this book is not so much a "how to" manual as it is a source of inspiration and awareness enhancement. (*Competition Obedience: A Balancing Act* is such a "how to" manual if you need one!) Her section on "Categories of Proofs" illustrates the many sights, sounds, smells and social challenges that our dogs are subjected to at trials. Many of the items listed are so common that many of us fail to deliberately think to proof for them, such as traffic noises, laughter, hair dryers or loudspeakers. Some of them are unusual enough to challenge the handlers, such as the sound of popping plastic wrap under the mats at an indoor tournament.

Proofing against adjacent ring activities is a tough project for people who train alone. It's a category that many folks involved in group classes get practice on just because they are working in group settings, but I was glad to see this section because I have recently met people in advanced classes who got irritated at their dogs for exercise failures in one ring without understanding that the failures were traceable to their dogs' reaction to activity in the next ring. The message throughout this concept is that part of teaching attention is desensitization. Simply correcting for a lack of eye contact or a down failure is not enough.

I wholeheartedly agree with this book's section on "Progression of Proofs". It includes advice on careful introduction of proofs for cautious dogs. It reminds us that we should be prepared for mistakes when we proof, and that proofing exposes weaknesses in foundation training. It encourages trainers to "...extract the hard part..." of an exercise for focused work, and reminds us not to be afraid of failures in training. Trainers are also reminded to lower criteria when introducing proofing, which could mean asking for an easier behavior, or working closer to the dog, or working farther from the actual distraction at first, until the dog understands a distraction for what it is.

The section on "Attention Proofing" related to front or heel position shows a list of possible correction options for attention loss. The "Distance Attention" section points out the many opportunities our dogs have during classes to look around and get interested in other things between exercises and during stationary intervals within exercises.

There are very useful attention exercises interspersed through the book, particularly the 20 Treat Exercise, which not only helps shape attention, but also helps you evaluate how well your dog actually is doing with his skills by recording

how long it takes your dog to offer you voluntary attention in a new setting, and how long it takes him to look at you and receive attention rewards 20 times. I suspect that many trainers will discover that there's a big difference between strong voluntary attention in general, and the short-term attention in heel position that is taught widely, but not always practiced exactly as intended.

There are great ideas for proofing when working on your own at home, and some creative and challenging ideas for class proofing projects. Then there are excellent and illustrated examples of proofing challenges for each formal exercise. I personally hope that folks will pay particular attention to the section on the Sit and Down Stays. While I am not a personal fan of using leash pressure to elicit opposition reflex, there are a number of challenges illustrated that don't involve the leash but do challenge the dog to show that he knows he is to hold still. There are LOTS of good ideas on simulating hazards that happen during stays, such as other dogs breaking, approaching, or running around the ring, or dogs in adjacent rings doing retrieves or go outs. It really makes you think about just how difficult those stays can be!

I admire Adele's particular care in approaching proofs for scent articles, including cautions to do the proofs listed with single dumbbell retrieves before asking your dog to deal with the choosing complexities while under duress.

Throughout the book, the reader is gently reminded that proofing should build confidence and increase success, and should not scare a dog or cause it to shut down. For the advanced exercises, there are good illustrations of when and how to add in training guides to increase success, and examples of how to cope with errors. But in general, the book does not preach that you must adhere to a certain method of training. If all you do is withhold rewards and use a no-reward marker when your dog is wrong, or if you work with more direct corrections, the book will still work to help you expose your dog to challenges that WILL happen in the ring every weekend. The compact-sized book with spiral binding will be a valuable addition to your training bag.