

Why dogs struggle when learning new things and when finding odor:

They don't understand- If the dog guesses correctly a few times in a row, it can look like they understand. Or maybe they got lucky and got it correct a few times. But if you progress without the dog having body language and actions that CONFIDENTLY say: "Out of my way, I got this!" then any training you build on that shaky foundation can fall apart.

Lack of generalization/proper training- Maybe they have that confident understanding when they are at home, or where they usually practice, but they don't yet understand that you want the same behavior no matter where they are or what is going on around them. You only get THAT level of confidence by practicing in as many different places as possible! Your dog should be confident and successful in environments that are crazier than a trial if you expect them to ignore everything going on and focus on the task. This also applies to purposeful distractions in the ring. Will the dog ignore an open pizza box with a piece of pizza in it sitting right near the hide? Can they ignore their favorite toy or favorite person in the search areas and still confidently search and alert?

Stress/pressure- Trials are stressful for dogs. And the handler often acts and smells differently due to their own stress. But the number one way to combat this sort of stress is proper training. When your training has systematically increased in difficulty to the point that it is WAY harder than any trial and your dog still nails it, you can walk into the ring ready for anything. Both you AND the dog will be way more confident. Be sure to also practice the in-between times and the long periods of waiting and down time as well! You and the dog need to be able to relax while you wait.

Wrong consequences- Consequences are whatever happens right after the dog does the behavior. There can be a good (positive) consequence, or an unpleasant (negative) consequence. There might also be a mostly neutral consequence. Only the DOG can decide which of these 3 categories the consequence falls into. What happens right after the dog does the desired behavior will determine if the dog wants to repeat that behavior again. So if you want to motivate the dog to repeat the behavior, you need something the dog loves. The more they love the consequence, the more motivation they will have to do the behavior and work through various challenges.

Hide placement- An improperly placed hide can definitely cause the dog to struggle. But proper placement is subject to [a massive number of variables](#) including the dog's experience level, temperament, and size as well environmental factors like temperature, wind direction, and humidity. Understanding how to place hides that challenge the dog without being too hard or too easy is a learned skill that takes specific education and practice to develop.