

The Power of Patterns

Dogs love patterns. It brings predictability and stability and can lower stress levels. The more patterns you can use, the better! Because it helps you too!! It can lower your stress, you can do a habitual routine with little thought about it so it's one less stressor you have to worry about. And it helps ensure you aren't forgetting something important! And the more you practice a routine, the faster and smoother it will become.

These are the times you need a pattern:

- **When you pack** for a trial and what you do the night before. (Create a packing list check off sheet so you don't forget anything. Make sure everything has a specific place it goes in the vehicle. Know where you are going and when you need to leave. Set your alarm! Look over the rules again to refresh your memory.)
- **When you first arrive** (getting the vehicle set-up and dogs pottied, and checking in)
- **What you will look for in the walk through** (what info do you need to know: how/where to check running order progress, route to the staging area, start line location, what is in play, how you plan to divide a larger search area, rules stuff (time limit, # of hides, height of hides, etc.) and route out of the search area and to your next destination.)
- **When you will be searching soon** (potty the dog, get everything ready)
- **From the car to the 'waiting in line' position** (don't get there too early! But don't make the steward nervous if you're next in line ("on deck") and not ready to go in!)
- **What you do while waiting in line** (how will you keep your dog calm and relaxed until you're next dog in, then adjust their arousal and focus to optimal level)
- **Start line routine** (this should be brief, but give the dog a chance to look at the area and possibly get odor from a threshold hide)
- **During the search-** The calls you have to make and how you deliver the rewards
- **Exiting the search area** and getting back to the vehicle or to the next ring (have your route planned out as part of the walk through with potential alternate plans if needed, like if another ring is running early/late.)

Think about ways you can streamline your process.

How can you make the routine the same each time?

Evaluate if the routine is helping you and the dog or if you need to change something.

The more planning and preparing and **PRACTICE** you do in advance, the more relaxing and fun the trial day can be for both ends of the leash!