

# A Beginner's Guide To Dog Shows



AMERICAN  
KENNEL CLUB®

## This is the AKC®

The **American Kennel Club®** was established in 1884 to promote the study, breeding, exhibiting and advancement of purebred dogs. It is the largest not-for-profit purebred dog registry in the nation.

The AKC approves and maintains the official records of over 22,000 sanctioned and licensed events each year.

The AKC has over 620 member clubs and over 5,000 affiliated clubs. These clubs are more than show-giving entities. They are public service, educational organizations whose activities benefit the entire community. Some AKC club activities include public education through presentations at schools, fairs, libraries, shelters, hospitals, rescue leagues, scouts and 4-H; training classes; and health clinics.

AKC registration means that a dog, its parents and its ancestors are purebred. It does not indicate health or quality. Dogs registered with the AKC may have their offspring registered and compete in AKC events. Their owners may use the AKC's full line of education and information services.

# The World of Dog Shows

Showing dogs is a great sport where the thrill of competition is combined with the joy of seeing beautiful dogs. Dog shows are one of many types of AKC dog events in which AKC-registered dogs can compete. These events, which draw more than three million entries annually, include dog shows and tests of instinct and trainability, such as obedience trials, Canine Good Citizen® tests, field trials, agility trials, lure coursing, hunting tests, herding trials, tracking tests, and coon-hound and earthdog events.

Dog shows (conformation events) are intended to evaluate breeding stock. The size of these events ranges from large all-breed shows, with over 3,000 dogs entered, to small local specialty club shows, featuring a specific breed. The dog's conformation (overall appearance and structure), is an indication of the dog's ability to produce quality puppies.



## Types of Conformation Dog Shows

There are three types of conformation dog shows:

**All-breed shows** offer competitions for over 175 breeds and varieties of dogs recognized by the AKC. All-breed shows are the type often shown on television.

**Specialty shows** are restricted to dogs of a specific breed or to varieties of one breed. For example, the Bulldog Club of America Specialty is for Bulldogs only, but the Poodle Club of America's specialty show includes the three varieties of the Poodle - Standard, Miniature, and Toy.

**Group shows** are limited to dogs belonging to one of the seven groups. For example, the Potomac Hound Group show features only breeds belonging to the Hound group.

## Which Dogs May Participate

To be eligible to compete, a dog must:

- be individually registered with the American Kennel Club
- be 6 months of age or older
- be a breed for which classes are offered at a show
- meet any eligibility requirements in the written standard for its breed

Spayed or neutered dogs are not eligible to compete in conformation classes at a dog show, because the purpose of a dog show is to evaluate breeding stock.

## The Role of the Judge

Judges examine the dogs, then give awards according to how closely each dog compares to the judge's mental image of the "perfect" dog described in the breed's official standard.

The standard describes the characteristics that allow the breed to perform the function for which it was bred. These standards include specifications for structure, temperament and movement.

The official written standard for each breed is maintained by the breed's national club and is included in *The Complete Dog Book* published by the AKC, and can be found on the AKC website [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org).

The judges are experts on the breeds they are judging. They examine ("go over") each dog with their hands to see if the teeth, muscles, bones and coat texture conform to the breed's standard. They view each dog in profile for overall balance, and watch each dog gait ("move") to see how all of those features fit together in action.

Judges award first through fourth places in each class, and give a ribbon to each dog receiving an award. The color of the ribbon is determined by the type of award the dog has won.



## How a Dog Show Works

Each dog presented to a judge is exhibited (“handled”) by its owner, breeder or a hired professional. The role of a handler is similar to that of a jockey who rides a horse around the track and, hopefully, into the winner’s circle.

Most dogs in competition at conformation shows are competing for points toward their AKC championships. It takes fifteen points, including two majors (wins of three, four or five points), awarded by at least three different judges, to become an American Kennel Club “Champion of Record”.

The number of championship points awarded at a show depends on the number of males (“dogs”) and females (“bitches”) of the breed actually in competition. The larger the entry, the greater the number of points a male or a female can win. The maximum number of points awarded to a dog at any show is 5 (five) points.

Males and females compete separately within their respective breeds, in seven regular classes: Puppy, Twelve-to-Eighteen Months, Novice, Amateur-Owner-Handler, Bred by Exhibitor, American-Bred and Open.

After these classes are judged, all the dogs that won first place in a class compete again to see who is the best of the winning dogs. Males and females are judged separately. Only the best male (Winners Dog) and the best female (Winners Bitch) receive championship points. The Winners Dog and Winners Bitch then compete with the champions for the BEST OF BREED award. At the end of the Best of Breed Competition, three awards are usually given:

**Best of Breed** - the dog judged as the best in its breed category. Also may be awarded Grand Champion points.

**Best of Winners** - the dog judged as the better of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch.

**Best of Opposite Sex** - the best dog that is the opposite sex to the Best of Breed winner. If Champion of record may also be awarded Grand Champion points.

## Regular Classes

**PUPPY** — Shall be for dogs between six and twelve months of age, that are not yet champions. (Optional class)

**SIX-to-NINE MONTHS** — Shall be for dogs between six and nine months of age, that are not yet champions. (Optional Class)

**NINE-to-TWELVE MONTHS** — Dogs nine to twelve months of age, that are not yet champions. (Optional Class)

**TWELVE-to-FIFTEEN MONTHS** — Shall be for dogs between twelve to fifteen months of age, that are not yet champions. (Optional Class)

**FIFTEEN-to-EIGHTEEN MONTHS** — Shall be for Dogs fifteen to eighteen months of age, that are not yet champions. (Optional Class)

**NOVICE** — Shall be for dogs that are at least six months of age and over, which have not, prior to the date of closing of entries, won three first prizes in this class, a first prize in Amateur-Owner-Handler, Bred-by-Exhibitor, American bred, or Open Classes, nor one or more points toward their championships. (Optional Class)

**AMATEUR-OWNER-HANDLER** — Shall be for dogs that are at least six months of age that are not champions. Dogs must be handled in the class by the registered owner. This class is restricted to exhibitors who have not, at any point in time, been a professional dog handler, AKC approved conformation judge, or employed as an assistant to a professional handler. (Optional Class)

**BRED BY EXHIBITOR** — Shall be for the dog is not yet a champion, and the exhibitor is the breeder and the owner. (Optional Class)

**AMERICAN-BRED** — Shall be for a dog whose parents were mated in America, and the dog was born in America. The dog is not yet a champion. (Required Class)

**OPEN** — Shall be for any dog of the breed, at least six months of age. (Required Class)

## Grand Champion

**Grand Champion** - A Grand Champion is a champion of record competing against other champions of record beyond the traditional requirements for a Championship and focuses on competition at the Best of Breed level, to achieve the level of Grand Champion. All Champions of record are eligible to be awarded points towards this Grand Championship level.

There are five levels of Grand Champion status achievable:

1. Grand Champion
2. Grand Champion (Bronze Level)
3. Grand Champion (Silver Level)
4. Grand Champion (Gold Level)
5. Grand Champion (Platinum Level)

For a complete explanation on the earning a Grand Champion and the 4 other levels of a Grand Championship, go to the AKC website: [http://classic.akc.org/events/conformation/counting\\_grand\\_championship\\_points.cfm](http://classic.akc.org/events/conformation/counting_grand_championship_points.cfm)

**Select Dog** - The Select Dog is similar to Awards of Merit in that this dog is the next best as far as the quality of the dogs in competition. These awards are selected after Best of Breed/Variety and Best of Opposite Sex. However the Select Dog is eligible for Grand Championship points.

**Select Bitch** - The Select Bitch is similar to Awards of Merit in that this bitch is the next best as far as the quality of the Bitches in competition. These awards are selected after Best of Breed/Variety and Best of Opposite Sex. However the Select Bitch is eligible for Grand Championship points.

## AKC National Owner-Handled Series

The AKC National Owner-Handled Series is a new non-titling competition for dogs that are exhibited by their owners that are not professional handlers. This series of special competitions will be offered at select dog shows across the country. To find out where the series is offered visit [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)



## AKC National Owner-Handled Series (cont'd)

This is an exciting new event where you compete against other Owner-Handlers to win at the Breed, Group and Best in Show levels.

Participation is easy and benefits include there is no additional entry fee required - just check the owner-handler eligibility box on the entry form

- Another opportunity to compete with your dog.

All dogs that are owner-handled and are not owned or exhibited by professional handlers meet the requirements for this competition. Exhibitors must declare their dog is Owner-Handler eligible at the time of entry using the check box on the entry form. Eligible dogs will be identified by an asterisk in the steward's book and the catalog. Dogs must be handled throughout the competition by an eligible owner. *Professional handlers, household members and current assistants to professional handlers may not exhibit the dog in any competition during the entire show.*

## Four-to-Six Month Beginner Puppy Competition

The Four-to-Six Month Beginner Puppy competition shall be for dogs that are at least four months of age and over, but under six months on the day of the event. Classes divided into Groups as listed in the *Rules Applying to Dog Shows* and the Miscellaneous Class breeds as listed in Chapter 3, Section 22. The Miscellaneous class competition will be the equivalent of Group competition and the winner will be eligible to compete in Best Four-to-Six Month Beginner Puppy in Show. The FSS competition will be the equivalent of Group competition, the Group winner will be eligible to compete in Best Four-to-Six Beginner Month Puppy in Show.

- Professional handlers are not permitted to exhibit in this class. *Professional handlers are defined as any person who belongs or has belonged to a professional handlers' organization, distributed rate cards, or otherwise advertised or represented themselves as handling dogs for pay.*

## FSS Open Show

This new event was developed to provide the experience and training for new exhibitors, dogs, and judges, awarding points towards the Certificates of Merit. The classes offered are 4-6 month puppy, 6-9 month puppy, 9-12 month puppy and open. Any FSS breed club approved as the breed parent club and not yet approved to hold licensed shows is eligible to hold an AKC Sanctioned FSS Open Show. This event is an opportunity for owners and their dogs to gain the ring experience of a conformation dog show in a relaxed and inviting environment.

Go to the AKC website, [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org) for a listing of upcoming events in our events calendar.

## The Road to Best in Show

Dog shows are a process of elimination, with one dog being named **Best in Show and one dog as Reserve Best in Show** at the end of any All-Breed Show and those Limited Breed Shows allowed awarding a Best in Show.

Only the Best of Breed winners advance to compete in the **Group** competitions. Each AKC-recognized breed falls into one of seven group classifications. The seven groups are Sporting, Hound, Working, Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding. Four placements are awarded in each group, but only the first-place winner advances to the Best in Show competition.



## The Seven Groups in All-Breed Shows

**Sporting** — These dogs were bred to hunt game birds both on land and in the water. The breeds in this group include Pointers, Retrievers, Setters and Spaniels.

**Hound** — These breeds were bred for hunting other game by sight or scent. These breeds include such dogs as Beagles, Bassets, Dachshunds and Greyhounds.

**Working** — These dogs were bred to pull carts, guard property, and perform search and rescue services. Among the breeds in this group are the Akita, Boxer, Doberman Pinscher, and St. Bernard.

**Terrier** — This group includes breeds such as the Airedale, Cairn Terrier and Scottish Terrier. Terriers were bred to rid property of vermin such as rats.

**Toy** — These dogs were bred to be household companions. This group includes little dogs such as the Chihuahua, Maltese, Pomeranian and Pug.

**Non-Sporting** — This diverse group includes the Chow Chow, Bulldog, Dalmatian and Poodle. These dogs vary in size and function, and many are considered companion dogs.

**Herding** — These dogs were bred to help shepherds and ranchers herd their livestock. The Briard, Collie, German Shepherd Dog and Old English Sheepdog are some of the breeds in this group.

Finally, the seven group winners are brought into the ring where they compete for **BEST IN SHOW**, the highest award at a dog show.



## Ribbons

Each dog that receives an award is given a ribbon by the judge. The color of the ribbon indicates the type of award the dog has won.

**Blue** — awarded for first place in any regular class. Also awarded to the winner of each group competition, usually in the form of a “rosette”.

**Red** — awarded for second place in each class. Also awarded for second place in each group competition, usually in the form of a “rosette”.

**Yellow** — awarded for third place in each class. Also awarded for third place in each group competition, usually in the form of a “rosette”.

**White** — awarded for fourth place in each class. Also awarded for fourth in each group competition, usually in the form of a “rosette”.

**Purple** — awarded to the winners of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch classes. Since these are the classes in which championship points are earned, these ribbons are highly coveted.

**Purple and White** — awarded to the Reserve Winners, that is, the runners-up to the winner of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch classes.

**Blue and White** — awarded to the dog that wins Best of Winners; that is, the better of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch winners.

**Purple and Gold** — awarded to the dog judged “Best of Breed” in each breed competition. This is highly coveted because it allows advancement to the Group competition.

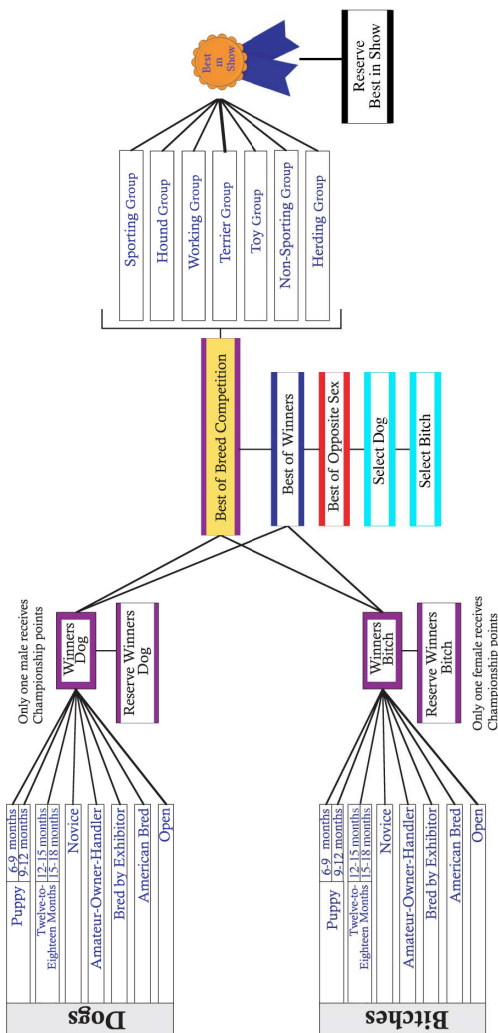
**Red and White** — awarded to the Best of Opposite Sex. This means the best dog of the breed that is the opposite sex of the Best of Breed winner.

**Light Blue and White** — two of these awarded to the Select Dog and Select Bitch in the Best of Breed competition awarded points towards earning a **Grand Championship Title**.

**Red, White and Blue** — only one of these is awarded, at the end of each show. It is given to the ultimate award winner, the **BEST IN SHOW**.



# AKC Dog Show Judging Procedure



First Place in Dog and Bitch Classes are Eligible to compete for Winners Dog and Winners Bitch.

Winners Dog and Winners Bitch are each awarded points, determined by the number of Dogs competing according to the current AKC schedule. Reserve Winners for each sex is then selected.

Best of Breed or Variety Competition consists of both male and female Champions, plus Winners Dog and Winners Bitch. Best of Breed or Variety award qualifies this dog to represent its Breed in its own Group. Best of Winners is selected from the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch. Best of Opposite Sex is then selected from the remaining dogs of the Opposite Sex to the Best of Breed or Variety. Select Dog and Select Bitch (Optional) selected from eligible dogs during BOB competition.

First Place Winner in each of the seven Groups represents its Group for Best in Show.

Best in Show dog stands alone at the end of the Show, remaining undefeated.

Reserve Best in Show is selected from the remaining Group winners.

## How Do I Get Started Showing My Dog?

The best place to start is by joining a local club, whether an all-breed kennel club or a breed-specific specialty club. A listing of clubs by state is available on our website [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org) or through our customer service department by calling (919)-233-9767.

Local clubs will have information on training classes for the show ring, and for obedience and agility classes. Even if the show ring is not your ultimate goal, the relationship that training forms between you and your dog will be very rewarding to you both. Local clubs also have “Fun Matches” where you and your dog can test your skill in the ring.

Handling your dog is an exceptional and enjoyable experience. From the grooming table to the show ring, you and your dog will develop a bond. While training classes offer the best hands-on way to practice for the show ring, attending shows and observing your breed is also a great way to gain understanding of what judges and other competitors do.

If you do not wish to handle your dog yourself, or have a friend or family member do it, you may contact a professional handler who charges a fee for showing your dog.

You're on your way! You are entering a sport that will bring many hours of enjoyment and education to every member of your family. You will make many friends in the sport, and will enjoy your dog and your new hobby for many years to come.

## Junior Showmanship

The AKC offers youngsters 9 to 18 years of age the opportunity to compete with others their own age at various AKC events. Juniors competing in conformation events are judged on how they present their dogs.

## Tips for the First-Time Exhibitor

- Make sure your dog is registered with the AKC.
- Be sure your dog is current on all inoculations.
- Learn the proper techniques for grooming and for presenting your dog in the ring.
- Join your breed's Parent Club, or a Local Specialty and/or All-Breed club in your area.
- Become familiar with the AKC rules and regulations for dog shows.
- Attend some dog shows to observe your breed being judged and how others present your breed. Get a *Judging Program* at the show to find out ring number and judging time.
- Use the knowledge of your breeder.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Attend handling classes with your dog.

## Tips for the First-Time Spectator

- If the grooming area is open to spectators, visit it and talk with professional groomers to get tips on keeping your dog looking his best.
- However tempting, do not pet a dog without asking for permission first. The dog may have just been groomed in preparation for being judged.
- At each dog show, you will find vendors and information booths. Many club booths offer helpful information to the general public.
- Wear comfortable shoes — you'll be doing a lot of walking. Unless you bring a chair or arrive early, be prepared to stand most of the time, as seating is usually limited.
- If you are considering getting a purebred dog, talk to the breeders and exhibitors — they are experts in their breeds.
- If you bring a baby stroller to a dog show, be careful that you do not run over any dog's tail, and that your child does not grab or poke the dogs it can reach. Avoid having them near ring entrances, which are especially crowded. Some shows prohibit baby strollers.

## Dog Show Terms

**Angulation** - Angles created by bones meeting at their joints.

**Baiting** - Using liver or some treat to get the dog's attention and have him look alert.

**Bench show** - A dog show at which the dogs are kept on assigned benches when not being shown in competition, so they can be viewed and discussed by attendees, exhibitors and breeders.

**Exhibitor** - A person who brings a dog to a dog show and shows it in the appropriate class.

**Fancier** - A person who is especially interested, and usually active, in some phase of the sport of purebred dogs.

**Gait** - The way a dog moves; movement is a good indicator of structure and condition.

**Groom** - To brush, comb, trim or otherwise make a dog's coat neat.

**Handler** - A person or agent who takes a dog into the show ring or who works the dog at a field trial or other performance event.

**Heel** - A command to a dog to keep close beside its handler.

**Match Show** - A usually informal dog show at which no championship points are awarded.

**Miscellaneous Class** - Transitional class for breeds attempting to advance to full AKC recognition.

**Pedigree** - The written record of a dog's family tree of three or more generations.

**Points** - Credits earned toward a championship.

**Soundness** - Mental and physical well-being.

**Stacking** - Posing the dog's legs and body to create a pleasing picture.





## Helpful Publications

The AKC offers a wide variety of resources to assist everyone from the first-time puppy buyer to the experienced dog fancier. Many AKC publications are free. To order materials and inquire about prices, call our Customer Service Department, or e-mail [OrderDesk@akc.org](mailto:OrderDesk@akc.org).

### **The Complete Dog Book**

A comprehensive glossary of dog-related terms, as well as pictures, histories, and standards of all AKC-recognized breeds.

### **AKC GAZETTE (Online Only)**

The official publication of the AKC, published monthly. It has articles on canine health, behavior and events; columns on specific breeds; and an Events Calendar, listing pertinent information on AKC-approved shows, obedience trials, tracking tests, field events and performance events.

### **American Kennel Club Dog Care and Training Book**

Shows you how to select the right dog, keep it healthy and fit, and teach the five basic commands every dog should know.

### **Rules Applying to Dog Shows**

A comprehensive listing of the rules and regulations for AKC-sanctioned dog shows at which championship points are awarded.

### **Show/Trial Manual**

A complete step-by-step explanation and “how-to” manual for producing a quality dog show.



## Where to Get Information

The AKC's address, phone number and website address are on the back cover of this brochure, and you can get information through any of these sources.

Many clubs advertise their shows on local television and radio stations, and sometimes in the local newspaper.

## The AKC Website

The AKC Website contains a wealth of information about the world of purebred dogs, including information on breeds, AKC registration, canine legislation and public health issues.

View a complete listing of AKC-sanctioned events by accessing the [Event and Awards Search](#) page from the [Dog Events](#) page on the AKC website. On the [Events Calendar](#) page, you can select a timeframe, competition type, and your home state or several surrounding states. The Events Calendar is compiled by day and date, and has the club name and location of the show. Entry forms for dog shows may be downloaded from the AKC website.

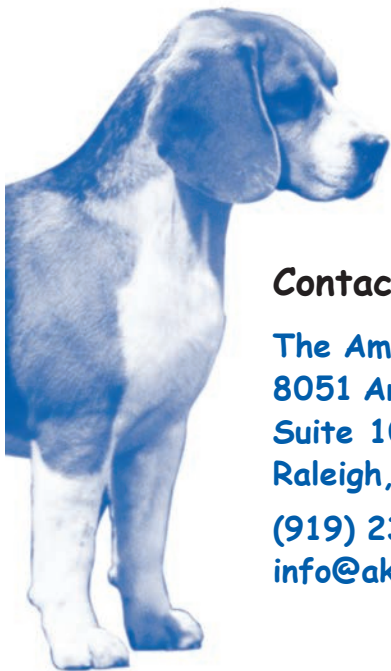
A *Premium List*, the official announcement of a club's event, can be obtained from the show's superintendent or show secretary.



# AKC Code of Sportsmanship

*PREFACE: The sport of purebred dog competitive events dates prior to 1884, the year of AKC's birth. Shared values of those involved in the sport include principles of sportsmanship. They are practiced in all sectors of our sport: conformation, performance and companion. Many believe that these principles of sportsmanship are the prime reason why our sport has thrived for over one hundred years. With the belief that it is useful to periodically articulate the fundamentals of our sport, this code is presented.*

- Sportsmen respect the history, traditions and integrity of the sport of purebred dogs.
- Sportsmen commit themselves to values of fair play, honesty, courtesy, and vigorous competition, as well as winning and losing with grace.
- Sportsmen refuse to compromise their commitment and obligation to the sport of purebred dogs by injecting personal advantage or consideration into their decisions or behavior.
- The sportsman judge judges only on the merits of the dogs and considers no other factors.
- The sportsman judge or exhibitor accepts constructive criticism.
- The sportsman exhibitor declines to enter or exhibit under a judge where it might reasonably appear that the judge's placements could be based on something other than the merits of the dogs.
- The sportsman exhibitor refuses to compromise the impartiality of a judge.
- The sportsman respects the AKC bylaws, rules, regulations and policies governing the sport of purebred dogs.
- Sportsmen find that vigorous competition and civility are not inconsistent and are able to appreciate the merit of their competition and the effort of competitors.
- Sportsmen welcome, encourage and support newcomers to the sport.
- Sportsmen will deal fairly with all those who trade with them.
- Sportsmen are willing to share honest and open appraisals of both the strengths and weaknesses of their breeding stock.
- Sportsmen spurn any opportunity to take personal advantage of positions offered or bestowed upon them.
- Sportsmen always consider as paramount the welfare of their dog.
- Sportsmen refuse to embarrass the sport, the American Kennel Club, or themselves while taking part in the sport.



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