



Musical Dog Sport Association (MDSA) Performance Guidelines

EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2010

*These performance guidelines describe the manner in which
MDSA performances (titling and non-titling) will be conducted.*

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Section 1: MDSA Vision of Canine Musical Freestyle

The Musical Dog Sport Association's definition of canine musical freestyle is a dog sport in which training, teamwork, music, and movement combine to create an artistic, choreographed performance highlighting the canine partner in a manner that celebrates the unique qualities of each individual dog. It is built upon the foundation of a positive working relationship of a dog and handler team.

The following are essential elements of an MDSA canine musical freestyle performance that should be present, regardless of class entry or event format:

- A performance is always presented with the above MDSA canine musical freestyle definition in mind.
- The dog and handler seem intangibly linked in the performance. The relationship and bond the team shares is clearly illustrated.
- The music is selected to enhance and showcase the movement of the dog.
- All movement is choreographed with the music and presented in an artistic and creative manner. The performance should not look like an obedience routine set to music.
- The movement of the handler compliments the dog's movement.
- Canine musical freestyle is the creative expression of teamwork, training, willingness and joy shared by a dog and handler.

Section 2: Eligibility

- MDSA freestyle events are open to all dogs, purebred or mix breeds.
- Dogs must be at least one (1) year of age at the date of the competition or event.
- Bitches in season may not compete at live events.
- Dogs and/or handlers with disabilities are welcome to compete as long as they are able to perform in a safe and joyful manner.

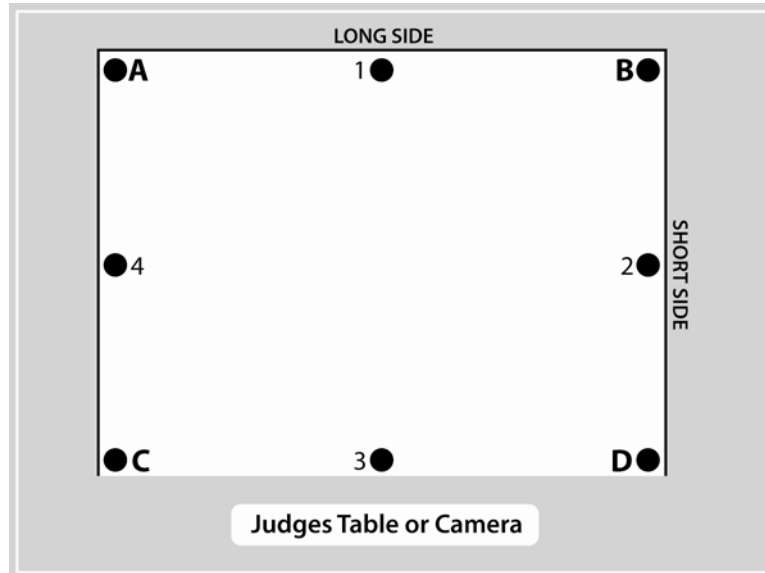
Section 3: Equipment

- The ROOKIE and TEAM classes can be performed on-lead, if desired. All other classes are performed off lead.
- Dogs may be shown with no collar or a properly fitted collar or a slip collar.
- Decorative collars or bandanas are permitted provided they do not distract from, overshadow or interfere with the dog as the focus of the routine. Decorative collars shall not be wider than an appropriately sized flat collar. Flounces, ruffles, and other similar neckwear are not allowed.
- No special training collars may be used, including but not limited to, prong, choke, electronic or head halters.
- Food, toys, or clickers are not allowed in any class other than the ROOKIE class.
- All dogs on the show grounds must be on leash or crated, except when in the performance space.

Section 4: Performance Space

- **Size:** The stage will be rectangular. The preferred dimension is 40 x 50 feet (12 x 15 meters). When space is an issue, a 30 x 40 foot (9 x 12 meter) ring may be used. The size of the ring shall be included in the show announcement or premium list.
- **Ring Markers or Gating:** The performance space is based on a proscenium stage. The space shall be designated in either one of two ways:
 - ✓ **With markers** approximately 12 inches (30 cm) in height. Small cones or potted flowers may be used. The markers will be placed at the corners and the center points of each side. Markers may be identified with small letters on the corner markers and numbers on the center markers. Letters and numbers should be approximately 3 inches (8 cm) tall.
 - ✓ **With gates** — on three sides — the back and the two sides. The front shall remain open and will always be on the long side of the ring.
- **Judge or Camera Placement:** The judge or the video camera shall be placed on the front, long side of the space. The judge's table or the video camera will be placed a minimum of 6 feet (2 meters) from the edge of the front of the space.
- **See Fig. A** for an illustration of the proper performance space arrangement.

(Fig. A)



Section 5: Performance Elements

Creative heelwork is an essential element of canine musical freestyle. Handlers are encouraged to explore the unlimited possibilities. Moves should fit both the music and the dog's personality and strengths. The dog should never be asked to perform moves which are beyond its level of training. The dog should never be required to perform beyond its physical capability.

There are no required moves, nor a specific number of moves requirement in either the titling or non-titling classes. A pleasing, balanced presentation is the goal. The choice of what moves or behaviors to use and how to present them is very important and should be carefully considered. It's also important to consider the flow of the performance; moves should flow smoothly from one to another. Creativity in a performance is encouraged, especially at the higher class levels. Each individual move, even the most basic of skills, can be performed in an almost endless variety of ways.

Example moves or behaviors include, but are not limited to:

Left Side Heel	Serpentines	Switches
Right Side Heel	Down	Pivots
Front work	Jumping	Recall
Circles	Rollover	Weaves
Spins	Bow	Zigzag

Section 6: Signals and Commands

- The handler may use verbal cues, visual cues or both.
- Verbal cues should be quiet and not distracting.
- Visual cues should be smooth and should not detract from the performance. When possible, visual cues should seem to be a part of the choreography. Multiple signals should be avoided.
- No force real — or implied — should be used, including grabbing and physically positioning the dog. Touch is allowed, but only as a demonstration of praise.
- Handler signals appearing to lure the dog into performing are not allowed. In props classes, the prop should not be used as lure, either.
- It is the handler's responsibility, prior to entering the ring, to arrange a subtle signal for music steward to start the music.
- At the beginning and conclusion of the performance, the handler shall acknowledge the audience with a courteous nod, bow or wave. Handlers may choose to acknowledge their dog at the conclusion of the performance before acknowledging the audience.

Section 7: Music

Music is a necessary part of canine musical freestyle. The music shall be carefully chosen to compliment and showcase the movement of the dog and the dynamics of the team. Music is a powerful tool for communicating emotion, energy, joy, bond, relationship and teamwork.

- Choreography may reflect the style of music chosen, such as country, swing or 50's.
- The music shall reflect a respect for the dog, the audience, and the sport. As such music lyrics shall not contain profanity or be obscene or lewd.
- Handler is free to choose from all musical styles and genres. There is no requirement for use of lyrics or use of instrumental only.
- Music editing is acceptable, and in some cases, required in order to meet the class time limit.
- Handlers are required to work within the time ranges for the class. Timing of the performance begins and ends with the music.
- Music more than 5 seconds over/under the class time limit may be scored as a *minor* error. Music 10 seconds or more over/under will be scored as a *major* error and will disqualify (DQ) the performance.
- Only CDs will be used at live events. The CD should be marked with the team's name, song title and artist. CDs shall have the song used for the performance as the only track.

Section 8: Attire

- The handler's attire should not interfere with the dog as the focus of the routine.
- The handler's attire shall reflect a respect for the dog, the audience, and the sport.
- Attire shall compliment the dog, the theme of the music, and choreography.
- Attire, including footwear, shall not overshadow, detract from or interfere with the performance of the dog.
- Footwear that could possibly harm or cause injury to the dog, such as high heels or cowboy boots with a hard heel, is not permitted.

Section 9: Overview: Title Requirements

- All performances will adhere to these entire Performance Guidelines and also the additional requirements specific to the class entered (see Section 11).
- Entrants that desire to earn their dog's *first* MDSA title will begin working toward a title in the Novice class.
- Entrants are allowed, but not required, to enter the Rookie class for performance experience and to receive feedback prior to entering the Novice level.
- Three (3) qualifying legs are required to earn a title (Note: See Section 9a for special grandfather clause to this rule). Legs toward a title may be earned at video and/or live events.
- Performances for each qualifying leg must be earned with a new routine with new choreography and new music.
- Performances for each qualifying leg must be earned with the same handler and dog team.
- Only one (1) entry per dog per titling event is allowed.
- Entrants may rework and re-enter the same routine to earn a qualifying leg only if the routine received a Non-qualifying (NQ) or Disqualifying (DQ) score or it was entered in a non-titling class at a previous event.
- There are no placements. Entrants are in effect competing against themselves to earn titles. All entrants receive at least one evaluation with a rating from an MDSA Judge. Entrants may also receive additional evaluations from apprentice judges for training purposes; however, the ratings of the apprentice judges are not used for purposes of determining qualifying/non-qualifying legs.

- Unless stated otherwise in individual class requirements (see Section 11), entrants need not be an MDSA member to earn MDSA titles or enter MDSA events.
- Upon successful completion of requirements for each title, handler will receive an MDSA title certificate and dog is eligible for title designation after name. Qualifying scores will also receive a ribbon.

Section 9a: Special Grandfather Clause for Qualifying Leg Requirement

The January 1, 2010 three (3) qualifying leg requirement to earn a title applies only to teams that are entering a routine to earn their first leg toward a new title on or after January 1, 2010. Teams that have already earned title(s) and/or have already earned one leg toward a title prior to January 1, 2010 will be grandfathered. These teams will only be required to complete two (2) qualifying legs to earn the title currently in progress. However, note that all other requirements presented in these guidelines will apply to *all* teams entering competition.

Section 10: Snapshot Overview: MDSA Classes (Titling and Non)

This chart is intended to be a summary. Review the full requirements for each class before entering.

MDSA Rookie Class	Music Time: 1:00 - 2:15 minutes
Rookie Class Non-titling	MDSA members only. Dog must not have earned MDSA title. Leash and/or treats and/or toys permitted. Two (2) entry limit.
MDSA Novice Class	Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes
Novice Freestyle Dog (NFD) Titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Three (3) qualifying legs.
Novice For Exhibition Only (FEO) Non-titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Unlimited entry limit.
MDSA Standard Class	Music Time: 1:30 - 2:30 minutes
Standard Freestyle Dog (SFD) Titling	NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Three (3) qualifying legs.
Standard For Exhibition Only (FEO) Non-titling	NFD title pre-requisite to enter. Unlimited entry limit.
Standard With Props (SFD-PRP) Non-titling	SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Unlimited entry limit.
MDSA Premier Class	Music Time: 2:00 - 4:00 minutes
Premier Freestyle Dog (PFD) Titling	SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Three (3) qualifying legs.
Premier For Exhibition Only (FEO) Non-titling	SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Unlimited entry limit.
Premier With Props (PFD-PRP) Non-titling	PFD title pre-requisite to enter. Unlimited entry limit.
MDSA Veteran Class	Music Time: 1:00 - 2:30 minutes
Veteran Freestyle Dog (VFD) Non-titling	Dog must be seven (7) years or older on date of show.
MDSA Team Class	Music Time: 1:30 - 2:45 minutes
Team Class (TEAM) Non-titling	No title pre-requisite to enter. Group must have two (2) to eight (8) teams. At least two (2) MDSA members. On or off lead permitted.
MDSA Brace Class	Music Time: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes
Brace Freestyle Dogs (BFD) Titling	Each dog must have SFD title pre-requisite to enter. Three (3) qualifying legs. Same dogs, same handler.

Section 11: Description of MDSA Titling Classes

NOVICE CLASS (Beginner level)

Music time range: 1:15 - 2:15 minutes

Title: Novice Freestyle Dog (NFD)

Pre-requisite: None

Qualifying Legs: Dog and handler team earning three (3) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to show that the team is proficient in the foundations of freestyle – creative heelwork, movement, choreography, focus and attention.

- Team should demonstrate proficiency in front work and right and/or left side work.
- Team should demonstrate sustained focus and attention between dog and handler. Some minor breaks in attention are permitted at this level.
- Team should demonstrate a strong foundation for core freestyle moves. Optional moves are always encouraged, but not required. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or happy performing or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- The team shall present a creative performance with a basic-level application of core choreographic elements: floor pattern design, simple creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in directions, contrasts, transitions, variety of moves and move combinations.
- Larger hand signals and slightly louder verbal cues are permitted, as long as they don't overshadow the dog. An intermittent delayed response to *some* cues on the part of the dog is permitted at this level.
- Music should complement the rhythm and dynamics of the team.
- The team shall cover the performance space.

STANDARD CLASS (Intermediate level)

Music time range: 1:30 - 2:30 minutes

Title: Standard Freestyle Dog (SFD)

Pre-requisite: NFD title

Qualifying Legs: Dog and handler team earning three (3) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to showcase the dog and the relationship between the dog and handler and a fluency in freestyle behaviors, choreography and music.

- Team should demonstrate proficiency in right, left and front side work.
- Team should demonstrate an element of basic distance work in the routine. There are no requirements as to how distance is achieved or for how long, but the expectations for this level are to demonstrate a basic ability. Examples include (but are not limited to) a simple stay and recall or asking the dog to move away from the handler a short distance and then return.
- Team should demonstrate sustained focus and attention between dog and handler. Breaks in attention should be very few and very minor at this level.
- Team should demonstrate a strong fluency in foundational freestyle moves. Appropriate use of one or more optional moves is expected at this level. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or happy performing or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- The team shall present a creative performance with the application of core choreographic elements: floor pattern design, creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in direction, contrasts, transitions, variety of moves and move combinations. It is expected that the team builds upon the basic knowledge gained from Novice level choreography successes and errors to create a routine with an intermediate level of complexity and more individual originality.
- More emphasis should be placed on musicality in the choreography. In other words, some attempt should be made to pair one or more choreographic elements – such as moves, floor patterns, speed changes – with the music content or style.
- Hand signals are permitted, but should be small. Hand signals or gestures should complement the music content or style. More emphasis on verbal cues or body movement cues is preferred at this level. Cues should not overshadow the dog. Dogs are expected to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in their response to most of the handler's cues.
- The music should match the dog's movement, and compliment the rhythm and dynamics of the team.
- The team shall cover the performance space.

PREMIER CLASS (Advanced level)

Music time range: 2:00 - 4:00 minutes

Title: Premier Freestyle Dog (PFD)

Pre-requisite: SFD title

Qualifying Legs: Dog and handler team earning three (3) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to focus on the positive relationship between the dog and handler showcasing it in a creative and artistic manner. The training, connection and bond should be clearly apparent.

- Team should demonstrate proficiency in creative heelwork beyond right, left and front side work.
- An element of advanced distance work is expected. There are no requirements as to how distance is achieved or for how long, but the expectations for this level are to demonstrate a higher level ability.
- Team should demonstrate sustained focus and attention between dog and handler.
- Foundational freestyle moves should be flawless. Optional moves are expected at this level. The handler should not ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or happy performing or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- The team shall present an interesting, creative performance with the application of core choreographic elements: floor pattern design, creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in direction, contrasts, transitions, variety of moves and move combinations. A strong emphasis should be placed on musicality, originality and showcasing the dog's individual unique qualities.
- Hand signals are permitted, but should be very small and/or disguised. Hand signals or gestures are expected to compliment the music content or style. More emphasis on verbal cues or body movement cues is expected at this level. Cues should not overshadow the dog. Dogs are expected to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in their response to handler cues.
- The music shall highlight the dog's movement, uniqueness and compliment the rhythm and dynamics of the team.
- The team shall cover the performance space.

BRACE CLASS (Intermediate level)

Music time range: 1:15 - 2:30 minutes

Title: Brace Freestyle Dog (BFD)

Pre-requisite: SFD title on each dog

Qualifying Legs: Dog and handler team earning three (3) qualifying legs (Q).

The purpose of this class is to showcase the dogs and the relationship between the dogs and the handler/dog relationship.

- The Brace team shall consist of one handler with two (2) dogs. The dogs need not be of the same breed. The same 2 dogs and handler must be present for each qualifying leg.
- The criteria and requirements used to review Novice class entries shall be used to review and qualify Brace class entries, with the exception of music time and title pre-requisites.

Section 12: Description of MDSA Non-Titling Classes

These classes do not qualify as legs toward a title: Rookie, FEO, Veteran, With Props, and Team. These classes are intended for performance experience, additional experience when team is not yet ready to proceed to the next class level, or as an additional challenge for the team. Handlers will receive score sheets from the judge(s) that will include comments and a Successful or Needs Work designation only. Although these are non-titling classes, participants are expected to adhere to the MDSA Performance Guidelines when crafting and submitting a routine. Some additional participation restrictions apply to these classes, so be sure to review the details for each specific class before entering.

ROOKIE

Music time range: 1:00 - 2:15 minutes

Title: Non-Titling

Pre-requisite: MDSA Member

The purpose of this class is to provide entrants with performance experience in a competition setting, practice and learning opportunities when the team is not yet ready to enter titling classes.

- The handler should not overshadow dog nor ask the dog to perform behaviors they are not yet confident or happy performing or are physically unable to perform safely and comfortably.
- Treats, toys and training aids may be used to praise and encourage the dog but should not be used as a lure.
- The dog may be shown on lead or off lead. The lead shall not be longer than 6 feet (2 meters). The lead should be handled in a graceful manner and not interfere with the performance of the dog. The lead may be dropped as necessary. Continuously tight leads or using the lead for corrections and manipulation are not permitted.
- This class may be entered no more than two (2) times by any dog/handler team.
- At live events this class shall be held after the competition.

FOR EXHIBITION ONLY (FEO)

Title: Non-Titling

The purpose of this class is to provide entrants with additional performance experience, additional practice or learning opportunities when the team is not yet ready to proceed to the next titling level, or to provide a performance venue for those who do not wish to earn a freestyle title or may have already earned a title and still wish to continue to participate.

- There is an FEO option in the Novice, Standard and Premier class levels.
- The criteria used to review FEO class entries shall be the same criteria as used for the corresponding class level. For example, a Standard FEO entry is expected to follow all Standard criteria, from music time to performance elements and requirements.
- Teams may enter FEO an unlimited number of times but each entry must be a new routine with new choreography and new music.
- There is no pre-requisite to enter Novice FEO. However, to enter Standard or Premier FEO, the team must either meet the title pre-requisite for the class OR have received three (3) Successful FEO ratings at the preceding level.
- At live events this class shall be held after the titling competition, but before Rookie class entries.

VETERAN

Music time range: 1:00 - 2:30 minutes

Title: Non-Titling

Pre-requisite: Dogs that are at least seven (7) years old at the date of the show.

The purpose of this class will be to showcase the dog and the relationship between the dog and handler in a competition setting.

- There are no criteria for this class and teams are encouraged to create performances that are appropriate for their skill level and physical abilities. As is the case with all MDSA performances, the team shall present an interesting, creative performance with the application of core choreographic elements: floor pattern design, creative heelwork, changes in pace, changes in direction, contrasts, transitions, variety of moves and move combinations. However, MDSA expects that the dog should never be over faced or required to perform beyond its physical capability and choreography should be adjusted to meet the needs of the veteran performer.
- This class may be entered an unlimited number of times, but each entry must be a new routine with new choreography and new music.
- At live events this class shall be held after the titling competition and FEO entries, but before Rookie class entries.

WITH PROPS (PRP)

Title: Non-Titling

- There is a PRP option in the Standard and Premier class levels.
- The criteria used to review PRP class entries shall be the same criteria as used for the corresponding class level. For example, a Standard PRP entry is expected to follow all Standard criteria, from music time to performance elements and requirements, with the exception that a prop is permitted in the performance.
- To enter Standard or Premier PRP, the team must first meet the title pre-requisite for the class.
- Teams may enter PRP an unlimited number of times, but each entry must be a new routine with new choreography and new music.
- The use of a prop shall in no way detract from or overshadow the performance of the dog.
- The use of the prop shall enhance the routine and its use should be choreographed.
- A prop should not be used as a training aid nor should it be used as a lure.

TEAM

Music time range: 1:30 – 3:00 minutes

Title: Non-Titling

Pre-requisite: At least two (2) MDSA Members

- Teams are made up of two (2) to a maximum of eight (8) dog and handler teams. At least two (2) must be MDSA members.
- Treats, toys and training aids are not allowed. Dogs may be on lead or off lead, but all dogs must either be on lead or off lead. The lead shall not be longer than 6 feet (2 meters). The lead should be handled in a graceful manner and not interfere with the performance of the dog. The lead may be dropped as necessary. Continuously tight leads or using the lead for corrections and manipulation are not permitted.
- The criteria used to review Team entries shall be the same criteria as used for the Novice class level.
- Teams may enter an unlimited number of times, but each entry must be a new routine with new choreography and new music.
- At live events this class shall be held after the titling competition, FEO and Veteran but before Rookie class entries.