



The Jungle Gym Teeter

By Linda Mecklenburg

To teach the teeter, try using the “jungle gym” technique. With this technique, you create a dog that is comfortable climbing all over the teeter with confidence and exuberance and that is happy jumping onto and off the teeter from all angles. Although you can use a similar technique on the A-frame and dogwalk, it’s preferable to teach the teeter first so that the dog learns from the beginning that he is in control of the board.

Before You Start

- Make sure that your dog has been preconditioned to the noise of the teeter so that he is not bothered by the sound.
- Teach the dog the one-rear-toe-on (I-R-T-O) position that is described elsewhere in this issue. The early steps are the same and facilitate the dog’s learning process. Even if you plan to teach running contacts or some other technique on the A-frame and dogwalk, you can still use the I-R-T-O technique for the teeter.

Introducing Your Dog to the Teeter

This technique requires an adjustable teeter. The teeter is lowered so that it is as close to the ground as possible. Start with the up end 2" to 4" above the ground.

When first introducing your dog to the teeter, click and treat him for *any* interaction with the ramp. With the teeter crosswise between you and your dog, wait for him to step on the ramp. Because you have treats in your hand, it usually doesn’t take long for him to come toward you and offer this behavior. Click and treat him for stepping on the ramp (usually he will use a front foot, but click for any foot). At first, toss the treat behind the dog so that he has to go get the treat. This effectively repositions him for a new and different approach to the ramp each time. If you treat him on the ramp, you must release him with a verbal O.K. and pull him off the ramp to restart.

The Down End

Note: For purposes of this article, the “down end” is the end of the ramp that rests on the ground and the “up end” is the end of the ramp that extends into mid-air when there is no dog performing the obstacle.

Step 1

Start by having your dog put one paw on the down end of the teeter. If he does, click and treat. At first toss the treat behind him so that he will remove his foot, retrieve the treat, and re-approach the ramp. Once he is repeating the paw touch consistently, alternate clicking and tossing the treat with clicking and treating while he remains in contact with the ramp. At this stage, you want the dog to be sitting or standing on the ground, touching the down end with one front paw.

Step 2

Next, wait for your dog to put two paws on the down end of the teeter; when he does, click and treat. At first toss the treat so that he will remove his feet, retrieve the treat, and re-approach the ramp to repeat the behavior. Once he is repeating the two-paws-on behavior consistently, alternate clicking and tossing the treat with clicking and treating while he remains in contact with the ramp. At this stage, you want the dog to be sitting or standing on the ground, touching the down end with two front paws.

Step 3

Then wait for the dog to climb onto the down end of the teeter with all four paws; when he does, click and treat. At first toss the treat so that he will remove his feet, retrieve the treat, and re-approach the ramp to repeat the behavior. Once he is repeating the four-paws-on behavior consistently, alternate clicking and tossing the treat with clicking and treating while he remains in contact with the ramp. Most dogs will offer a 1-R-T-O position on the end of the ramp. Click and treat as the dog maintains contact with the ramp, whether with one rear foot or two. Once he is offering to climb onto the ramp and stand, encourage him to turn around on the ramp, maintaining contact. You want the dog to learn that staying in contact with the ramp is a good thing and that maintaining his balance on it is good, too.

The Up End

Step 1

Once your dog can happily climb on the down end of the ramp, stand on the ramp, offer 1-R-T-O, turn on the ramp, and both jump off and maintain position to get a treat, you can gradually move to the up end. At first, minimize the motion by holding the ramp. Have your dog start by putting one paw on the up end of the ramp; when he does, click and treat. Usually, the dog will withdraw his paw if the ramp moves. That's okay, because at first you should toss the treat so that he will remove his foot, retrieve the treat, and re-approach the ramp to repeat the behavior. Once he is repeating the paw touch consistently when you click, treat only if the dog remains in contact with the ramp. At this stage, your dog should be sitting or standing on the ground, touching the ramp with one front paw. Gradually allow more and more motion of the ramp until the dog will keep his foot on the ramp and hold it as it drops to the ground. With his back feet on the ground, he learns to initiate the motion with his front foot. This is the critical step that builds his understanding that he controls the motion and the sound. Many repetitions are needed to instill the behavior.

PHOTO BY SUSAN CRANK



The dog puts one paw on the up end of the ramp.

Step 2

Next wait for your dog to put two paws on the up end of the ramp. At first, minimize the motion by holding the ramp. When he puts two paws on the up end of the ramp, click and treat. Usually, the dog will withdraw his paws if the ramp moves. That's okay, because at first you toss the treat so that he will remove his feet, retrieve the treat, and re-approach the ramp to repeat the behavior. Once he is repeating the two-paw touch consistently when you click, treat only if the dog remains in contact with the ramp. At this stage, you want him to be sitting or standing on the ground, touching the ramp with two front paws. Gradually allow more and more motion of the ramp until he will keep his feet on the ramp and hold them there as it drops to the ground.

Riding the Ramp

Step 1

Once your dog will ride the ramp down with two paws on, the next step is to wait for him to climb onto the up end of the ramp with all four paws; when he does, click and treat. At first, toss the

treat so that he will step off, retrieve the treat, and re-approach the ramp to repeat the behavior. Once he is repeating the four-paws-on behavior consistently, alternate clicking and tossing the treat with clicking and treating while he remains in contact with the ramp. Most dogs willingly offer a 1-R-T-O position on the end of the ramp. Click and treat as he maintains contact with the ramp, whether it is with one rear foot or two. If he turns and stays on the ramp, click and treat.

Step 2

Once the dog will get on either the down end or up end with all four paws, encourage him to initiate motion when he has four paws on the ramp. When he climbs onto the teeter, no matter which end, encourage him to move toward the pivot point. Click and treat as soon as the teeter moves and deliver the treat while he is still on the ramp. Encourage him to walk through the motion for the treat, and as soon as the ramp hits, reverse your direction. If he turns to follow and stays on the board, click and treat. Move back and forth along the length of the teeter to encourage him to initiate motion as many times as possible in one session.

Step 3

When your dog is walking back and forth on the teeter confidently, allow him to walk onto the board from the end. Sometimes walk forward until he reaches the 1-R-T-O position; sometimes reverse direction before he gets there.

Encourage your dog to make contact with the ramp in any way that he wants, from the side, down end, up end, whatever. Before raising the teeter, you want him comfortable jumping on and off from all angles, not just from the ends.

Raising the Teeter

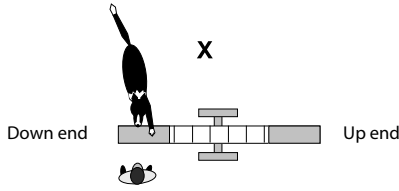
Don't raise the teeter until the dog is confidently climbing or jumping onto the up end and riding it down. With larger dogs the teeter can be nearly full height and the dogs can still get on the up end from the ground. For small breeds, however, the teeter will be at a lower height before the dog can't reach the up end. Many dogs do not run all the way to the end of the teeter, not because they are afraid of the motion, but because they are afraid of the drop. By encouraging the dogs to literally jump onto the up end with all four paws, they learn that the drop is a fun part of the game.

PHOTO BY SUSAN CRANK



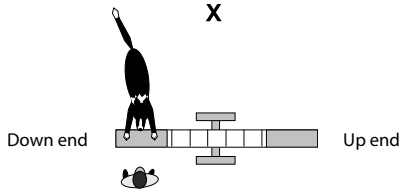
The dog is stepping onto the up end of the teeter and will push it down as he jumps on with all four paws.

Start at the down end.



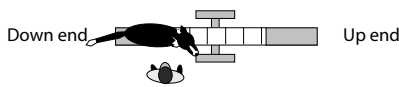
1

Click for one paw and toss treat to "X." Then click and treat while he maintains contact with the board and release with a verbal OK.



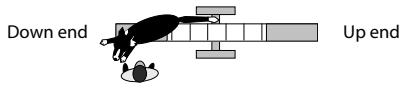
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Click for two paws and toss treat to "X." Then click and treat while he maintains contact with the board and release with a verbal OK.



3A

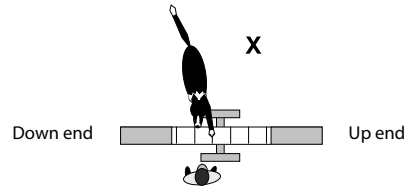
Click for four paws on...



3B

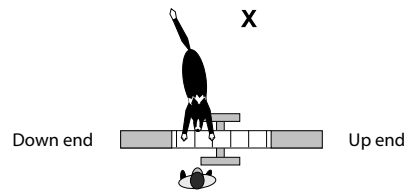
...when dog turns around, treat while dog is on board. Click for 1RTO if offered.

Repeat the steps starting closer to the up end.



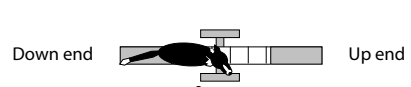
1

Click for one paw and toss treat to "X." Then click and treat while he maintains contact with the board and release with a verbal OK.



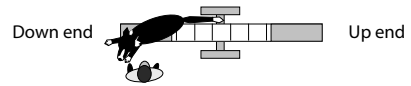
2

Click for two paws and toss treat to "X." Then click and treat while he maintains contact with the board and release with a verbal OK.



3A

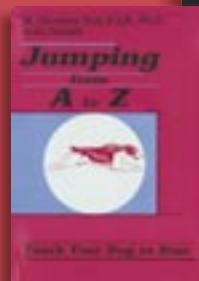
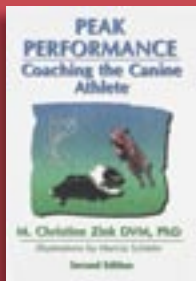
Click for four paws on...



3B

...when dog turns around, treat while dog is on board. Click for 1RTO if offered.

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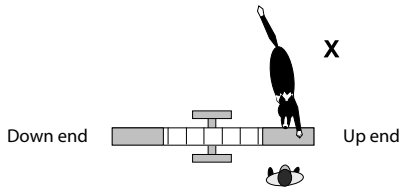
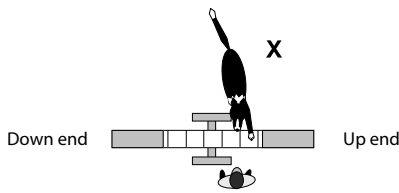
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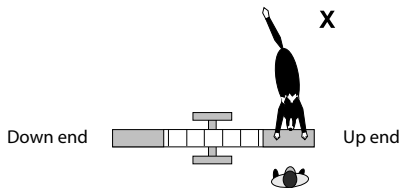
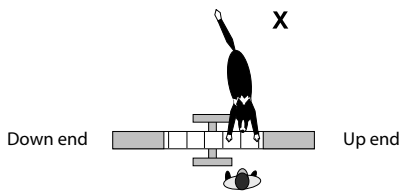
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Repeat the steps on the up end—the closer to the pivot point, the better.



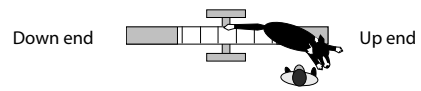
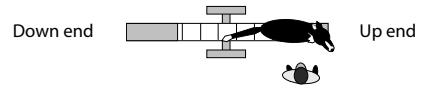
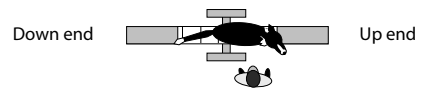
1

Click for two paws and toss treat to “X.” Then click and treat while he maintains contact with the board and release with a verbal OK.



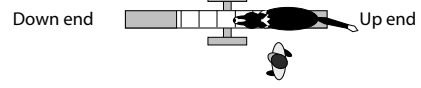
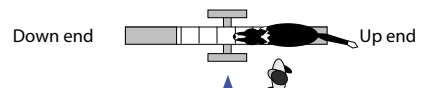
2

Click for two paws and toss treat to “X.” Then click and treat while he maintains contact with the board and release with a verbal OK.



3

Click for four paws on. When dog turns around, treat while dog is on board. Click for 1RTO if offered.



4

Move back and forth beside board. Click each time teeter moves. Treat as dog walks through the motion.

Eventually add the wait-for-release behavior simply by clicking whatever behavior is appropriate. Most dogs will offer a two-on/two-off or 1-R-T-O position. Finally, allow the dog to approach the teeter from the down end and perform it “normally,” putting it all together.

The jungle gym technique develops confidence and surefootedness on the teeter. By showing the dog how to initiate motion while he is still on the ground, he learns that he controls the motion and the noise and he learns to like both the motion and the noise. Done properly, he should be eager to get on the obstacle. With this technique your dog will be comfortable and balanced climbing onto and off the obstacle from all angles, which prepares him for awkward approaches during competition. The jungle

gym method should lead to your dog happily climbing all over the teeter and off as if it were a jungle gym at the playground.

Other Jungle Gyms

To teach the dogwalk and A-frame duplicate these steps. Start with a very low obstacle and encourage one paw on, then two, then four, then climbing all over and off from all angles, and then add the wait-for-release position. You want the dogs to be able to get on and get off, turn around on, and balance on the ramps at any point, including the apex of the A-frame or the center ramp of the dogwalk, before they ever perform the obstacle in the “normal” fashion. Once again, they develop confidence and surefootedness on the contact obstacles. 🐾

Linda Mecklenburg is one of the leading handlers in the U.S. She has represented the U.S. in international competition on eight different occasions with three different dogs. In 2001, she and her BC, Awesome, were members of the USA team that became the FCI Standard Team World Champions. Awesome also placed 8th in the Standard Individual competition, thus having the best combined performance of all dogs at the FCI Agility World Championships that year. Linda teaches agility full-time at her Awesome Paws Agility Center in Ohio. She can be reached by email at awesomepaws@aol.com.