



FCRSA WORKING CERTIFICATE AND WORKING CERTIFICATE EXCELLENT



June 2011

Guidelines For Handlers

Presented by the
FCRSA Field
Committee

This guide provides handlers with information about the Flat-Coated Retriever Society of America's (FCRSA) Working Certificate and Working Certificate Excellent tests. You'll find advice for preparing yourself and your dog for the tests, a step-by-step walk-through of each test, answers to questions frequently asked by handlers, and a brief glossary of terms. Our hope is that this guide will help prepare you and your dog for success.

FCRSA Working Certificate and Working Certificate Excellent

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLERS

Test Preparation and Resources

Prepare your dog and yourself for the test. The best preparation for test success is to train yourself to a level of comfort in the tasks to be performed, and train your dog to perform consistently and to a level of reliability before entering a test.

If you need help training for a test or are looking for a mentor, contact the FCRSA Field Committee or your local/regional Flat-Coat club for assistance in finding active field trainers or training groups. If there is no club near you, the FCRSA Field Committee can help find a mentor to answer questions and provide training advice. In addition, there are training resources listed on the FCRSA Field Training Resource List (www.fcrsafield.com). Ask your mentor for help finding the training program or books that will work best for you.

Read and be familiar with the rules. The FCRSA WC and WCX rules detail the requirements for passing each test. A thorough familiarity with the rules, and especially with actions that result in mandatory elimination from the test, will make all the difference in your success.

The rules can be found at <http://www.fcrsafield.com/wc.html> and <http://www.fcrsafield.com/wcx.html>. The Golden Retriever Club of America (GRCA) WC and WCX tests generally are open to Flat-Coated Retrievers. The rules for FCRSA and GRCA tests are nearly identical; the minor differences are reviewed on page 14 of this guide. Whether running an FCRSA or GRCA test, Flat-Coats should be judged under FCRSA rules. If you have questions about the rules, ask your mentor or the FCRSA Field Committee, or you can ask the judges the day of the test. The GRCA rules are found at http://www.grca.org/pdf/events/wcwcx/GRCA_WCWCX_Rules.pdf.

Attend a working test prior to entering a test. You'll learn a great deal by watching the handlers and dogs run a working test. You'll see the process and rules demonstrated, and observe the skills and characteristics of those dogs and handlers who do well. A schedule of tests can be found on the regional Flat-Coat club web sites at <http://www.fcrsafield.com/regional.html#regional> and on the GRCA WC/WCX calendar: <http://www.grca.org/events/calendar/wcwcx-cal.html>.

Day of the Test

Arrive early. Give yourself plenty of time to locate the test grounds, air your dog prior to the test, and to watch the test dog run. If there are no signs directing you, ask where to park and where to air your dog.

Prepare your dog. Be aware of your dog's mindset and the best routine to prepare him for success. Is he excited and full of energy? If so, arrive in time to take him on a good, long walk around the grounds to work off his energy and allow him to relax. Does he seem nervous? Maybe he needs time to walk around and get familiar with the sights and smells.

Find the marshal for your stake. Verify your running number, ask which stake will be run first, and obtain a catalog. Pay special attention to the number of dogs ahead of you in the running order, and when you will need to get your dog ready to run the test.

Don't miss the handler's briefing. Each test series will begin with a handler's briefing when a test dog will demonstrate the test, and handlers will be given the opportunity to watch the performance and ask any questions about the test process or rules. After running the test dog, the judges may adjust some aspect of the test or clarify instructions to the gunners to finalize the test setup. It is in your best interest to use the briefing to ask questions about the test process or rules. See the box at right for additional information on watching the test dog.

Watching the Test Dog

While the test dog runs, handlers have a chance to see where the marks will fall. There are many other aspects important for handlers to notice:

- Pay attention to the sequence of the marks.** Which is the memory mark? Which is the go-bird? How does this affect how you will show the gun stations to your dog and line up for the marks? Inexperienced handlers often forget the sequence, or forget where their dogs should be facing. Go over every step you will use to line up, cue, and turn your dog. Run your dog the way you have trained – make your handling choices intentionally and not by accident.
- Pay attention to the gunners.** Make note of whether the gunners are shooting before a dead bird is thrown, or if they shoot while the bird is in the air. This can make a difference in whether your dog will be drawn to the gun station by the shot before the throw, or whether you'll need to be sure your dog is focused on the mark before the shot.
- Make note of where the line is.** How is the line marked, and do the judges have any restrictions about where the dog must sit? Review this while you wait in the holding blind so that you know where you're going with your dog!
- Consider the path from the holding blind to the line.** Do the judges want you to leave the holding blind in a certain direction? If the choice is yours, consider the advantage of leaving from one side over the other. What direction is your dog facing as you leave the blind? Where is the bird drying rack, and how best can you heel your dog so that you block your dog's access to it? Is there any other hazard or item of curiosity (bird bags, buckets, or judges' coffee mugs or lunches)? For WCX handlers, if you are heading directly at the readily visible short guns or flyer guns, will you have a hard time pulling your dog's focus to the less visible gun stations?
- Think about your path from the line after you run, and for WCX handlers, from the honor box.** Consider how best to get quick control of your dog, before he has a chance to make a move to the bird rack or the next dog in the holding blind. For WCX handlers, make a note of what area is definitively behind the judges where you will stop and put the leash back on your dog.
- Ask the judges about anything that is unclear to you.** Take the opportunity to ask about the test or rules, after the test dog runs. You will also have a last chance to ask questions from the holding blind, when the judges call you to the line. Make sure to phrase your exchanges with the judges in a respectful and friendly manner. The judges have given their time and energy to promote the sport we enjoy. It is good sportsmanship to thank the judges each time you leave the line, no matter what has occurred.

THE WORKING CERTIFICATE (WC)

The WC test consists of a land double and two water singles. This test is intended to demonstrate the natural ability of the dog to perform basic hunting tasks, including marking ability, memory, attention, use of nose, courage, perseverance, style, and delivery of the bird in table-ready condition.

The land double demonstrates the dog's ability to mark and retrieve two birds consecutively. The water singles demonstrate the dog's ability to swim, to retrieve a waterfowl, and the perseverance and willingness to reenter the water. The test also demonstrates the dog's willingness to work in partnership with the handler.

WC Land Series

The marshal will let you know when it is time to get your dog in the holding blind. Have your collar, lead, and whistle at hand, and your dog aired in advance. Be prepared to go to the holding blind and await your call to the line.

Elements of the WC Test

	Land Stake	Water Stake
Marks	40-50 yards	25-30 yards
Cover	Both marks in moderate cover	One mark in light cover, the second mark in open water
Birds	Upland game birds (e.g., pigeon, chukar, pheasant), although ducks may be used if no Golden Retrievers are entered.* No mixed bird species. Dead birds may be used, or a live flyer may be used at the judges' discretion.	Ducks; dead birds

* The GRCA requires upland birds on the land series.

When called to the line by the judges, you may ask the judges any last-minute questions from behind the blind before you proceed. Walk to the line quietly, with your dog at heel and under control. *The dog may be brought to line with a flat-buckle collar (no choke or prong collars permitted, and no tags on the collar), on leash or with a piece of line slipped through the collar's D-ring or under the collar. You may not use unusual force to keep your dog at heel position and the dog should not be pulling you to line.* The rules stress control and walking quietly to the line. You may use a quiet, firm tone in reminding your dog to heel, but do not speak loudly or in an intimidating tone.

Once at the line, tell your dog to sit where the judges have indicated. Remove the leash and tuck it out of sight, either in your pocket or behind you on the ground. Hold your dog gently by slipping a couple of fingers under the collar, or with the line slipped through the D-ring or under the collar.

Take time to show your dog the two gun stations. The gunners should be visible, standing up, and wearing white. *Having your dog focus on each gun station will be your best opportunity for success.* Face

your dog in the direction of the gun, and stay mostly quiet or softly give cues such as “mark,” and your dog is likely to self-focus. Limit your body movement; the more you move, the more distracting it is to your dog, making it difficult for him to focus. Excessive pointing-out of the guns to your dog is not necessary or condoned, and can be confusing to your dog. Look for a sign from your dog that he has noticed each station. If you have trouble getting your dog facing or focused on a gun, gently pat your left leg or move the leg slightly back to get your dog to turn his head toward you (to the right); move your left leg slightly forward to turn your dog’s head away from you (to the left). Practice these actions in training. Remember that your calm manner will allow your dog to focus.

Once you are sure your dog has clearly seen both guns, position him between the marks or facing the memory mark (the first bird to be thrown). If you’ve forgotten which is the memory mark, ask the judges. You may speak quietly to cue “mark” and/or “stay” to your dog. Then, when you are ready to begin the test, give the judges a signal with a brief wave of your free hand. *Once you signal the judges, you must remain silent and not speak to your dog as the birds are thrown by the gunners.* After the first bird is thrown, you may turn your body slightly to face the next mark, but limit your movement and avoid moving the dog out of the sitting position. The sound of the gunshot is likely to draw your dog to focus on the next mark. You may not force your dog to turn, or use unusual force to keep your dog at heel. A dog that moves and thrashes as the birds go down will miss seeing and focusing on the marks and is likely to be unsuccessful in the test.

Once the birds are down, *wait until the judge calls your number before you send your dog to retrieve!* Releasing your dog before the judge calls your number will result in elimination from the test.

Once the judge calls your number, *be sure to wait until your dog is facing and focused on the mark before releasing him to retrieve the bird.* Send your dog to pick up the marks in any order, although it is preferable that the dog’s first retrieve is the last bird thrown. If your dog goes a few steps and stops or returns to your side, calmly re-heel and focus him, then resend him. Resending your dog (called a “recast”) is not allowed unless the judges conclude that the dog is confused; however, it is always good practice to resend and let the judges decide whether or not the dog was confused.

Once your dog has left to retrieve, stand quietly at the line while your dog is working to find the bird. Any voice commands (i.e., “fetch”, “hunt it up”, etc.), whistle commands, or hand signals while your dog

Thoughts for Novices: First, Take Heart!

It can be hard not to let our nerves get the best of us, even when we know our nerves aren’t helpful for our dogs. Here are some tips to help ease your nerves:

- Remember that your dog is unlikely to make a mistake that the judges haven’t seen before.
- Focus on what you can do to be a good partner to your dog. Take time in the holding blind to keep your dog’s attention and prepare to work as a team.
- Take your time during the test. It may seem as if all is going in slow motion, but the reality is people are often rushing through the test and this can be a great disadvantage to you and your dog.
- Have confidence that you’ve done the best you could to prepare for the test! Only by seeing where your preparation falls short can you improve.
- Remember to breathe, to smile, and appreciate this time spent outdoors with your dog.

is finding the bird are considered handling of the dog; *this is a test of your dog's marking abilities; any handling or assisting your dog to find the bird is not permitted.*

If your dog goes out, hunts an area, does not find the bird, and leaves that area to go retrieve a different bird, this is considered a “switch” and is grounds for elimination (see “what is a switch” in the frequently asked questions (FAQ) section).

Once your dog has the bird, you may encourage him to return using voice or whistle commands. For proper delivery, your dog will need to bring the bird past a point or line indicated by the judges; he is not required to deliver the bird to hand. If your dog comes past the point or line, and drops the bird, pick it up. If your dog delivers to hand, take the bird gently. With either delivery, *be sure the bird is in your hands before you touch your dog or his collar.* Limit your dog's distraction from lining up for the next mark by holding the bird behind your back and allowing the judge to take it. Never toss the bird on the ground behind you — it should always be handed to the judge.

Line your dog up for the next mark. *Slip your fingers under your dog's collar to gently direct him, or pat your side or speak quietly to settle and focus him on the mark. Rough handling of the dog may result in elimination from the test.* In lining your dog up for the memory mark, take your time and be sure he is facing and focused on the memory mark before you send him! *The biggest handler error in the WC test is sending the dog for the second bird before he is focused on it!* Without purposeful focus on that mark, the dog is likely to run back to the area of the first mark (see “what is returning to an old fall?” in the FAQ section) or romp around the field without direction, both of which usually end unsuccessfully.

After the dog has retrieved and delivered the second bird, take that bird in hand, and then gently take the dog by the collar. Hand the bird to the judges, reattach the dog's leash, thank the judges, and walk the dog out of the area. Be careful not to interfere with the next running dog waiting in the holding blind.

Occasionally a dog at the line will receive a bad bird throw or be interfered with in some way. If this happens, the judge may direct you to take your dog off line and return later to run your dog. Put your dog on leash, and calmly walk him off the line. The judges or marshal will tell you when to rerun your dog.

After all of the WC dogs have run the land series, the marshal will announce “call backs,” a list of the dogs' running numbers that passed the land portion of the test and will continue to the water series.

WC Water Series

The WC water series consists of two single marks run consecutively. Prior to beginning the test, the judges will explain the series during the handler briefing, and run the test dog. Don't hesitate to ask questions you may have about the series or any test rules.

You and your dog will wait your turn in the holding blind. When the judges call you to the line from the holding blind, sit your dog where the judges indicate, facing the first mark. You may hold your dog gently

by slipping a couple of fingers under his collar or using a line slipped through the collar's D-ring or under his collar.

Take the necessary time to show your dog the gun for the first mark. Since these are single marks, show your dog only the first gun at this time to avoid confusion. Make sure your dog is focused on the gunner, and then signal to begin the test. Remember — *once you signal the judges you must remain silent and may not use unusual force to keep your dog sitting while the bird is thrown.*

Wait until the judge calls your number before you send your dog! Once your number is called, send your dog and wait quietly at the line while he is working to find the bird. *Any handling or assisting your dog to find the bird is not permitted.* Once your dog has the bird, call him in using voice or whistle commands.

Upon return, make sure your dog has passed the designated line before he delivers or drops the bird. *Do not touch your dog before the bird is in your hand.* Hand the bird to the judges.

Once the first mark is completed, gently guide your dog to sit where the judges indicate and have him face the second mark. Once again, it is essential that he be focused on the gun station before you start the test. Signal the judges to begin, and wait for them to call your number before releasing your dog to retrieve. Remain silent at the line until your dog has picked up the bird.

Be sure you have the bird in hand before touching your dog. Once you have completed the test, take your dog gently by the collar, thank the judges, and reattach his leash and lead him quietly off the line. As you leave, be careful not to interfere with the next dog waiting in the holding blind.

To successfully complete the WC test, your dog must retrieve all birds and return them to you according to the rules. The marshal will announce the qualifying dogs/handlers.

Things to Remember . . .

- Bring your dog to line with a flat-buckle collar (no choke or prong collars permitted, and no tags on the collar), on leash, or with a piece of line slipped through the D-ring or under the collar.
- You may speak quietly and firmly to your dog, but you may not use an intimidating tone of voice.
- You may not use unusual force to keep your dog at heel position and the dog should not be pulling you to line.
- Slip your fingers under your dog's collar to gently direct him, or pat your side or speak quietly to get him settled and focused on the mark. Any rough handling of the dog will result in elimination from the test.

Most Common Handler Errors

Most failure in the working tests is due to lack of preparation. The most frequent issues are:

- Entering a test before the dog is adequately trained
- Insufficient knowledge of the test rules
- Rushing at the line and not taking the time to show the dog the gunners and get him settled for the start of the test
- Sending the dog to retrieve before the judge calls your number
- Sending the dog to retrieve before he is focused on the area of the mark

- Take time to show your dog the two gun stations on the land double, and the single gun station on the water mark. Look for a sign from your dog that he has noticed each gun station before signaling to start the test.
 - Once you signal the judges, remain silent and do not speak to your dog as the birds are thrown.
 - Wait until the judge calls your number before you send your dog to retrieve.
 - Wait until your dog is facing and focused on the mark before releasing him to retrieve the bird. This is particularly important before you release your dog for the second retrieve on the land double.
 - This is a test of your dog's marking abilities. Handling or assisting your dog in finding the bird is not permitted and will result in elimination.
 - Do not touch your dog before the bird is in your hand.
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THE WORKING CERTIFICATE EXCELLENT (WCX)

The WCX test was established to encourage breeders and owners to further use and develop, through training, the natural working and retrieving abilities of the breed. This test demonstrates a trained retriever (and handler).

The WCX is a steady stake, which means that the dog is run off lead throughout the test, and the handler cannot touch his dog during the test. The test consists of a land triple, a water double, and an "honor" on water meaning the dog must stay quiet with the handler in a designated area while another dog and handler team works at the water. The WCX emphasizes the dog's marking ability, memory, attention, perseverance, courage, steadiness, and the dog's willingness to work as a team with his handler. Each series will begin with a handler's briefing, where a test dog will demonstrate the test, and handlers are given the opportunity to watch the performance and ask any questions about the test process or rules. After running the test dog, the judges may adjust some aspect of the test or clarify instructions to the gunners to finalize the test setup. It is in your best interest to take advantage of the briefing period to ask questions you have about the test process or rules. See the box on page 2 for additional information on watching the test dog.

WCX Land Series

When the judges call you to the line from the last holding blind, remove the lead and collar from your dog and tuck them in your pocket or leave them on the ground, out of sight. You and your dog are under judgment from the time you leave the holding blind. Walk to the line quietly, with your dog at heel and under control. Because this is a stake in which your dog is required to be steady, control is emphasized at all times. *You may talk quietly and firmly to keep your dog under control, but you may not use a threatening or intimidating tone of voice or gestures at any time.*

Elements of the WCX Test

	Land Stake	Water Stake
Marks	60-100 yards	45-60 yards
Cover	Moderate cover for all marks	The memory bird should be in moderate cover and not visible from the line; the second bird is in open water or very light cover so that it is visible.
Birds	Upland game birds (i.e., pigeon, chukar, pheasant), although ducks may be used if no Golden Retrievers are entered.* No mixed bird species. Two birds are dead, the third is a live flyer.	Ducks; generally dead birds are used although a flyer may be used at the discretion of the judges.
Decoys	None	2-4 decoys clearly visible from the line but not in line with either mark

* The GRCA requires upland birds on the land series.

Sit your dog where the judges indicate. *Make certain your dog sees all the guns! Take the time to face your dog toward each gun station so that he clearly sees each one.* During this process, you may speak quietly to your dog, giving him cues such as “good” or “mark” to indicate the gunner. Pointing to each gun is excessive and not necessary or condoned. One of the biggest errors that handlers make in the WCX is rushing this process, and as a result, the dog does not have the opportunity to focus on each gun.

When you are ready to begin the test, signal the judge by a motion of your hand. *From the time you signal for the test to begin, you must remain silent until the judge calls your number to release your dog. Do not send your dog to retrieve before the judge calls your number or you will be out of the test!*

The birds will be thrown “around the horn,” meaning they start either at the far right or far left, and follow sequentially in one direction. As the birds go down, you may pivot in position to face the area of each fall, but limit your movement so that your dog stays in a sit position. Your dog should have adequate training on multiple marks to follow your movement. No other cues are allowed — do not touch your dog, give any verbal commands or cues, or pat your leg while the birds are going down.

Breaking situations largely depend on handler response to the dog’s forward motion before the judge’s release. If your dog stands up, creeps, or jumps forward as the birds go down, and you make no effort or command to stop or restrain him, the judges will not interpret this as breaking. However, if you give a verbal or whistle command, or make any effort to keep your dog from leaving the line, the judges will consider this a break. It will be considered a “controlled break” if you effectively stop your dog, and he promptly returns to heel at the line. *If you believe your dog is leaving to retrieve a mark before the judge calls his number, stop him. Otherwise, he will be out!* If your dog creeps or stands, but does not leave the line, stay quiet. The judges may ask you to re-heel your dog before releasing him, but it will not be considered a controlled break. Only one controlled-break is allowed in the WCX. For more information on breaking, see the FAQs.

After the judge calls your number, you may talk quietly to get your dog into position for the retrieve. Your dog may pick up the birds in any order; however, *be sure that your dog is facing and focused intently on a mark before releasing him*. Success is much more likely if you align your dog carefully, and ensure he is focused before sending for each retrieve. You may send your dog using a verbal command or a verbal command with a hand signal.

When sent, your dog should eagerly run to the mark and retrieve it. If your dog starts out a step or two, stops, and returns to your side, don't wait — assume he is confused and re-heel and resend him. The judges will determine whether your dog was confused and if so, they will allow the resend (recast). A dog that stops and returns for any reason other than obvious confusion will fail the test.

After your dog leaves to retrieve a bird, *you may not give any commands or encouragement, whistle, or use any gestures to help your dog find the bird*. Once he has picked up a bird, you may encourage his return by voice or whistle. He should return quickly and deliver the bird to hand. Remember — you may not touch your dog at any time during the test.

As your dog returns with each bird, position yourself in the direction of the next retrieve and bring your dog to heel position. When taking the bird from him, hold the bird behind your back and allow the judge to take it; never toss the bird on the ground.

While aligning your dog for the next retrieve, you may pat your leg and/or speak quietly to adjust his position, but do not touch your dog. *Take your time in lining him up for each retrieve, and be sure he is focused before sending him*. After he leaves the line, remain silent until he picks up the bird and be sure he delivers each bird to hand.

After completing all of the land marks, thank the judges, and heel your dog off the line without touching him. Once you and your dog are behind the judges, you may put a collar and lead on, and walk from the area. Do not allow your dog to interfere with the next running dog in the holding blind.

The marshal will announce the dogs that have passed the land series and will go on to the water marks.

WCX Water Series

The water series includes two parts — the water double followed by the honor. When the judges call you from the last holding blind, heel your dog to the line, and sit him where the judges indicate. Show your dog the gunner stations for both marks. It bears repeating that you should take your time during this process and be sure your dog clearly sees each gun. You may speak quietly to your dog, giving a cue (e.g., “good” or “mark”) to get him to focus on each mark. Pointing to each gun is excessive and not necessary or condoned.

When you are ready to begin the test, signal the judge by a motion of your hand. *From the time you signal for the test to begin, you must remain silent until the judge calls your number to release your dog*. Remember, a second controlled break in the WCX test is grounds for elimination.

After the first bird goes down, you may pivot in position to face the area of the second fall, but limit your movement so that your dog stays in a sitting position. *Do not touch your dog, give any verbal commands or cues, or pat your leg while the marks are being thrown.*

Do not send your dog to retrieve before the judge calls your number! Make sure your dog is facing and focused intently on a mark before releasing him to retrieve with a voice command or voice command with a hand signal. *After your dog leaves your side, you may not speak to or direct the dog to the mark, or encourage him to hunt; doing so is considered handling and your dog will fail the test.* As the dog returns with the first duck, line yourself up with the second mark, and encourage your dog into heel position, then take the bird and get him focused on the area of the memory bird before sending him to retrieve. Hold the bird behind your back for the judge to take. Again on this mark as with the others, after the dog has left the line to retrieve, you may not assist your dog in finding the bird – any speaking to your dog, or handling, will result in mandatory elimination.

Once your dog has delivered the second bird to you, hand the bird to the judge and move to the area where you will sit your dog for the honor. Some judges outline a box, or mark a line the dog must sit behind. If you are unsure about where your dog should sit and stay, ask the judges. If your dog has failed the test at this point, the judges will ask that your dog honor on lead so be sure your collar and lead are in your pocket. You may not block your dog's view of the marks during the honor — your dog must sit and be in a position to see both marks that are thrown for the running dog. *As you move to the honor position, and during the honor, you may speak quietly to your dog provided you do not interfere with the handler and dog running the marks, or with the judges.* For Flat-Coat handlers, this is allowed in both FCRSA and GRCA tests. When running a GRCA test, it is a good idea to confirm this with the judges. Golden Retriever handlers must remain silent during the honor.

The judge will usually ask if the honor dog is ready before starting the test for the running dog. Be sure your dog is settled and firmly in a sit before indicating you are ready! *Your dog must remain in the defined area during the honor; if the dog leaves the honor area, he will fail the test. No controlled break is allowed on the honor.* Remain in the honor area until the judge excuses you. Thank the judge, and then heel your dog off lead from the honor area before putting a collar and lead on your dog. You and your dog are under judgment until you are behind the judges. Leave the area promptly.

If for any reason the judges determine that a dog should be taken off line and rerun at a later time due to a bad throw or “no bird,” you may put your dog on lead and walk him off line. A judge or the marshal will tell you when to return for a rerun. Practice this in training so that you are able to walk your dog off line under control. “No birds” are not uncommon at tests.

Things to Remember . . .

- The WCX is a steady stake; you may talk quietly to your dog to keep him under control, but you may not use a threatening or intimidating tone of voice or gestures at any time.
- Take your time at the line and make sure your dog clearly sees each gun station.
- From the time you signal for the test to begin, you must remain silent until the judge calls your number to release your dog to retrieve. Do not touch your dog, give any verbal commands or cues, or pat your leg while the marks are being thrown.
- Wait until the judge calls your number before sending your dog to retrieve or you will be out of the test.
- A “break” or “breaking” occurs when the dog leaves the line before the judge has released him to retrieve, or if the handler gives a command, whether verbal or by whistle, to stop the dog from leaving the line to retrieve before the judge has called his number. One controlled break (bringing the dog back under control at the line) is allowed; more than one is grounds for elimination. No controlled break is allowed on the honor. If you think your dog is leaving to retrieve before being released, be sure to command him to stop — otherwise he will be out!
- Take your time in lining your dog up for each retrieve. Be sure that your dog is facing and focused intently on a mark before releasing him to retrieve.
- After your dog leaves your side, you are not permitted to speak to or direct your dog to the mark, or encourage him to hunt; doing so is considered handling and your dog will fail the test.
- As you move to the honor position, and during the honor, you may speak quietly to your dog provided you do not interfere in any way with the handler and dog running the marks, or with the judges.
- Your dog must remain in the defined area during the honor; if the dog leaves the designated honor area, he will fail the test.

Most Common Handler Errors

Most dogs and handlers fail the working tests due to lack of preparation. The most frequent issues are:

- Entering a test before the dog has adequate training, particularly in the areas of steadying and multiple marks
- Insufficient knowledge of the test rules
- Rushing at the line and not taking the time to show the dog the gunners and get him settled for the start of the test
- Sending the dog to retrieve before the judge calls your number
- Sending the dog to retrieve before he is focused on the area of the mark

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When can I talk to my dog?

You may talk to your dog while in the holding blind, while pointing out the gunners to your dog, to encourage your dog to return to you once he's picked up the bird, while lining your dog up between marks, and quietly during the honor. Do not talk to your dog *after* you have signaled the judge to begin the test and before the judge releases your dog to retrieve, or while your dog is hunting for the bird.

When can I touch my dog?

You may touch your dog in the holding blind before coming to the line. Once you proceed from the holding blind to the line to begin the test, you cannot touch your dog except when running the WC test, when you may gently guide him by the collar to assist him to see the gunners, gently restrain him as the marks are thrown, and gently line him up between marks. WCX handlers may not touch their dogs at any time after leaving the holding blind.

What type of collar can I use?

You may use a collar for the WC test only. A flat-buckle collar (without any tags attached) is the only collar allowed. No collars are allowed on the dog beyond the holding blind for the WCX test.

What type of leash can I use?

You may walk the dog from the holding blind to the test line using a leash for the WC test only. For this purpose, you may use a cloth or leather leash with a clip, or you may slip a cloth or leather line through the D-ring of the collar, or under the collar. No slip leads may be used. No leashes are to be used during the WCX test. Your leash should be tucked into your pocket in the holding blind, and until the dog has completed the land test or water test.

What type of birds will my dog retrieve?

Usually, your dog will retrieve upland birds (pigeons, doves, chukar, or pheasant) during the land series, and ducks during the water series. If the test is open only to Flat-Coats (no other breeds are entered), the club may use ducks on both land and water.

Can I praise my dog and tell him he's good once he picks up the bird?

You may praise and encourage your dog to return to you only *after* he has picked up the bird. You may not give any command or encourage your dog to pick up the bird.

Can I show my dog the gunners?

You may show your dog the gunners at the line. You are encouraged to take reasonable time needed to make sure your dog views each gunner. For the WC, you may gently guide the dog by the collar to help position him in the direction of the gunners. For the WCX, you may gently tap your leg or step up with your leg to help your dog identify the gunners. You may not nudge your dog with your leg or pull on his collar to indicate gunners.

Does my dog have to deliver to hand?

Your dog does not have to deliver to hand for the WC test. He only needs to deliver the bird past a line indicated by the judges. If you're unsure of the line, ask the judges before running your dog. Dogs must deliver to hand for the WCX test.

What constitutes a break?

A break is when a dog leaves the line before being released by the judge. No breaks are allowed in the WC test because it is not a "steady" stake — a WC dog is permitted to wear a collar and you may gently hold him by the collar, or with a slip line, when the birds are being thrown. Do not take the chance of running your dog steady; hold on to your dog! In the WCX test, if your dog leaves the line before the judge calls his number, and you give a command to stop your dog, the judges will assume he was breaking. If your dog returns immediately upon command, it will be considered a controlled break. Once the dog is under control, you must wait for the judge to call your number before sending him to retrieve. If your dog does not return on command, he will be automatically eliminated. If your dog moves forward but does not break, the judge may ask you to re-heel your dog before releasing him to retrieve, so be prepared. A dog is allowed one controlled break in the WCX test; a second controlled break is grounds for elimination. A "tie" goes to the dog and handler -- if the dog leaves when the judge calls the number, or if the handler releases the dog at the same moment the judge calls, this will not be considered a break.

What is a switch?

A switch occurs when you send your dog for a mark, he hunts the area and does not come up with the bird, and he then goes to another area to retrieve a different bird. Also, a switch occurs if a dog is returning with a bird, drops the bird he is carrying, and goes to another area and retrieves a different bird. A switch results in automatic elimination.

What is returning to an old fall?

Returning to an old fall occurs when a dog has returned to the handler with a bird and, when sent for another bird, goes back to the area where he has already picked up a bird. Returning to an old fall indicates the dog needs more training. While not a mandatory failure under the FCRSA rules, it generally results in a dog failing the test for failure to successfully retrieve all of the marks. Returning to an old fall is a mandatory failure for Golden Retrievers.

Can I talk to my dog on the honor?

You may speak quietly to your dog on the honor to restrain him from breaking, provided your voice does not interfere with the running dog, his handler, or the judges. Golden Retriever handlers must remain silent during the honor.

What constitutes handling?

Any verbal command, whistle, or hand signal to aid your dog in finding a bird is considered handling.

What is a recast?

A recast occurs when your dog does not go when you send him for a mark, so you send him again. Recasting results in automatic elimination unless the judges believe the dog was confused or unsure when he was first sent. It is not considered confusion if the handler repeatedly gives the dog a command to retrieve and the dog does not leave the line, or if the dog goes part of the way out to the mark and hunts, and then returns without the bird.

What are the differences between the FCRSA and GRCA rules?

There are a few key differences between the FCRSA and GRCA rules: 1) upland birds must be used at a test where Golden Retrievers are running; 2) returning to an old fall is a cause for mandatory elimination for Golden Retrievers; 3) a Golden Retriever handler may not speak to his dog during the WCX honor; and 4) Golden Retrievers in season may not run a test. Flat-Coats should be judged by the FCRSA rules, even in GRCA tests, except for the following:

- Although the FCRSA rules allow ducks to be used for both land and water series, a GRCA-sponsored test must use upland birds on the land. Different species of birds may not be used for different breeds of dogs.
 - Flat-Coated Retrievers in season may run an FCRSA test at the end of the stake, per FCRSA rules, even if Golden Retrievers are entered. Flat-Coated and Golden Retrievers in season may not run a GRCA test, and Golden Retrievers in season may not run an FCRSA test.
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GLOSSARY

- Air your dog** — to leash-walk your dog until he/she eliminates.
- Bird/gunner station** — a combination of bird boy and gunner (may be one person), wearing white, that throws a bird and shoots the gun during the test
- Mark** — the throwing and fall of a bird that is visible to the dog while in the air, and which a dog should watch, remember, and retrieve when released to do so. The term “mark” is also used to describe the dog’s ability to see and remember where a bird fell (i.e., marking ability); as a cue to communicate to the dog to "get ready," "pay attention," and something is about to fall or be shot.
- Single mark** — when one bird is thrown prior to releasing the dog to retrieve.
- Double mark** — a marking series where two birds are thrown, one after the other, in two separate areas of the field. The dog retrieves the first bird, which must be delivered to the handler before retrieving the second. This requires the dog to use his memory to remember where the second bird was thrown.

- Triple mark** — a marking series where three birds are thrown sequentially, one after the other, in three separate areas of the field. The dog is sent to retrieve after all three have been thrown, retrieving one at a time and returning to deliver each bird before retrieving the next.
- Memory mark** — one of the first birds thrown in a multiple mark series, referred by this name because the dog must remember, or have memory of the mark, to retrieve it.
- Go-bird** — the last bird thrown in a multiple mark series. The dog usually retrieves this bird first because it was thrown just prior to releasing the dog to retrieve.
- Running number** — the dog and handler's number in the running order of the test.

The Guidelines were written by Janet Ciarico, with contributions from Karen Peterson and Linda Reynolds.

Cover photo by Liz Saunders.