**Chapter 11: Guidework Fundamentals**

This chapter will detail some of the fundamental skills necessary for working with a guide dog. We will be covering topics like Following Position, Curb Approaches, Street Crossings, and Turn Mechanics. It is imperative that new handlers become proficient in these basic skills, as they will provide the foundation for more advanced skills and are vital to achieving overall success as a guide dog team.

**Wait Position vs Following Position:**

The *Wait Position* is the term we use when you have the harness handle in your hand but are stationary with your dog. This can be when you are about to start your route, when you reach your curb or anytime you pause your route but don’t set down the harness handle. At the Wait Position, your left foot should be as far forward as your dog’s front feet (the right foot can find a comfortable stance where you can keep your balance.) This often means your left arm is back farther than you might normally hold it. It is best to keep the harness handle low over the dog’s back. The dog should remain at the ready in a standing position, if you will be paused for an extended period of time (other than at a curb) it may be best to set down your harness handle and ask your dog for a Sit or Down.

When we talk about *Following Position,* we are referring to your position in relation to your dog while in motion and working with the harness handle in your hand. A good following position will help you feel the information your dog needs to communicate to you through the harness handle and will help you to stay centered along the sidewalk. Generally speaking, your following position will be a step or so back from your dog's front legs and your left foot will fall midbody alongside your dog as you walk, but not physically contacting the dog’s torso. When in a good following position, you will have enough resistance in the harness to feel any pace changes or side to side movement. Ideally, you will keep a slight bend in your left arm so your elbow can act as a shock absorber; you won’t ever be able to stay completely in step with the dog because they have four legs and you only have two!

**Moving with your dog:**

While working, when you tell your dog, “Juno, forward.” be prepared to step out with your dog as he makes his way down the sidewalk. At times the dog will make lateral movements as they go around objects or pedestrians. It will be important to maintain your direction of travel but “sidestep” with the dog. If you feel your dog pull a few paces to the left, they will try to get you back to center so be ready to follow back to the right. Think of side-stepping like changing lanes on the highway, the vehicle continues moving in the same general direction, it just moves over slightly as it continues forward. When you feel that lateral movement through the harness, go ahead and give some verbal praise! The dog will often choose the clearest path, not necessarily the exact center of the sidewalk, so stay with your dog.

At times the dog may change pace as determined by the environment. On narrower sidewalks with pedestrians and stationary objects, your dog may not be able to move out at their usual pace. Slow your pace to match your dog’s and remain in your good following position. When the sidewalk opens and you feel your dog pick up their pace, continue to move out with them. Many dogs will slow their pace as they approach the curbs; when they stop, stop with them, then gently slide your left foot forward to locate the curb.

**Curb Approaches and Street Crossings:**

When you are approaching an intersecting street, you are starting your curb approach (in this example, the down curb approach). Often there are environmental cues that let you know you are getting close; it could be that you hear the traffic on your intersecting street, maybe the building line ends and you feel the sidewalk open up, or maybe you feel your dog surge slightly for their target. When you feel you are within several paces of the curb, you can use the cue “To the curb!” Your dog will likely be looking for where the sidewalk continues across the intersection, this is part of the dog’s “straight line concept”. Try to maintain the same direction as you were heading when moving down the sidewalk. Stay in good following position until your dog has stopped; then gently slide your left foot forward into the wait position. This should allow you to feel for the down curb or that you are in your down-ramp. Once you have established you and your dog are there, mark with “Yes!” then feed and praise your dog. Leave your left foot forward at the curb, this will let you know how far you need to step with your right foot to clear the curb when entering your crossing.

In a later chapter we will cover how to target a specific spot at an intersection like a crosswalk button or tactile strip.

During the first several routes in class, your instructor will not ask you to judge traffic so you can concentrate just on working with your dog. It will be important to maintain proper alignment as you wait for your light cycle or, later, assess your traffic patterns. You may be instructed to briefly reach down and touch the top of your dog’s head just to make contact as you wait for your light cycle. This helps to keep a nice connection with your dog as you wait until it is safe to go.

**\*There is no need to turn and face instructor when they give instruction at the curbs.** It may be your natural inclination to face someone who is speaking to you; however, this can easily alter your alignment and adversely affect communication with your dog.

When you are sure it is safe to cross your intersection, give your hand signal and confidently say “Juno, forward.” Be ready to step into your crossing, but don’t start until your dog initiates movement. Ideally, we’d like your first step into the crossing to be with your right foot. Often this step involves an elevation change and can result in a heavy footfall, so we’d like that to be farther away from the dog. Once you are moving in your crossing verbally praise your dog, “Good boy/girl!” Remember to stay in that good following position and match your dog’s pace, if they move out - you move out, if they slow - you slow. The dogs will be not only looking for the up curb, they will also be negotiating any other pedestrian traffic in the crossing or possibly turning vehicles and might need to adjust pace. Once you are most of the way through your crossing you can again use the prompt, “To the curb”. As you feel your dog slow and stop check for the curb with your left foot. If you are at your curb or ramp you can say “Yes!”, then feed and praise, then ask your dog to go forward again to leave your crossing. Generally, the dog will stop with their front feet on the curbstone or a step into the ramp.

**Traffic Safety:**

Most people have had some form of Orientation and Mobility training to help them build safe traffic assessment. It is important to know how to identify different intersection configurations, assess light controlled intersections and be familiar with different terminology related to crossings. Parallel versus Perpendicular traffic, “T” versus “+” shaped intersections, the difference between crossing light-controlled intersections versus stop sign controlled intersections.

The responsibility of deciding when to cross an intersection will always be the handler’s responsibility. However, once in the crossing the dog will be responsible for reacting to any close moving traffic, such as a turning car. The dogs have all had multiple phases of traffic training and we will go into this topic in greater detail later in class, as well as show you their reaction to a “Traffic Check”. But aside from that, receiving a “Natural Check” is always a possibility. Most often, your dog will just alter their pace in a crossing to let the car pass. It is important to remain in good following position to detect any changes in pace, or reactions to traffic. The dogs need to be comfortable working in close proximity to cars; their idea of “too close” might differ from yours. Please inform your instructor if you have any particular concerns when it comes to street crossings and close moving traffic. We will do our best to help you become as comfortable as possible working with your dog.

When judging your traffic, take your time assessing the situation. Be sure you are in good alignment, you are certain of your intersection configuration, you have your dog’s attention on the work, and you are committed to the crossing before using the Forward command. If you hear Emergency vehicle sirens in your vicinity, do not initiate your street crossing (even if you have the light) until you have made sure they are not headed in your direction. First responders often need to run red lights to get to the scene of an emergency. Sirens can also be extremely loud and may be worrisome to your dog in close proximity. It’s best to hold your position and offer some physical and verbal praise to reassure your dog.

**Stationary Turns:**

Stationary turns involve changing your direction with your dog and picking up a new line of travel. Once you give the cue to turn, your dog will change direction, then continue forward in the new direction; there is an implied forward with either turn. There are several differences between the cues for a left turn vs a right one, but both start with you in the “Wait position” with your left foot forward by your dog’s front feet.

For the left turns, all body language will be moving toward your dog:

* Apply slight tension or light harness check to signal to the dog to back up
* Bring your left foot back just even with your right foot
* Give a hand signal across your body toward the dog
* Give the verbal cue, “Juno Left”
* Then be ready to move staying parallel to your dog.

To make the left turn, the dog will need to take a step or two backwards then change orientation a quarter turn to the left and continue in that direction.

For the right turns, most of your body language will indicate movement away from the dog:

* Bring your left foot back just even with your right
* Keep a neutral harness handle, (no tension backward)
* Move your hand signal away from the dog toward the right
* Give the verbal cue, “Juno, right”

To make the right turn, the dog will need to move across in front of you making a quarter turn to the right then continue in that direction. If you are making a right turn from a down curb, make sure the dog has enough space to maneuver between you and the curb.

Initially it may seem like a lot of steps to put together at once but can become fluid quickly with some practice. Your instructor will offer Juno practice work for turns if you find some extra repetition to be helpful.

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