

# ROCK SOLID DOGS

## Arch Training for Obstacle Focus and Increased Distance

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The concept behind arch training is to start with very simple exercises where the dog gets in the habit of targeting easy to find pieces of equipment. At our home training facility and performance field, we use “Hoops” as ground-running obstacles but jumps would work equally as well for most of these exercises. Our preference for hoops comes from doing this with very young dogs who should not be jumping because they are not yet physically developed in the shoulders.

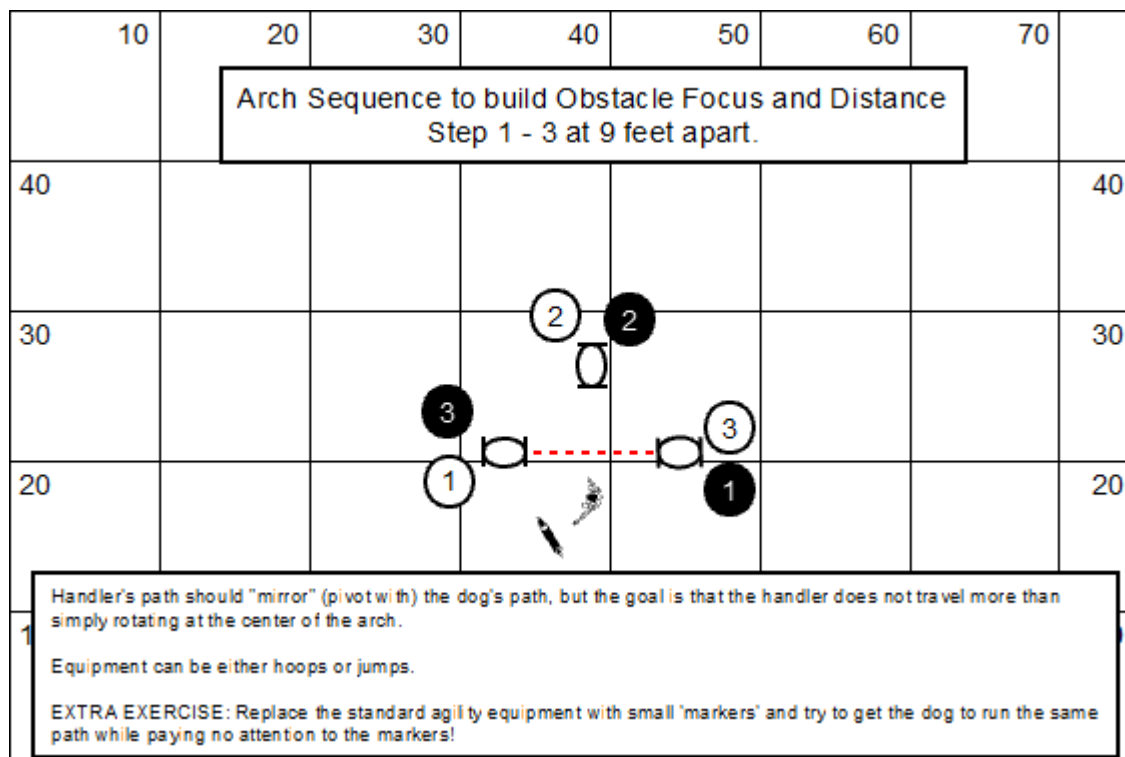
This progression of exercises should be done with equipment first so the dog gets the idea of “targeting” for obstacle focus. If done properly, each week the dog will gain a bit more confidence, drive, and be willing to work “further away”. Once the dog is reliably successful performing the arch (or circle) with the equipment, you should then attempt the same pattern with no equipment ... just simple markers (landscape “whiskers”, sour cream container lids, etc.) that the dog should not be aware of – they are placed just for the handler's use to work on their own accuracy attempting to guide the dog to certain places with complete “handler focus”.

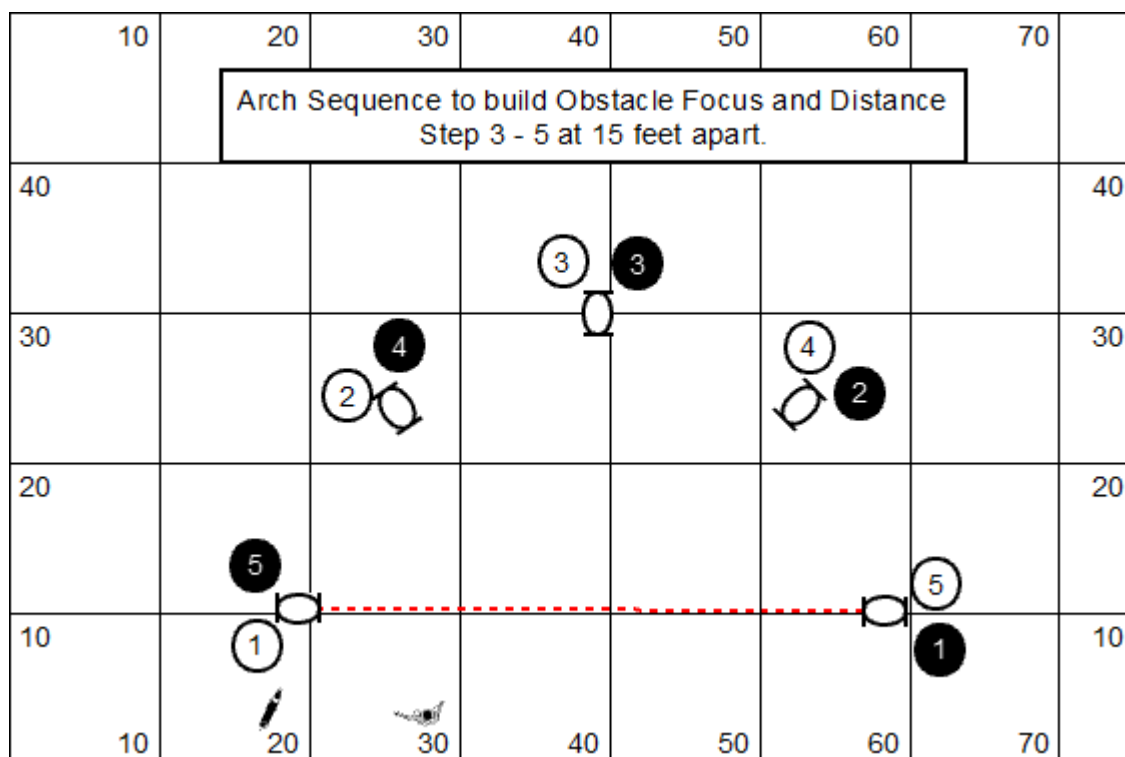
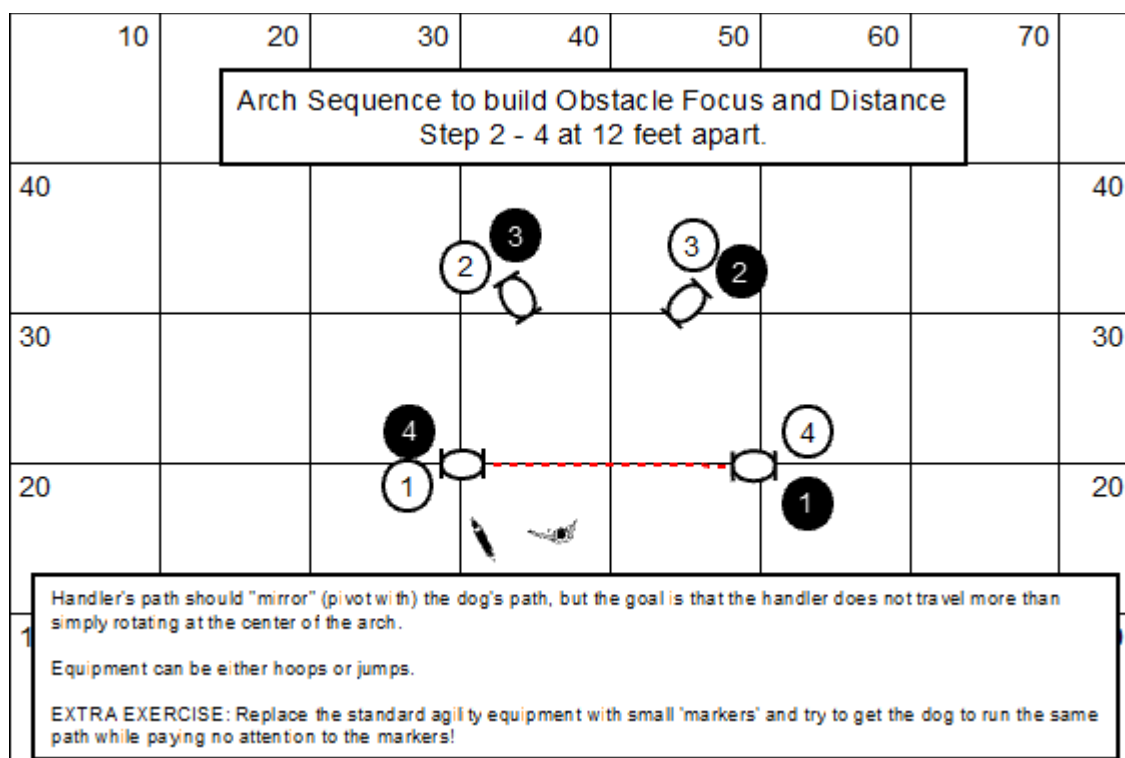
For each of the arch exercises, the handler should be thinking about their own footwork acting in parallel with the dog, and the handler's arm extending downward at about a 45 degree angle with their hand pointing about 2 feet ahead of the dog at all times. If at all possible, the handler should NEVER cross the plane between the first and last hoops or jumps.

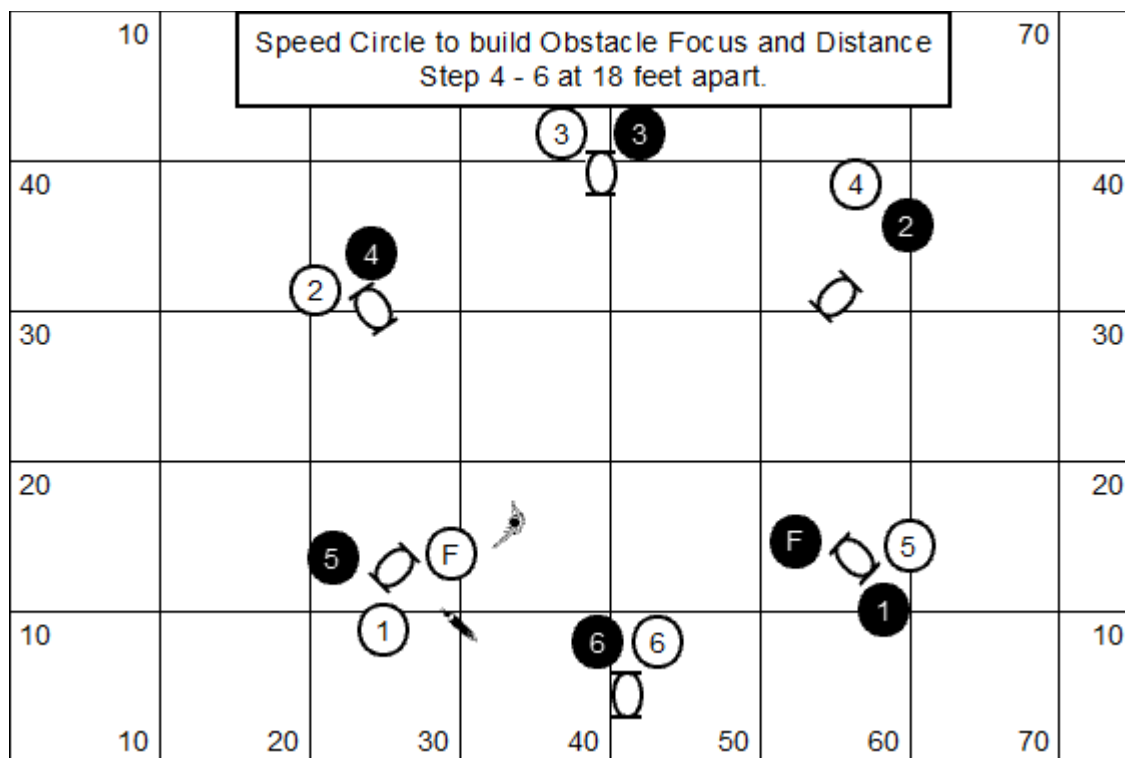
The goal is to make this as easy as possible for the dog to understand their responsibility. “Find the next thing and go to it.” Often the dog will miss one or more hoops in the sequence. It's very tempting to stop and go back to force the correct performance, but that is discouraged in our training program. If a dog misses something – it's usually because the

handler “dropped their hand”, leaned in, took a mis-step, or otherwise visually cued the dog to do something that was not intended. Don't fault the dog for following your lead! Always, always reward and build confidence. This is the core of building enough confidence in a dog so that they can “work away” and if you constantly 'correct' (go back and fix), the dog will always wonder if they are “doing it right”. Reward the dog, fix your own performance! Video recording of your training goes a long way to proving that this is correct more often than not.

We start small, work our way up to more hoops at greater distance. At the end of the series, your dog should be able to run the entire 6 Hoop Speed Circle, finishing on the same hoop they started, with the handler working from the OUTSIDE of the circle ... meaning that the dog should be running confidently at as far as 36 – 40 feet away. It typically takes our local training dogs about 6 – 12 months to reach this level of confidence. Your results may vary.







Initially we use the speed circle in a traditional manner, having the handler inside the circle and running parallel to the dog. We don't work toward having the handler work from the outside of the circle until extreme confidence has been built. For most dogs this takes a while ... typically the handler will be able to send the dog to hoops about 3 feet farther every month.

We also use this circle to work on timing and directional cues, asking the dog to “tight wrap” the inner pole of various hoops from time to time and “switch wrap” the outer pole of hoops to reverse their pattern. At first these changes of direction are handled “close up”, but it's not uncommon for handlers here to be able to get those wraps at 30 feet away with sufficient practice.

More speed circle exercises and “Whisker Drills” (including changes of direction, front & blind crosses without equipment, and distance sends) can be acquired by email from [Answers@RockSolidDogs.com](mailto:Answers@RockSolidDogs.com)

Have fun with your dog as you grow these skills!

