

# 4x4 Weave Pole Training

By Ace Russell



4x4 as used here is not an alternative to the 2x2 weave pole training method, nor is it a reference to lumber or four-wheel drive vehicles.

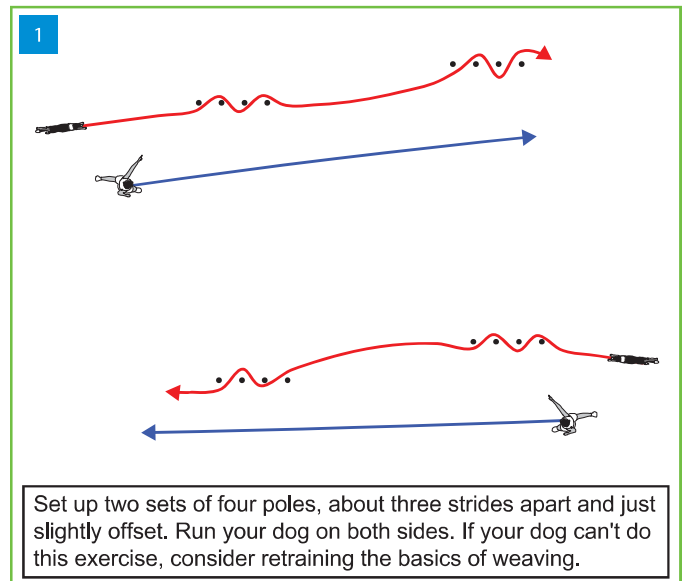
4x4 training is for intermediate dogs that have a good basic "feel" for weaving and can do 12-pole sets, but can't do them "in their sleep." For many teams it's a struggle from learning the basics to performing smoothly and flawlessly, no matter how hard the entry, no matter how different the equipment, and no matter how distracting the environment. I also recommend 4x4 training for dogs that are less than enthusiastic about weaves. Using sets of 4 poles can be very helpful to those teams that seem to be stuck somewhere in the middle stages of weave pole training.

No matter how your dog has learned the basics (2x2, channel, Weave-A-Matic, wires, etc.), you may still have a dog with one or more weave pole problems. Although your dog may have a reasonable facility with the skills that make up weaving, that doesn't necessarily yield the best and safest performance every time. Try the exercise shown in **Figure 1**. If your dog can't do this, you may want to consider retraining the basics of weaving.

The weaves are unique in two important aspects: visual and footing. No other obstacle is so difficult for fast-moving dogs to find on a course they've never seen before. And no other obstacle requires such precise movements of the dog's limbs and spine in a rhythm that continues for an incredible 22' (with 24" spacing between poles).

The two major skills required for performing the weaves well are hitting the entry and swiftly getting into the weaving motion. The lack of these skills besets intermediate teams. Go to any trial and watch the weave pole errors. Most often it's either missing the entry completely or hitting the entry in such a way that makes the weaving rhythm difficult or impossible to establish.

When a fast dog barrels into the weaves without collecting his stride, the problem is usually evident by the third pole. We all want a dog that can find every entry and wrap tightly around the



second and third pole with a great feel for the weaving rhythm. Dogs that can make that entry and critical first turn smoothly are the ones who will be more successful and safer.

Why 4-pole exercises? Four poles are the minimum required to test both entries and wrapping. With one set of 12 weaves, broken up into 4-pole sections, you can practice three times as many entry-wrap exercises. I don't recommend 3-pole exercises for this stage of training, because most competition sets are an even number of poles, and exiting on the right side can be confusing to many dogs.

So why practice with the minimum number of poles? Ask yourself if your dog really requires repeating a full set of 12 weaves at every training session. Are your dog's particular problems going to be solved only by full sets? Troublesome or slow weaves often get more troublesome or slower if you overwork 12-pole sets and demotivate your teammate.



Four-pole exercises offer some unique training advantages over full sets. With 4 poles, you can give your dog proper feedback when it's needed, which can be crucial for helping your teammate solve problems. Timing is everything. For example, if you're practicing with 12 poles, what happens when your dog flies happily towards the weaves, collects his stride, enters beautifully, makes that crucial first turn, and continues strong and fast until some error or deceleration down the line? Have you waited to say "Yes!" until the 12th pole? And now that the ending isn't perfect, what are you going to say about that perfect beginning? What if you say "Yes!" when your dog gets past pole 3? Does he think that's all you require? Does he pop out of the weaves for his reward?

When I propose 4x4 training, my students sometimes worry that it will encourage their dogs to pop out of competition sets after the fourth pole. This is not an issue if you train well to encourage proficiency with longer sets. Popping out is a separate problem, with a variety of causes unrelated to entry-wrap issues. There are many excellent resources that address popping out.

During the later stages of 4x4 training, it's useful to include longer sets at almost every training session. You can adapt the exercises in this article to offer your dog a variety of set lengths as you see fit. Use 4-pole sets for entry-wrap training and longer sets to proof your dog's progress.

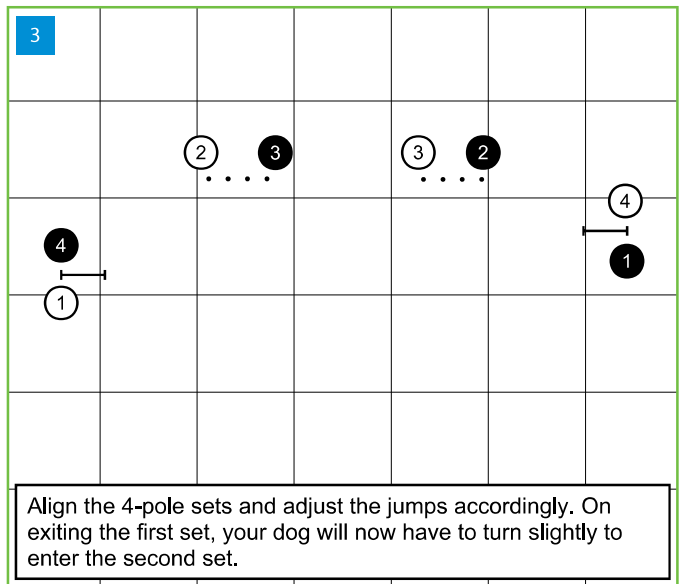
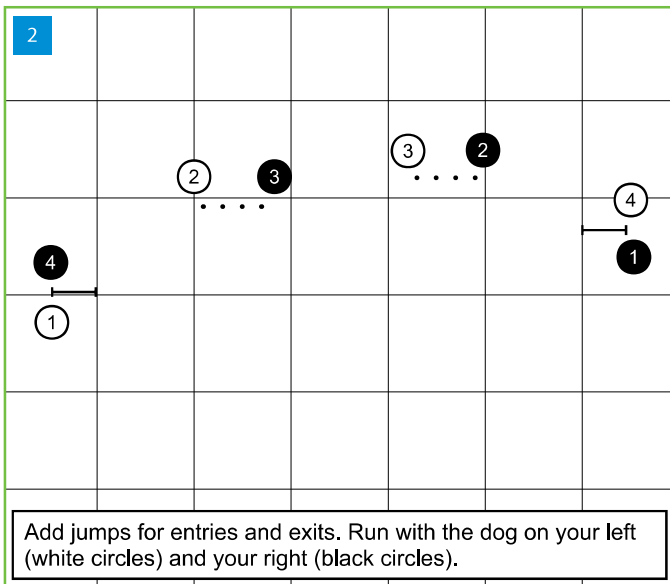
To start, help your dog happily succeed at a few of the simpler 4-pole exercises. After skills and/or enthusiasm improve with 4 poles, try exercises with 8, 12, or even 16 poles to keep raising the bar for your dog.

But don't shoot for lots of longer sets prematurely, unless your dog is raring to go. I've witnessed many dogs that are confused or that have a ho-hum attitude about weaving really light up when they only have to do 4 poles. They race to the next set of 4, and before you know it, they're hitting their entries and getting into the rhythm more smoothly every time. Longer sets are then appropriate.

Another nice aspect of 4x4 training is that it's relatively easy to move units of 4 poles to different locations on your course. Presenting your dog with a constantly changing background is especially helpful at the intermediate stage.

Just as a reminder, weave pole training sessions should be frequent but short. As a guideline, schedule a rendezvous with your dog at the weaves every other day. Don't do weaves until your dog is fully warmed up, then work on a few 4-pole exercises, take a break from the weaves, then maybe try a longer set or two. Or incorporate a regulation set into a full course and watch your dog's progress.

The exercises shown in **Figures 2 through 13** don't need to be done in numeric order. Pick and choose from among them and add your own variations to address your dog's specific needs. For example, using the basic configurations in Figures 2 through 4, you might start with the jumps in line with the poles. And you might want to add a third or even a fourth set of 4 poles before trying the other patterns. Just be sure to leave at least a couple of strides between them at first.



4

Offset the 4-pole units so that your dog has an even greater challenge finding the entry to the second set.

5

Change the angles between the sets. Start with simple variations, then increase the angles and experiment with spacing between sets.

6

Angles such as these test the entries from the jumps. Starting with easier entries, move the jumps "around the clock." Look for good entry-wrap successes that are independent of your position on the course.

7A

Call your dog over the entry jump and work in both directions. You can enter and exit on any corner. Look for a particularly confident set as an opportunity to exit, jump, and reward.

7B

If you only have 12 poles, use this version instead. In both versions, feel free to exit before you complete the full exercise. Mix it up so your dog can't guess how many 4-pole units you'll be doing.

8

Enter and exit at any corner. Tighter angles and enticing dummy jumps may make this triangle pattern much tougher than the square pattern.

9

This is the same pole configuration as in Figure 2. Tunnels test faster decision-making. Feel free to end with a tunnel, if that's a rewarding obstacle for your dog.

10

This is the same pole configuration as in Figure 3. Try various spacings between obstacles as you seek to increase the level of difficulty for your dog.

11

Don't get stuck in a rut handling the same way every time. Let your dog see you handling these sequences in a variety of different ways.

12

Stay on the inside of these sequences. Start with white circles, then do black circles, then do white squares, and finally black squares.

13

Get a couple of great runs in on the exercise in Figure 10, then give your dog a rest while you're setting this one up (with 6 poles). Add 2 more poles every few days to test that your dog delivers as fast, fault-free, and happy performances on full sets as on 4-pole units. Test entries around the clock for fully independent weaves.

Any 2x2 equipment can be used for 4-pole training. If you don't have access to four 4-pole units, simply proceed to the next exercise, which shows the alternative 12-pole version.

Let's face it, the weaves can be tough. They're tough to teach, tough for our dogs to perform consistently, and over a lifetime of weaving they're tough on our dogs' bodies. And with new course challenges appearing on the scene all the time, weaves are even tougher these days to enter correctly and execute with speed. Anything we can do to help make the weaves easier for our dogs is a good gift. 🐾

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