



Focus / Ball motivation

What is it?	Why do it?
Dog learns to negotiate obstacles for a toy that is placed or thrown at end of course. Transfers dog's focus away from food in handler's hand, to instead focus on getting to the end of the course quickly.	Useful for improving confidence in dog, increases speed as dog no longer sticking by handler, improves safety and skill in negotiating obstacles as dog learns to look ahead instead of back at handler, improves off leash control, improves distance work (allowing handler to take more shortcuts on agility courses)

NB: Each of the following steps may take several days or weeks. Do not progress through the steps until your dog is consistently performing the previous step with enthusiasm and speed.

Step 1: Introduction to Focus / Ball Motivation

What you need: A 'focus reward'

Your training will be much easier if your dog has a 'reward' that they are obsessed with. This may be food or it may be a tug toy or a ball - whatever works as a target to focus your dog's attention.

- ✎ It is easier if your focus reward is something that doesn't have to be in your hand – that way you can more easily encourage your dog to work at speed and at a distance from you.
- ✎ Food on its own is not always good to use as a focus reward as if it is thrown or placed on the ground some dogs get in the habit of sniffing the ground. If you have trouble transferring the dog's interest from food to something you can throw, a 'food tube' is a good step – use a small plastic container and place yummy smelly treats inside it. Poke a few holes in the container so the dog can smell the food.

Having a **focus reward** will be important, especially once your dog has learned basic agility skills – it is the way we motivate them to increase their speed and really enjoy their training.

What you do:

- ✎ You should save the special focus reward and only use it in training.
- ✎ I use the example of a tennis ball below as the focus reward to explain how to develop the dog's interest in it, but it could just as well be a food tube or some other object.



Step 2: Encouraging interest in the focus reward

You can easily transfer the dog's interest from their current reward (eg food, or a tug toy), to your new focus reward (eg a tennis ball). You do this by giving the old reward for interest in the new focus reward.

For example: If your dog is highly food motivated, they get the food reward for bringing you the tennis ball. If the dog will do anything for a game of tug of war, they get a game if they bring you a tennis ball. This should lead to the dog being enthusiastic about bringing you tennis balls!

In flygility the dog will need to retrieve a tennis ball, it therefore helps if a tennis ball is a focus reward for them. However, if you are not interested in flygility, you can simply substitute another item in the instructions below.

Other tips for establishing a focus reward:

- 🐾 Don't let the dog have free access to any tennis balls. Keep the tennis ball as a very special toy - up on top of a shelf or the fridge.
- 🐾 For a dog with little interest in the tennis ball, you can teach them to show interest in the same way you taught target training – reward for interest in the ball.
- 🐾 Tease the dog with the ball - take the tennis ball out and show it to the dog, making a huge fuss of how wonderful the ball is, but withholding it from the dog.
- 🐾 Your voice and attitude towards the tennis ball will teach the dog that it is a special treat.
- 🐾 Use ball chasing only as a special reward for very short training sessions.
- 🐾 Associate tennis balls with special good events, eg meal-times and car trips - by getting the dog to fetch the tennis ball before each meal or car trip.

Putting it together

When you have completed some of the other modules you will be able to combine this interest in tennis balls with the flyball box.