



Suggested Equipment

To get you started I have provided you with a basic kit containing articles and flags for laying a short track. You will also need to gather a few other items.

- Long line- I prefer Biothane as it is water and odor resistant, easy to clean, retains its shape and is very lightweight. To be very specific, if I have a choice I like the round Biothane (sometimes referred to as beta covered rope or biothane rope). The length of the line can be shorter (20' is acceptable) when you first start training, but eventually you are going to want to get comfortable with handling a 40' line. Choose hardware that is stainless steel or brass to avoid rust. NO FLEXI-LEADS AT ANY TIME! If your dog is a strong puller you might want to wear light gloves when tracking to protect your hands from blisters.
- Harness- The harness serves several purposes. It takes the pressure off of the dog's neck as they lean forward to follow the track. It also serves as a cue to the dog about what they are about to do. I use a specific harness for tracking as I have another type for scent work and another type for obedience. The AKC regulations state "the harness will be constructed of straps of plain pliable material and will be designed so that there is minimal restriction of the dog's movement." This means that harnesses advertised as "no pull" should not be used. I use a washable canvas harness as often it gets wet and muddy from the field. They also make biothane harnesses as well which are quite lovely. I add ID tags to the harness as I remove their collar when tracking and if there is an equipment malfunction such as a leash breaking I want a way for someone to contact me if they find my dog.
 - Link to harness type: <https://a.co/d/049v0HX2>

FROM THE AKC REGULATIONS: Section 14. Leash, Harness, and Distance Between Handler and Dog. The leash will be between twenty (20) and forty (40) feet in length. The leash will be attached to the dog's harness while tracking. The dog must wear a harness while tracking. The harness will be constructed of pliable material and will be designed so that there is minimum restriction of the dog's movement. An inconspicuous marking is permitted on the harness to identify the dog in case of loss. If a collar is worn by the dog while tracking, the collar must meet the requirements of Chapter 2, Section 17 (Collars), of the Obedience Regulations. However, required licenses or rabies tags may be attached to the collar. The leash must show on top of the harness while tracking, and it must not be deliberately run through the underside of the dog, controlling or restricting the dog's movement. The handler will follow the dog at a distance of no less than twenty (20) feet, except during the TDU or VST test where the handler may follow the dog at a distance of no less than ten (10) feet.

- Articles- when it comes to choosing tracking articles you've got a lot of variety to choose from. Socks, gloves, wallets, sponges, key chains, carpet squares, leather squares, pieces of clothing, bandanas, plastic lids, etc. There really is a tremendous amount of variety when it comes to articles. Make sure they are non-toxic, not something small enough to be ingested easily, sturdy enough to withstand damp grass and manipulation by the dog in case they pick it up, and not so large it impedes your track. Something about the size of your hand. I keep a variety in my car with my tracking flags and rotate them as needed.
- Tracking flags- the flags used in tracking are just wire with a plastic square mounted on the top part. You see them everywhere utilities are marked and are available for purchase from hardware stores or Amazon. Please do not stop along a road and pick up flags that have been placed by a utility company!
 - Link to flags: <https://a.co/d/0g5jU7Fo>
- Tracking treats- the treats I use for laying a track are high value treats like hot dogs, cheese, and chicken. I also keep some FreshPet dog food in the fridge when I don't have time to cut up treats as it is already packaged in small balls and is something my dogs love.
 - Keep in mind when the weather is warmer the food laid in tracks will attract bugs, especially ants. Many dogs will not eat a treat covered in bugs. If you live in an area where there are fire ants please make sure to

avoid their nests when laying your track. Freezing your food prior to track laying also makes it less enticing for bugs, as well as tracking in the early morning when it is cooler.

- Vehicle set up- you are going to need a crate in your car if you plan to track in warm weather to avoid overheating your dog. Your dog will have to wait in the car while you lay track so keeping them contained is going to have to be part of your training plan. If your dog is not crate trained it is advisable to start playing crate games with them to make the crate fun and safe. A dog running loose when people are laying tracks ruins the track itself, leaves your dog vulnerable to hazards, and if other dogs are working a track you risk a dog fight as food is involved.
- Tug toy- I tug with my pups after they finish an exercise. It's something they find very rewarding, it releases dopamine, and it signals the track is complete.
- I also keep a few other items in the car all the time
 - Rechargeable crate fan
 - Water dish and water
 - Brush/comb to remove burs
 - Microfiber towel to rub the dog down with and pick up burs and ticks
 - Snacks for myself and my dog
 - Training log to record sessions
 - First aid kit with supplies for humans and pups
 - Bug spray and sunscreen
 - Copy of all my dogs current vet records
 - Flashlight
 - Small tupperware container with water and towel to wash my dogs feet when needed

Equipment You DON'T Want To Use For Tracking

You should NOT ever track with a choke chain, martingale, pinch/prong collar, shock collar, head halter, hands-free leash, flexi or no-pull harness. These are aversive and restrictive and may keep your dog from tracking properly.

Tracking requires a bit of pulling forward. It requires them to lean forward, look down, and focus on what is in front of them. If the gear they are wearing inhibits or stops that then the dog will never reach their full potential.

As I mentioned earlier, I use a specific harness for tracking with my dogs. It is not anything special, as there are very expensive leather tracking harnesses out there, but it is structured differently enough that my dog knows that harness means we are going to track. That harness is only worn when we are tracking. It goes on when they exit the crate and comes off before going back in.

Where I clip the line on the harness also communicates what we are doing at the moment. When they exit the crate the line is clipped on the front of the chest. When we approach the scent pad I stop and clip it on the back D-ring. That is usually when my dogs get excited because the entire process up to that moment has told them it's time.

If you have a dog with a shorter coat be aware of the equipment coming in contact with the dog. Metal on any harness, typically the D-ring and the leash clip, are the same temperature as the environment. If it is very cold out that metal ring will be very cold on the dog. Consider putting a coat or sweater on your short coated dog if you are going to track in cold weather (and you should!). If the dog finds the equipment uncomfortable, such as a freezing cold clip on their back, they will not want to wear the harness and will likely view the whole exercise as negative.

For dogs of all coats, sizes, abilities, and ages I do recommend that you get your dog comfortable wearing some type of dog boot or shoe. In extreme temperatures, hot or cold, their feet should be protected. And if your tracking interest gravitates towards SAR or variable surface tracking you will need to protect those pups feet against rubble, sharp debris, and hot pavement.