



Exterior scent work searches involve dogs searching for target odors in an outdoor environment, like a park or building exterior. This can be challenging due to wind, weather, and natural distractions. Training with your pup involves gradually increasing difficulty, practicing in various conditions, and teaching the dog to work through distractions like other animals, food, and people.

Young and inexperienced dogs will often struggle with an exterior search because of all the added variables they have to sort through. Odors can carry for miles with the right wind, animals are often present or have moved through the area leaving lingering odor which can be exciting or frightening for a particular dog. Natural items like sticks, pine cones, blowing garbage, rocks, and animal waste can often overcome the dogs training and derail your search, no matter how perfectly planned.

The search area will be an outdoor space like a parking lot, pathway, courtyard, picnic area, a park, or around a building. The hide can be in, on, under, or suspended from various objects or natural elements like grass or trees. Depending on your dogs level of training, venue you model your training after, or the availability of scent

The degree of difficulty depends on the class/venue and can be affected by factors such as weather, terrain, and distractions. Unlike interior searches, exterior searches you will have to overcome distractions in many forms, weather that can change quickly, and variable ground surfaces.

Let's look at the basic challenges that you will eventually have to train through at some point if you practice exteriors enough.

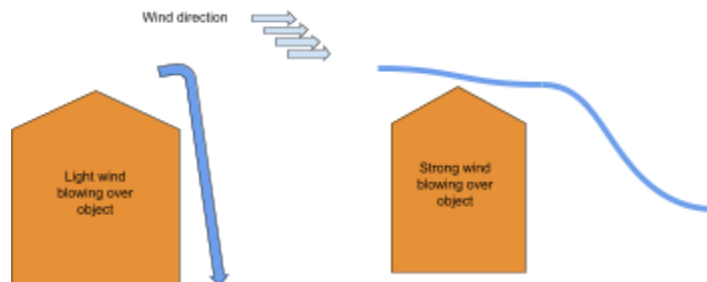
Wind & Weather

Air movement is very fluid and can change quickly. You may plan a search based on current wind movement, but wind is tricky. It lessens and gains in intensity frequently, maybe you might not really be able to perceive the change, however those little fluctuations will have an effect on the availability and location of odor. Factor in humidity, weather patterns, and weather events. You have an environment that can change from one moment to the next, coupled with the fact that odors can carry for miles with the right wind conditions.

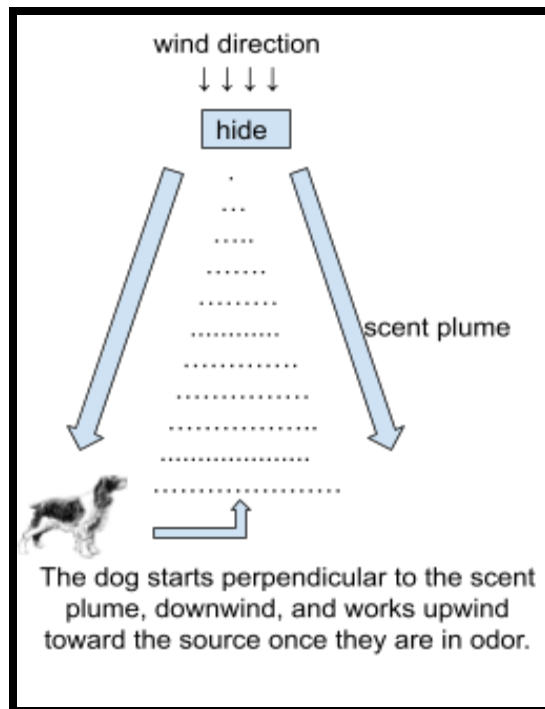
It sounds daunting to be sure, however knowing how to set up your searches, doing a bit of advanced weather detective work, and most importantly, practicing in variable conditions will make you and your dog a strong team. Odor presents differently in cold, heat, rain, and snow. Practice in all those conditions to help your dog excel at exterior searches with any change they might encounter.

There are few things you can do ahead of your search to ensure you've given your dog the best chance for success.

- Knowing the general direction of the wind using an app, handheld device, tossing powder or leaf litter will help you plan but you should always factor in shifts in the wind's speed and direction when searching. Remember if you are using smoke to determine wind direction and speed it HAS ODOR!
- A "true" wind (when the weather report indicates a specific predominant direction) is a good starting point, but remember wind swirls in smaller areas and bounces off and gets trapped on objects in the environment.



- To give your dog an advantage and achieve search success, work your way downwind of the hide so your dog can track the scent to the source. Utilizing a point-to-point strategy, where the dog starts perpendicular to the downwind scent, is effective.
- Practice the point-to-point exercise as outlined below
 - The dog starts at a point downwind of the hide and moves along a line that runs perpendicular to the hide
 - As the dog moves across the search area, it eventually crosses into the scent plume carried by the wind
 - Once the dog is in odor, they will learn to turn and work upwind towards concentration of scent until they reach the hide
 - This keeps your dog working in odor and teaches them to move back into the plume when they walk out of it, creating a grid as they work across the wind
 - This drill also helps handlers see when their dog moves into odor by the change in body language and intensity
 - This drill also help the handler identify areas the dog still needs to search and avoids missing large spots in the search area



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Distractions

Exterior searches have a unique set of challenges that interior searches do not. While interiors have an overlap with the list, dogs become more accustomed to them as we began our scent journey indoors and we do have greater control over the distractions the dog will encounter indoors than outdoors. The weather, humidity, exposure to animals and their waste, leaves, pine cones, and competing odors carried on the wind are a few of the distractions we generally don't have to train for when working indoors. It is a much more stable environment overall.

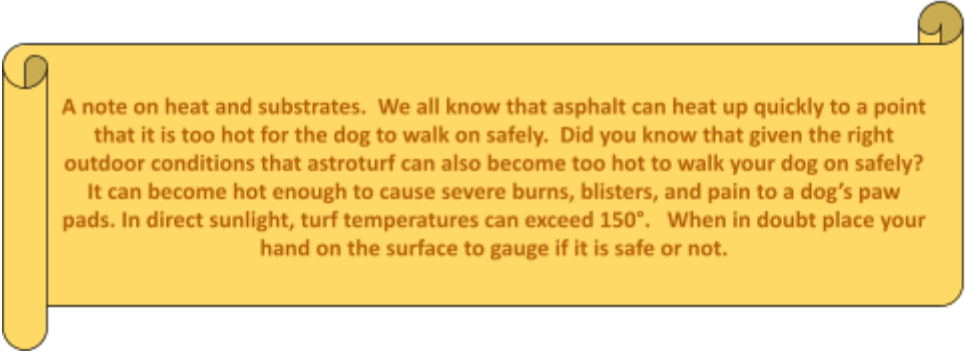
When we step outside to set up a search, you scan the search area for major distractions, remove or

mask as many as you think you need to for your dog's current ability to focus in their presence and plot our hides. We can chase away a squirrel in the search area but we cannot keep him from returning and we are not going to chase away his lingering odor.

Distractions are a part of life. Some dogs struggle with impulse control so as a result, they will struggle with focus during the search. Does that mean if you have a young, energetic pup that has an attention span that rivals a goldfish should you give up on exteriors? Absolutely not! What it means is you need to expose them to distractions in all your training exercises, but start small and build bigger.

Keep in mind that some animal odors can do more than distract, they can trigger a strong prey drive response, or even worse, a fear response in your dog. Say you also work your dog in barn hunt on rats, or hunt birds or rabbits with your spaniel, that has its own reward history and may be hard to get then to switch from one to the other in the moment.

- Begin with easy hides so they can build confidence then move them to more challenging searches as they build skills
- Train in different types of exterior spaces and make sure to frequently incorporate them into your weekly practice sessions
- Take your dog out in different weather conditions (rain, snow, heat, and wind) to get them used to how odor behaves in each changing condition
 - Remember oils all different evaporation points
 - Anise seed oil will crystalize in cooler temperatures- that includes the car as well if you are driving in the colder months or using the AC
- Animal scents are usually found in exterior searches. If you need to redirect your dog to get them back on task don't use "no" or "leave it" but use your body language to move them with you back into the search area
 - I cue "get to work" with my dogs when they are distracted by a competing odor as I walk in the direction I want them to go
- Searches occur on grass, concrete, or dirt, often near structures, landscaping, or in, on, or under, objects, with potential distractions like wildlife or noises.
- Distractions: High-scent areas like parks can trigger prey drive; ensure the dog is focused on the target odor, not environmental, natural smells.
- While we don't give it much thought as humans, the surface of the search area can also distract or have a negative effect on your dog. Asphalt, concrete, stone, mulch, sand, grass, dirt, pavers, and artificial turf all absorb odors to an extent. Make sure to practice on variable surfaces to get your dog used to a range of surfaces.

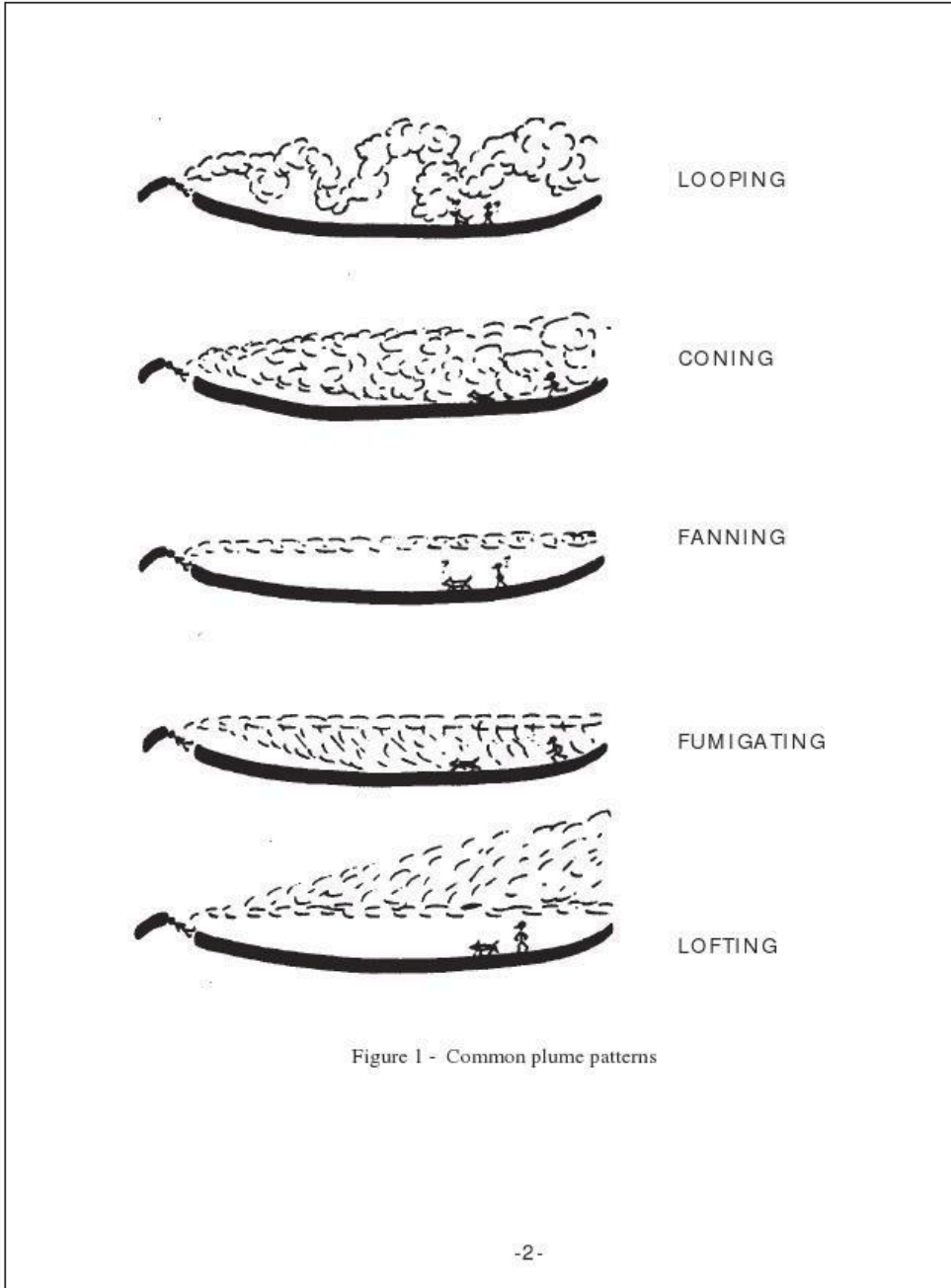


A note on heat and substrates. We all know that asphalt can heat up quickly to a point that it is too hot for the dog to walk on safely. Did you know that given the right outdoor conditions that astroturf can also become too hot to walk your dog on safely? It can become hot enough to cause severe burns, blisters, and pain to a dog's paw pads. In direct sunlight, turf temperatures can exceed 150°. When in doubt place your hand on the surface to gauge if it is safe or not.

Handler Hints for Success

While your dog is doing the heavy lifting, you have a role to play too. Make sure that you scan the search area for potential dangers, that you are starting with a hydrated dog, and you've formulated a plan for the search area that will set your dog up for success.

- If possible, before a search, do a warm-up search to help your dog get into the right mindset. Just a simple box search will wake up their brain and put them in a training frame of mind.
- ROUTINE, ROUTINE, ROUTINE! Dogs love patterns and predictability, use that to your advantage.
- End training while your dog is still wanting more and if the dog struggles or disengages, end the session and pick it up later with an easy problem.
- Allow the dog to work independently, interrupting only to redirect from distractions or to manage the search area
- Avoid pulling the dog off scent or restricting their movement by shortening the leash
- Establish a pre-search routine (potty, harness up, do focus exercises) to get them in a working state of mind
 - Get your dog used to going potty on cue so you avoid them eliminating in the search area (in a trial it is a NQ and in class it's just rude :)
- Get comfortable with your dog's body language when they are working odor and at odor. In a new environment your dog may give you all the pre-alert signs but not a trained final response. Don't get hung up on formality, if the dog is showing you all the signs, take it.
- If your dog struggles in the search area, change directions and let them approach an area from a new angle. This gives them the chance to pick up odor that they may have missed from the other direction.
- In the early stages of training exteriors recognize and reward re-finds!
- If your dog is used to training in a quiet area then make sure they can search in areas that are busier and louder. Utilize recordings and apps to simulate noises such as traffic, babies, airplanes, other dogs barking, horns, and music.
- Don't rush over the start line. Give your dog a minute to take it all in and start with focus.
- Practice your leash handling skills without your dog. Clip it to something and practice taking in line and letting it out.



Illustrations from Hatch Graham's article, "Convection Turbulence and the Airscenting Dog" show how scent moves away from a source under different weather conditions.