



## Articles:

Indicating articles probably causes more anxiety in handlers than anything else in tracking.

Think about it from your dog's point of view. He is happily following the track, getting closer to that lovely tracklayer who will tell him how clever he is and give him a nice treat. Then, suddenly, THE SOCK appears, and he is supposed to STOP tracking and show his handler where it is! Maybe even sit down or drop, when all he wants to do is keep on tracking. Small wonder that for many high-drive dogs, this causes problems!

### *Some suggestions:*

1. Have a very clear picture of what you want your dog to do.

The rules for Trials say that the dog must indicate the article by standing, sitting, downing, retrieving or at least pausing.

For most dogs, stopping and standing beside the article is what you should aim for. If your dog *chooses* to show one of the other behaviours, treat it as a bonus and encourage it.

2. Mostly we use socks as articles because they are easily available and convenient to carry, but occasionally throw in something else – a beanie, a small fluffy toy, a small rubber toy, a phone case, some old (no longer used) keys etc.

In training, the position of an article should always be indicated, either by the traditional crossed flags or (my preference) a flag with a different coloured tape from the rest of the track flags. The article should be on the ground (not on a log or in a bush), close to the article flag but not directly beside it.

3. If your dog is on track as he should be (in training, never allow him to drift) he will sniff at this “thing” that the silly tracklayer has carelessly dropped. To begin with, he may not stop. **REWARD THE SNIFF.** Then, as his experience grows, demand more before you reward – a brief pause, then a complete stop and finally, a longer stop or stand beside the article.

4. **Rewards:** When your dog “finds” an article it is your cue to go WAY OVER THE TOP. Really make an enormous fuss. He is the best dog that ever walked so let him know that. Then a more tangible reward (in training, not Trials) such as a few small pieces of high value food, given one at a time, or a brief game with his favourite toy. In a Trial, make a big fuss if he finds an article, even if it is not one of the Track articles.

Pick up the article and put it in your pocket. After all, your dog has gone to the trouble of finding it so accept the gift. (If you really don't want to carry it, surreptitiously drop it further along the track.)

5. **Resume the track.** Give your dog a drink then treat it as a new start. Bring your dog to you, say “Go find” or whatever command you use at the start and get going again.

Treat the track as a succession of shorter “find the sock” tracks.

Note: Your dog does not need to be re-scented. Finding the article has done that.



Remember: If your dog was on track before he found the article, you know the direction of the track after the article. It helps to allow the lead to trail behind you and to move along the lead to reward your dog, so that you know where the track was and don't become disoriented.

*Notes:*

1. Don't **demand** that your dog sit or drop at an article.

Imagine you are a dog. You have found an article and you think that you are pretty damn clever. Then the boss rushes up to you yelling "sit **sit SIT**". The whole process of finding an article has turned into a very unpleasant experience and you will begin to want to avoid it – by ignoring the article!

If your dog does offer another behaviour, such as bringing the article to you, reward that AS WELL but your most important reward must be for showing you the article.

2. This is a personal preference. Don't put treats in the articles to "help" the dog find them. I want to teach my dogs to follow the indicated scent, not go looking for treats. All rewards come from me. If necessary in the beginning, slow the dog with increased pressure on the lead when you are close to an article. Then, if you need to, bring the dog to a stop beside the article and praise like mad because he "found" it. Dogs aren't stupid and he will soon work out what brings the treats.
3. It is a good idea to work an occasional "article track". This is a series of articles (5 to 10 of them) dropped at about 20 metres apart in a straight line or a gentle curve and flagged. It gives a good opportunity to practise both finding an article and rewarding the find.