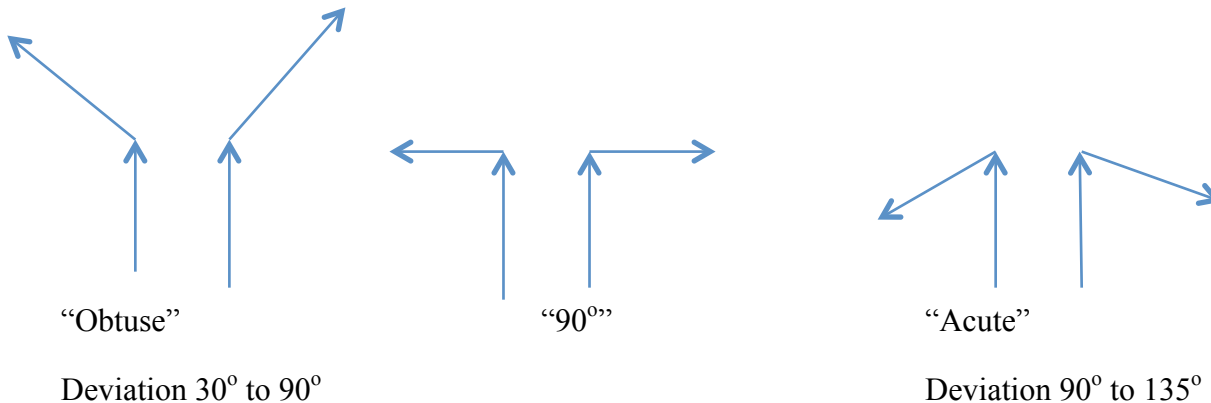


## Changing Direction – Corners

In real life, a lost person would wander all over the place but in Tracking, we limit the changes of direction to three distinct types of corners.

### Corners



“obtuse” and “90°” angled corners may be used in all tracks (including Tracks 1, 2 & 3), “acute” angled corners may be used only in Tracks 6, 7 & 8.

### How do I know when I’m at a corner?

There are three main ways that dogs behave at a corner:

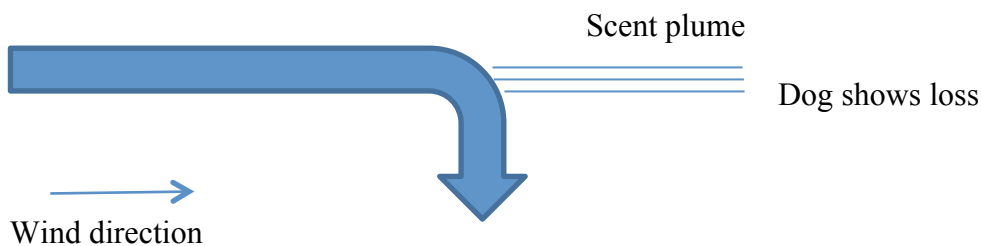
- 1) Goes straight around as if on rails. The problem here is that the handler tends not to believe their luck and refuses to follow.
- 2) Overshoots, shows loss and often comes back towards the handler. These dogs are usually fast, confident workers.
- 3) Is unsure and tends to look for guidance from the handler.

Remember: your dog may show all three behaviours in the one track.

*So – what do I do?*

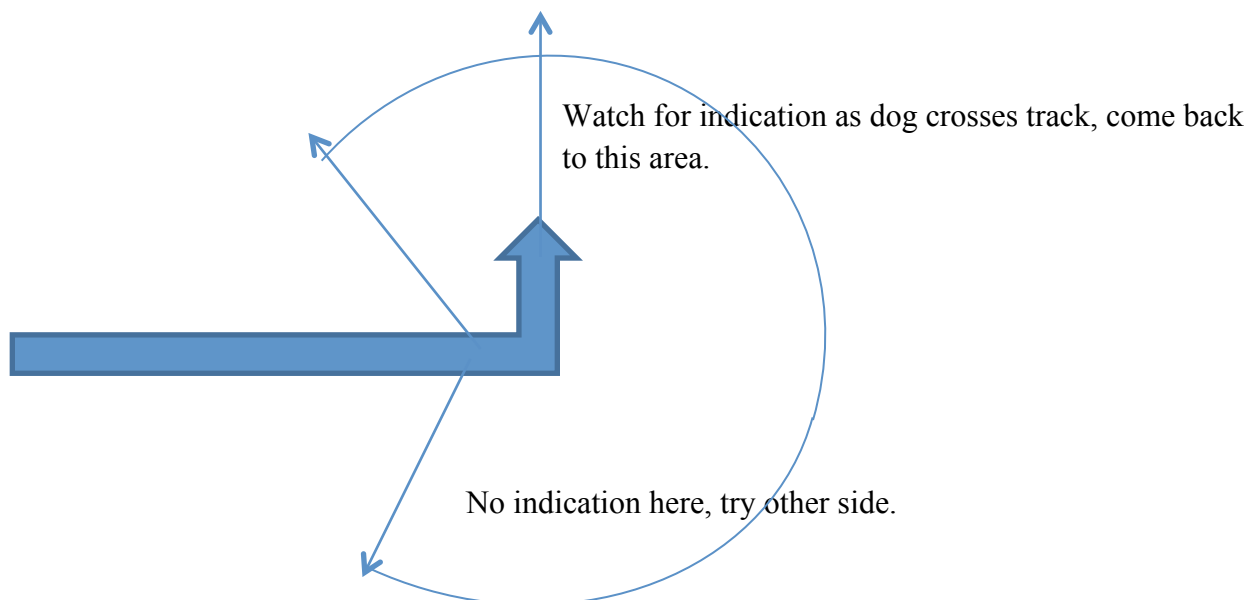
**Type 1.** If your dog does this and is still tracking (remember **your** dog’s tracking posture), take a few steps after him and “question” your dog. This means gently increasing pressure on the lead but not enough to make him stop. If he is right (and a confident tracker) he will keep going and you follow. If he is not right he will probably stop and show loss. This is a skill you need to practise in training so that you know the amount of pressure to apply. If he shows loss, you will need to back up and treat it like a Type 2 situation. However, be aware that he may have been right the first time and either wasn’t very confident or you applied too much pressure when you questioned him.

**Type 2.** Your dog may show loss by raising his head and/ or stopping. (In training, let your dog overshoot corners so that you know how he behaves. Even though a corner is flagged, resist the temptation to slow your dog as you come up to the corner flags. You need to know how far he is likely to overshoot and what signals he gives. *Overshooting* is probably the commonest behaviour. It seems to result from two main causes: (a) from dogs that work very quickly, because they tend to go past the corner before they realise that the scent has disappeared and/or (b) the wind is blowing from behind the dog on that leg. This creates a “plume” of scent that can extend up to 30 metres or more past the corner, especially if the leg is along a sand track. When this happens, many dogs will follow the plume to its end before showing loss.



*As a handler, what do you do?* In both of the above cases, you will need to “back up”. This means walking backwards until you are at a point where you could see that your dog was tracking. Many experienced handlers allow their tracking lead to trail on the ground behind them to act as a guide to where they came from. When you reach a place where the dog was tracking, begin to cast him around. This means moving him fairly slowly from side to side in a circular motion using almost the full length of the lead (you will need to do a little dance as well). Look for a signal that your dog is crossing the track. It may be a bob of the head, a turn of the head or even just a flick of the ears but it is a signal to you to bring your dog back to that area to keep looking. If your dog begins to go in a particular direction take a few steps after him and see if he commits to that direction. If he again shows loss, back up and cast him around some more. (If he indicates there is no track on the right, try casting him on the left and vice versa. Keep in mind that you may not be at a corner at all and the track may go straight ahead).

If you are still having no success, back up further and try again. Don’t worry if the judge and steward are behind you – they will get out of your way!





**Type 3.** Any dog can become unsure on a track – due to changed terrain (such as pigface, heavy sand or a burned area) or just a lapse in concentration. Dogs who are unsure often show loss by stopping but they may keep going with a changed body posture as if they hope the scent will re-appear! They *may* give a slight turn of the head when they pass the corner. Know what your dog looks like when he is on track! If there is a change, question gently. If he keeps going, follow – he may just have been having a rest. If he stops, back up and cast. There may not be a strong indication, so be prepared to follow and look for either loss or commitment to the track.

### ***TIPS FOR WORKING CORNERS***

1. Praise your dog for *showing loss* and for searching for the corner, in training as well as in a trial.
2. In training, never slow down as you come to a corner, otherwise your dog will believe that you know where the (unflagged) corner is and will wait for your cue. Similarly, do not indicate the direction of the turn to your dog by pointing or turning to face along it. *In more advanced training* it is a good idea to indicate the presence of a corner but not its direction (maybe two upright flags) and make the actual turn up to 10 metres past the flags. Dogs do learn to read flags! Your track-layer, who should be following up, can tell you if you are correct.
3. If your dog is having real trouble finding the track and is starting to become frantic, anxious or distressed, call him in to you, give him a drink, some soothing words and a gentle cuddle so that he is calmed and re-assured, then cast him around. On most occasions he will find the track almost immediately.
4. There is no need to re-scent your dog – he knows what he is looking for, he just can't find it.
5. If you find that in training, you are following flags rather than watching your dog, it is a good idea to wear a baseball cap pulled low over your eyes so that you can't easily see the flags.
6. Sand-tracks have special difficulties. The air scent tends to be confined to the sand-track, especially if it is in a dip as most of them are. If the wind is blowing along the direction of the track, a scent plume can form at a turn. Also, if the track turns out of the sand-track and up a small bank, the bank will tend to confine the air scent to the sand-track with only a small amount of scent going up the bank and out. If your dog shows loss in a sand-track, any turn must be up and out, so encourage him to cast along the top of the bank.
7. Trust your dog. At worst, you will be wrong, but the sun will still rise tomorrow and your dog will still love you!