

WEST AUSTRALIAN WORKING SHEEP DOG ASSOCIATION
RULES AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON YARD & UTILITY TRIALS
Updated May 2026

1. DEFINITIONS.

- 1) **YARD DOG TRIAL:** A competition in which a dog and its handler must negotiate sheep through a predetermined course confined within a permanent or temporary sheep yard, within a specified time. Eighteen or more sheep should be used if possible.
- 2) **UTILITY TRIAL:** A competition in which a dog and its handler must negotiate sheep through both the yard and field courses, within a specified time.
- 3) **ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:** The people responsible for conducting the competition.
- 4) **TRIAL COMMITTEE:** Three people as nominated on the program to settle any disputes and/or clarify any ruling.
- 5) **HANDLER:** Financial member of an affiliated club who has nominated to work a dog.
- 6) **INTERSTATE COMPETITOR:** Any member who is a financial member of a recognized state association affiliated with the Australian Sheep Dog Workers Inc. working in a Western Australia official trial will be recognized as a fully capitated member of the WAWSDA.
- 7) **Encourage workers** must be accompanied by an experienced worker.
- 8) **FARMERS/ENCOURAGE CLASS:** When you first start trialing you are permitted five encourage runs. For Yard and Utility trials, encourage workers may enter encourage and novice events whilst they are still in the encourage class, a total of ten runs. They can choose to enter yard only or utility only or a combination of both, making a total of five. If an encourage worker enters an open event, they will lose their encourage status. Encourage workers are also permitted to run open dogs in their 10 encourage/novice event. Once the encourage status is completed, they can enter as many events as they like, but if they have an open dog, it will be relegated back to the open class only. If the worker wins a novice event, they will lose their encourage status.
- 9) **NOVICE YARD DOG:** One that has not won a novice yard trial, can enter in an improver yard trial only if registered with WAWSDA. (Ref 9)
- 10) **NOVICE UTILITY DOG:** One that has not won a novice utility, can enter open utility.
- 11) **IMPROVER YARD DOG:** Has won a novice yard trial, can enter Improver/Open yard trial. Dog must be registered with WAWSDA.
- 12) **OPEN DOG:** Must be registered with WAWSDA.

2. TRIAL RULES.

- 1) Prior to the start of the competition a draw must be conducted to determine the order of work. Where a worker has more than one entry in a class, entries will be distributed as uniformly as possible throughout that class. The first and second runs in any class will be randomly selected from all dogs in that class. Any dog entered in a utility trial is automatically eligible for the yard section, unless the dog has previously won a yard trial. Any dog competing in an open trial must be entered with its full name and registration number.
- 2) Secretary of the club running the trial to keep a set of rules in the office.
- 3) All handlers must be issued with a copy of the draw, or a copy must be displayed in a prominent position at the trial. A public address system should be employed wherever possible to keep handlers and spectators informed.
- 4) Judges, the organizing club is to consult with the president of the Yard and Utility committee, as the president has the record of the people that have judged at previous trial. When using two judges the scores will be combined and averaged. Judges will address all competitors prior to the commencement of the trial. Before the trial, judges should observe sheep going through the course before addressing the competitors. The judge(s) will be in command of the competition from the time the handler, with dog released, enters the course.
- 5) The number of sheep used in the field section will depend on availability.
- 6) All sheep will be inspected for any physical defects or injuries prior to being worked. Any injured, unhealthy or unsuitable sheep must not be worked (e.g., wool blind).
- 7) The organizing committee will set a maximum time in which the course must be completed, before the competition commences. The composition of the course will influence the time allowed; it is recommended the course be constructed to allow it to be comfortably completed within that time. A bell or similar device shall signify the start and end of each run.
- 8) All competitions are to be run over a course determined by the organizing committee. Competition courses should include at least four of the following:

Gather of sheep.

Draft

Classing race.

Trailer, truck or elevated platform.

Put the sheep away.

Any other obstacle e.g. Tarwonga Trap, Maltese cross.

When erecting the yards, the organizing committee must ensure there are no sharp edges, protrusions or objects that may be hazardous or likely to cause injury to the sheep, dogs or handlers. Where the yards are constructed from panels or portable yards, the organizing committee must ensure that they are securely fixed to prevent any movement when the sheep apply pressure.

9) In competition courses incorporating a drenching race or other confined area into which all the sheep must be forced, the number of sheep to be worked shall be that number which allows each sheep to stand comfortably. The organizing committee shall determine this number in consultation with the judge(s). Section points must be allocated to each section according to its degree of difficulty.

10) Points in "Dog of the Year" will be allocated to a "Dog and Handler" team.

3. JUDGING SYSTEMS: YARD TRIAL OR YARD SECTION

- 1) No abuse, physical or verbal to other workers, judges, dogs or sheep. Penalized at the judge's discretion
- 2) The yard section will commence once the judge starts the trial (or when the sheep are within the yards in a utility trial).
- 3) Handlers entered in a combined yard & utility trial and who lose sheep or retire in the first part of the field section, are still eligible for a yard run.
- 4) If personal gates are provided in a yard course, they must be used.
- 5) No handling of the dog. Penalty Disqualification.
- 6) Dogs causing sheep to go down through over-working will be penalized at the judge's discretion.
- 7) Running by handlers should not be allowed in yard & utility trial. Penalized at the judge's discretion.
- 8) Dogs shall not be penalized for nipping sheep low down on the hock or on the topknot, providing they do so in the right places at the right time, and without being too severe.
- 9) Dogs biting excessively and/or working the sheep in an unduly rough manner may be disqualified or penalized between two and five points, at the judge's discretion.
- 10) Opening of gates and mixing of sheep is to be done in the prescribed sequence. Penalty five points.
- 11) Each gate incorrectly left open. Penalty five points.
- 12) If the dog makes no valid attempt to move the sheep within a section, all points for that section are lost.
- 13) Dog turning sheep wrong way due to over heading. Penalty one point each time.
- 14) Dog leaving the yard or race and needing to be called back. Penalty two points each time.
- 15) Any movement by worker to move sheep. Penalty two points.
- 16) Dog jumping in wrong pen. Penalty one point.
- 17) Sheep not clear of gates before closing. Penalty four points.
- 18) In the drenching race, five sheep (the first two and last three) may be marked with raddle (subject to the owner's consent).
- 19) Points shall be deducted at judge's discretion for sheep breaking back (one point per panel, being harder on the dog that makes little attempt to cover). Dogs causing sheep to hit fences or gates. Penalty two to five points or disqualification.
- 20) If necessary, for opening, gates must be cleared of sheep by dog. Penalty four points.
- 21) Turn tail, not under pressure. Penalty two points.
- 22) Turn tail, under pressure. Penalty one point.
- 23) In the drafting phase, handlers may use their body to avoid jamming sheep's head. Mis-drafted sheep. Penalty two points each sheep.
- 24) If no forward progress is made, points should be deducted for ineffective work. Penalty one point. Once the dog has lost all points for a section, the handler will be told to assist the dog to clear that section.
- 25) Prior to competing, handlers may apply to the trial committee to have an able-bodied person assist with any physically demanding task likely to be encountered. The assistant must be selected by the trial committee and will assist at the direction of the handler. The handler will be penalized if the assistant infringes any rules.
- 26) Judges to nominate in their opening address in which yards dogs may not cross, penalty five points AND which areas are "off course" and which areas result in "lost sheep".
- 27) In the event of a run being interfered with e.g., gates not closed or dogs or sheep straying onto the course, the judge may order a rerun.

- 28) In the event of a sheep escaping but not from the entire course, the clock is stopped while the situation is rectified. Judges to point the “off designated course” at their discretion. If the situation cannot be remedied in approximately two minutes, the trial will be terminated.
- 29) Where the yard score is taken from a combined Yard and Utility event. If the competitor has a sheep escape from the yard section, their yard score will not be eligible for the yard competition but will be eligible for a utility score, once sheep has been put back on course.
- 30) Dogs may wear a muzzle. Penalty five points.

4. FIELD SECTION.

- 1) No abuse, physical or verbal to other workers, judges, dogs or sheep. Penalized at the judge’s discretion
- 2) Points are allocated to each field section. The cast, draw and movement of sheep into the yards will be one section. When all points have been lost in any one section, the handler will be asked to move on to the next, until the course is completed, or time expires.
- 3) Handler may not leave the casting peg until sheep have entered the circle. Penalty section points.
- 4) Dog leaving prior to bell and not able to be recalled. Penalty disqualification.
- 5) Every worker must follow the set course. In the case of all points lost on the cast, lift and draw, the worker must go through the circle before continuing the course in the correct order.
- 6) Redirection during the cast. Penalty one point each redirection.
- 7) Crossing.
 - a) One cross on the cast. Penalty fifteen points. Second cross, loss of all points for that section.
 - b) At any time after the cast, crossing in the field section. Loss of all points for that section.
- 8) Stopping short or over running on the cast, thereby forcing the sheep offline. Penalty one point and then one point for every ten meters further offline.
- 9) Every ten meters the sheep go beyond, wide of or back from the circle, prior to entering the circle. Penalty one point.
- 10) Sheep must be kept within ten meters each side of the handler for the remainder of the field section. Penalty one point and another for every ten meters further.
- 11) Stop walking between obstacles in the field section. Penalty Disqualification.
- 12) Trap.**

The trap is judged in two sections, making a total of fifteen points. Ten points for entering the trap, and five for releasing the sheep and shutting the gate.

If the sheep exit the pen whilst the handler is walking to the release gate, they may attempt to re-pen them whilst walking at normal pace to the release gate. If not, successful they lose the five points.
- 10) **Pen.**
 - (a) Handler not standing in the circle. Penalty all pen points.
 - (b) Any sheep leaving the pen after the worker leaves the circle and returns immediately, before the worker closes the gate. Penalty one point. Any sheep escaping completely after the worker leaves the circle will result in the loss of all pen points and termination of the trial.

5. FINALS.

- 1) The finalists will be the highest scoring dogs in the first run. Number in the final to be determined by the trial committee.
- 2) If a number of dogs are tied on the lowest score eligible for the final, all will go into the final.
- 3) The highest aggregate score will be the winner.
- 4) In the event of a tie for first place after aggregation of scores, a runoff will be conducted. There must be an outright winner.
- 5) In the event of a tie for minor places prize money is pooled then divided e.g., if third place is a tie, prize money from third and fourth is pooled and divided. If there is a trophy, place getters may toss for it or have a runoff.
- 6) Where possible the finals shall be conducted in the same order as the dogs were drawn in the first run. However, if a handler has consecutive runs, they may be separated by other finalists.
- 7) Club secretaries must work out the top twelve places for both yard & utility sections before forwarding the official program to the WAWSDA Secretary.

6. RE-RUNS.

- 1) A re-run will be granted if any dog not belonging to the handler comes into the competition area and interferes with the run.
- 2) The judge(s) may order a re-run for the competing dog at any time during that dog's run.
- 3) If a re-run is granted it must be conducted at the end of the draw.

7. PROTESTS.

Any protest must be lodged with the trial committee immediately and their ruling is final.

8. CANES.

Canes are not to be used in a threatening manner, penalized at the judge's discretion.
In the improver/open events running under AYDA no canes are allowed.

9. WELFARE OF SHEEP AND DOGS.

- 1) The handler will not be penalized for aiding a distressed sheep.
- 2) Handler must make an effort to stand a sheep that goes down in a race or other confined area and free a sheep caught in a fence. Failure to do this or show disregard for the welfare of the sheep must be penalized or may result in disqualification.
- 3) All dogs worked should be vaccinated and in general good health.
- 4) Bitches on heat may be worked at yard & utility trials.

10. GENERAL RULES.

- 1) A panel of senior judges appoints new Novice and Open judges.
- 2) The status of a dog in the Yard and Utility trials is not affected by its status in Arena trials.
- 3) Novice dogs representing the State will be upgraded to Open status.
- 4) The two WA representatives to the Australian Yard Dog Championship will be:
 - 1) The winner of the State Yard Trial and
 - 2) Another from our "Yard Dog of the Year list" which is taken from the six trials prior to the closing date for the Championship.
- 5) The registrar for a fee of \$20.00 may register a dog scoring 75% of possible points or winning a novice yard or novice utility trial.