

## Using Real Estate Wisely

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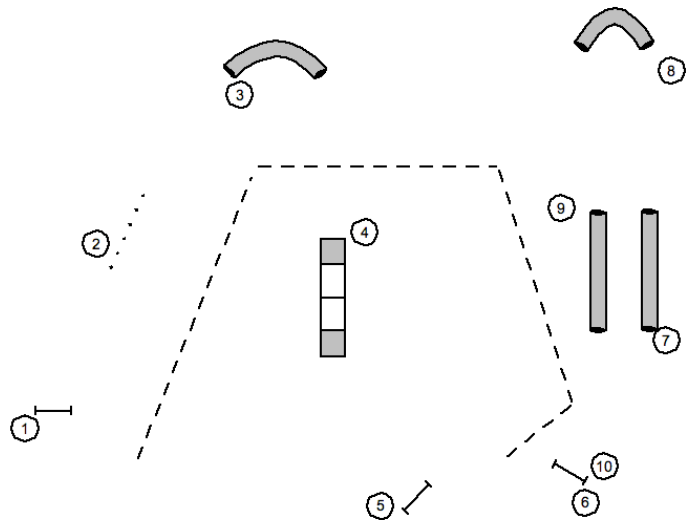
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This article is intended to highlight the most important choices you can make about using real-estate on course so you can do so wisely for your dog. By real-estate, I mean, the physical space that you have to work in on course.

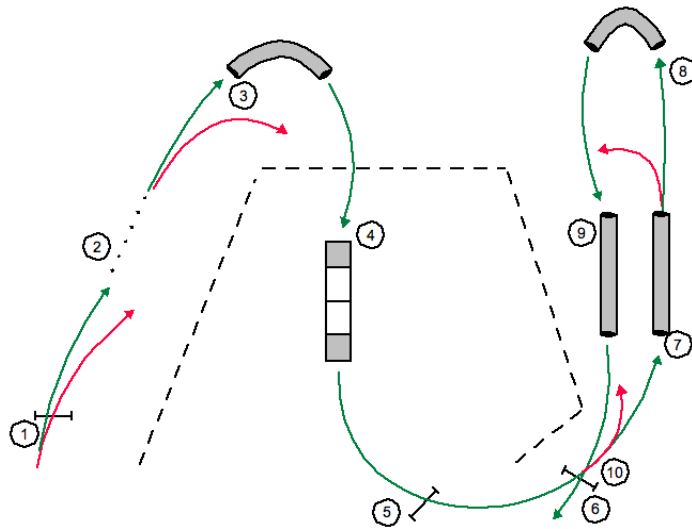
The article is written with NADAC style challenges in mind, although the concepts apply equally well to any venue and I have tried to illustrate the ideas with multiple types of courses to reinforce that point.

### An Example

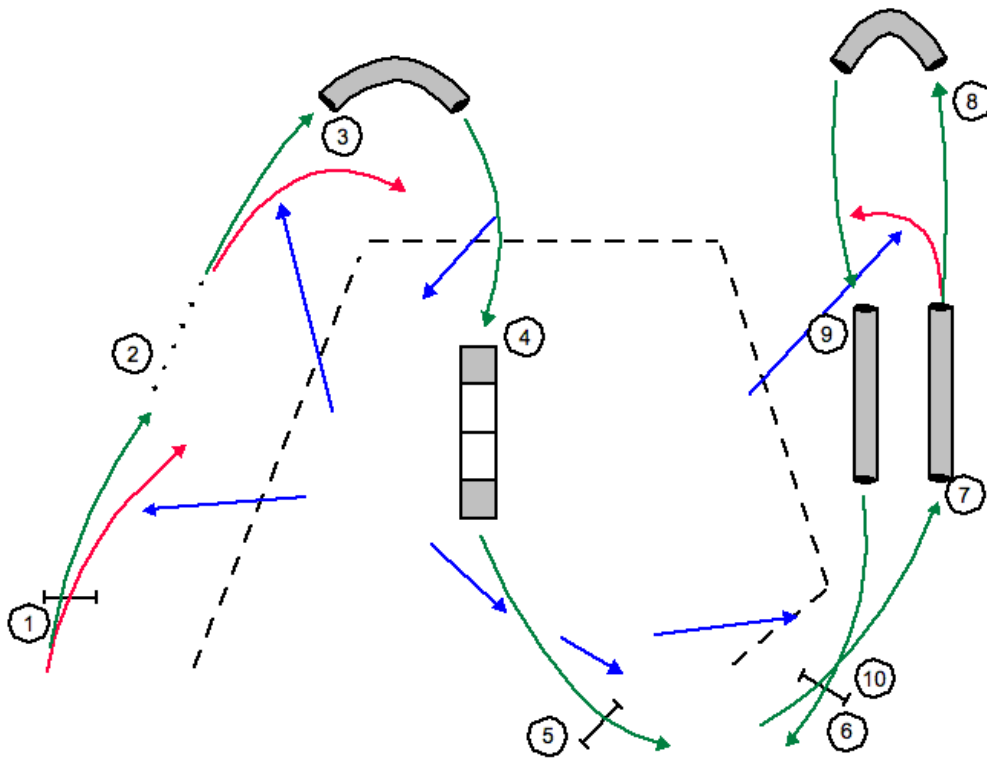
Here is a typical NADAC style example of how thinking about your available real-estate can make a significant difference in how well you can communicate the ideal path to your dog. This course is similar to a NADAC chances puzzle in which the handler must work inside a limited area in solving the sequence 1 through 10.



In this view of the course, the red arrows represent the erroneous paths that dogs took in an actual competition on a very similar course. It is probably not a big surprise that dogs sometimes made these mistakes, when you visualize the handler working laterally away from the dog, or decelerating as they got stuck up against the gamble line.



The blue arrows in this figure illustrate the places where the handler can push (or pull) to support the dog's path. Remember from previous articles that pressure on the path is effective from many angles and it is most effective and consistently applied, when you are facing and moving toward the  $\frac{1}{2}$  way point on the ideal path.

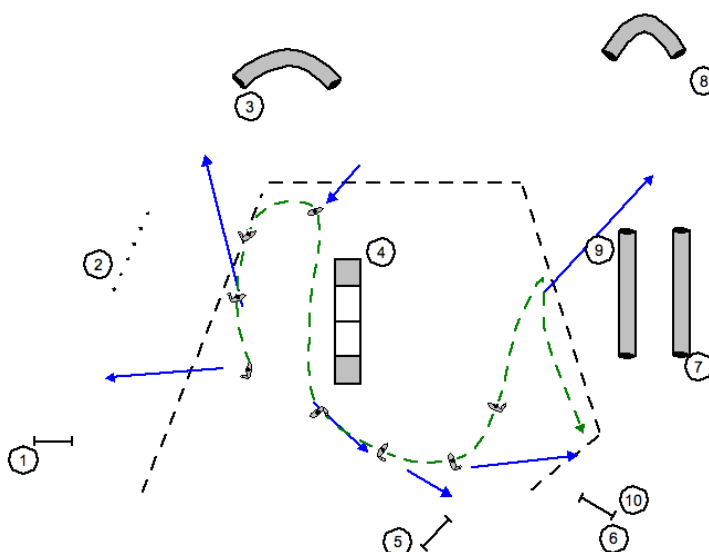


Notice how the pressure from the handler almost seems to push on the red arrows to make them align with green. I sometimes think of pressure exactly this way. In other words if it is natural for the dog to curl in, I am going to help them understand to stay out, by redirecting their natural path back to where I want it to be. By pushing at the path instead of the next obstacle, the dog feels the pressure early enough to follow the ideal path in the first place, rather than curling in and being pushed back out.

Notice also how the gamble line actually prompts the handler to move away from the important pressure points (assuming the handler runs along the gamble line). The advice to “stay off the line” is not just to make sure you don’t accidentally step over it.

### A Solution Using Real-Estate Wisely

Here is one solution that incorporates a careful use of the available space. Notice how the handler has lead out to cue extension over jump #1 and is facing the path to support the path to the weave poles.



The handler deliberately uses a moderate pace while the dog is weaving so that when the dog is done, the handler can continue moving forward to support the path to #3 without getting stuck leaning over the line and waving their arm etc. Notice that the handler has not turned their feet and upper body to align with the gamble line, they are still turned in toward the dog’s path so there is consistency between the pressure of their lead hand and the direction of their movement, upper body and shoulders.

The handler could use a front cross between #3 and the A-frame to get the turn out of the tunnel, but doesn’t. This preserves extra real-estate for the push from #7 to #8. Being on the right side of the A-frame (from the handler perspective) enables a rear cross from #4 to #5 and the handler can continue to push forward to set the line from #6 to #7 without getting caught so far in the corner behind the two tunnels that they can’t support the path from #7 to #8.

### Deliberate Decisions in the use of Real-Estate

In this example, the handler made several deliberate decisions with respect to real-estate.

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First, they considered the use of the available space as an important factor in their strategy. They chose not to do a front cross in order to give themselves an extra 10-15 feet of working space between the A-frame and twin tunnels. They also used a rear cross to generate distance between themselves and their dog through the jump sequence.

Second, they used their lead out position to best advantage. One that cued the type of jump they wanted from the dog and that enabled them to push on the path to the weaves. The lead out wasn't so long that it precluded the handler from moving to support the next section of the path, and wasn't so short that it put them out of position in supporting the path at all.

Finally they moved in the space at a pace and in directions that enabled effective pressure on the dog's path. For example, they did not accelerate past the weaves only to come to a stop at the gamble line when they wanted the dog to drive ahead to the tunnel, but instead chose a moderate pace. They drove the dog in extension over jump #6 to present the correct tunnel without going deep into the corner of the gamble line. They also used acceleration as the dog went into the #7 tunnel in an appropriate direction to encourage the dog to drive out to the correct entrance at #8.

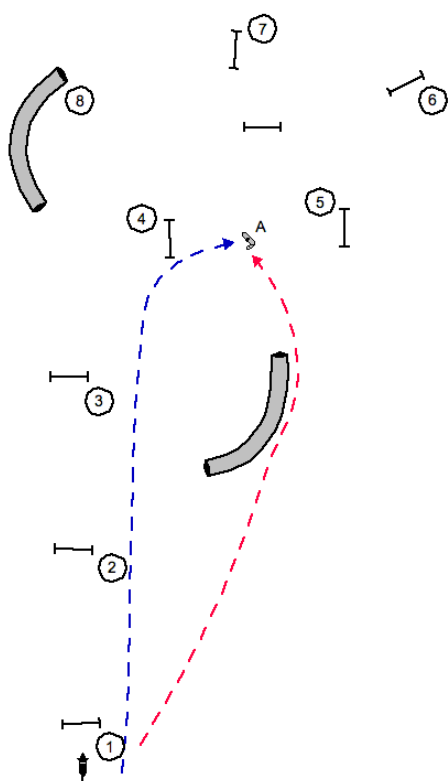
When a similar course was run in competition, handlers who didn't use the available real-estate wisely ended up miss-cueing their dogs, particularly if they performed a front cross at the A-frame. Many found that they ran out of room and had to decelerate as the dog was deciding how to jump #6 thus cueing collection and a turn which made the off-course tunnel attractive. Some handlers were able to accelerate their dogs over jump #6, but ended up deep behind the tunnels. If they took support off the path early in order to hustle up the gamble line to send the dog to #8 they often ended up pulling the dog into the off course tunnel anyway. Conversely if they held pressure to ensure they got the tunnel at #7, they were out of position as the dog came out and since they were decelerated as the dog went in, they got a nice tight turn back into or toward #9.

This is just one example of the specific decisions that a handler can make as part of their strategy to use real-estate wisely, so the next section looks at some of the concepts not covered already.

## **Lead out**

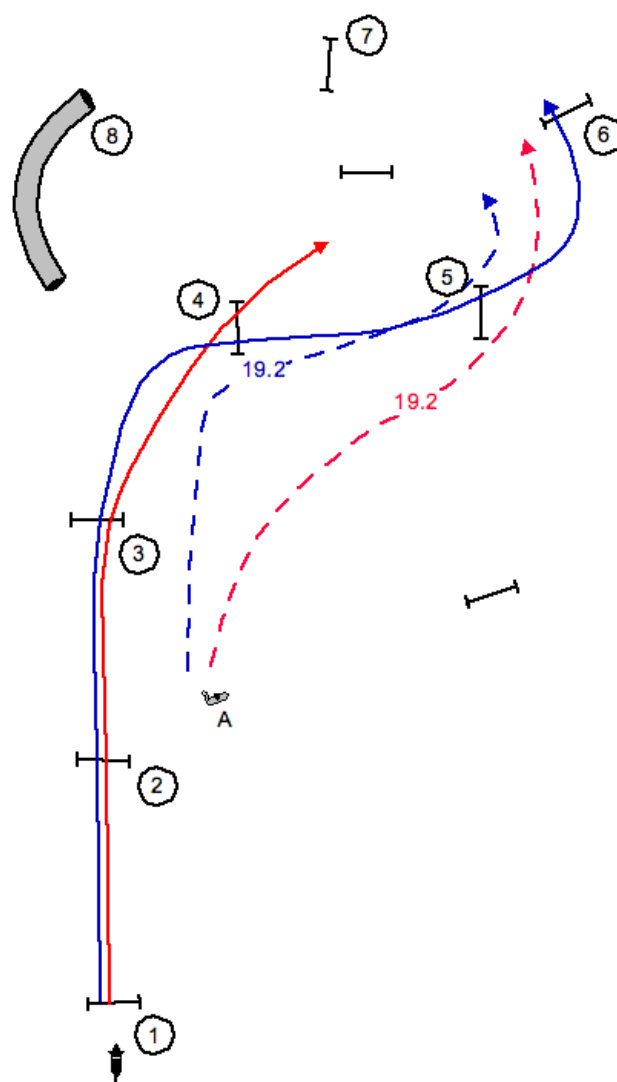
One thing to think about is that the real-estate that you use between the time that you leave your dog's side and your ultimate lead out position, is useful information for the dog. Be cautious about taking short-cuts to get to your final position. I think it is good practice to move exactly as you would if you were running with your dog until you get to your lead out position.

In addition, its generally true with a lead out, that you are communicating as much of the course as possible via that initial position, for example the path through the first 4 obstacles. Also generally, the only reason you are not communicating the first, say 6, is that you have to get somewhere else to clarify 4,5,6 and beyond - so its important to not give up the real-estate you gained with the lead out by watching how well it worked and forgetting to move into the next handling challenge.



Finally, a lead out can put you in a position to get somewhere later on course that is important. Often it enables a series of choices that makes a critical front cross, or timely deceleration cue, viable later on. A very big piece of your strategy in using real-estate wisely is to leverage your lead out to even greater advantage by making these choices.

### Taking Short-cuts



A large part of your strategy in using real-estate wisely is for the express purpose of getting to critical locations on course and I just mentioned that “how you get there” is almost as important as “that you get there” in the lead out example. But what about how you get there in the middle of the run?

Assuming you don’t have the speed and agility to lead your dog through the course, using real-estate wisely can seem a lot more like figuring out how you can possibly get to where you have to be by taking short-cuts.

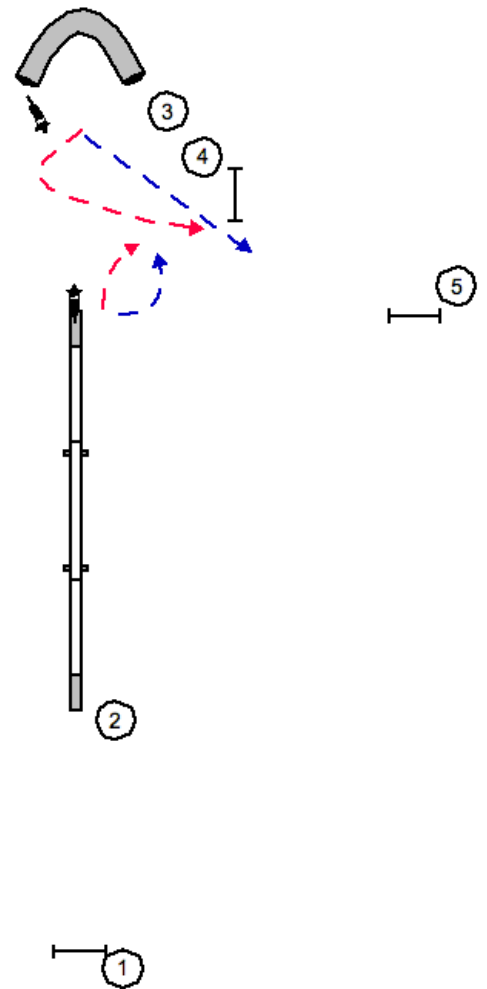
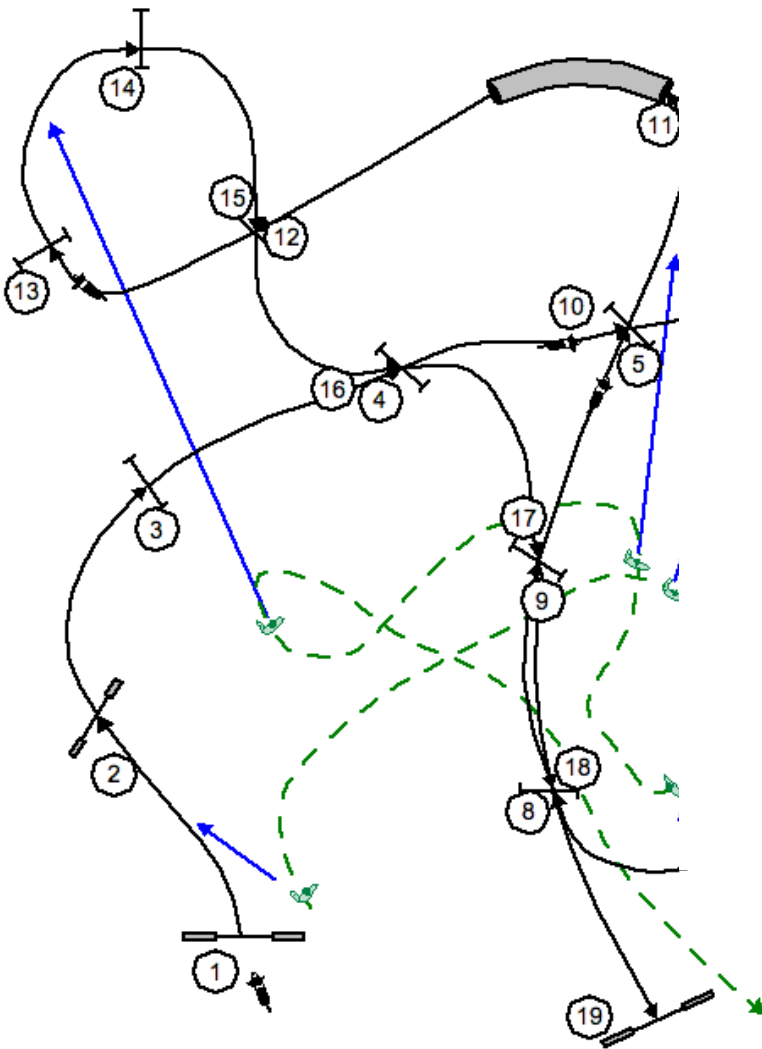
My first and best advice about taking short-cuts is to be very cautious about “cheating the corners” as a way to shorten the path. In this typical example, both of the handler paths are the same length and both use a rear cross to turn the dog from #5 to #6.

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Even though the red handler was trying to shorten their handling path, all they really accomplished was to fail to set the change of direction from 3 to 4, fail to set the line from 5 to 6, accidentally cue extension over 4 in the wrong direction, draw the dog to the right side of number 5 (which potentially creates a longer path from 5 through 7) and potentially put themselves a little bit out of position for the next part of the sequence. And in the end, the “shorter path” actually wasn’t shorter at all, just riskier.

Judge, Sandra Katzen, designed this ASCA style course to help me illustrate where short-cuts can be used wisely. The push out to the dogwalk is a typical example. Notice how the handler’s path is angled at the ½ way point between jump #4 and the dogwalk right from the start of the course. This approach sets a long line for the dog all the way across the arena and enables the dog to drive all the way to the dogwalk without the handler going deep and escorting them to it. The same strategy pushes out to jump #6 and pulls the dog over jump #6 into the serpentine (notice that the handler has not “cheated the corner”, but has communicated a tight change of direction consistent with what the dog needs to do). Serpentine handling is a handy shortcut and is used to help the handler get into position to support the weave entry. Pulling off laterally at the weaves is a typical and handy use of real-estate. The deliberate decision to go deep on jump #11 to set up a rear cross into the turn from jump #12 to jump #13 enables the handler to take a much shorter path as the course turns back toward #14. A recall over the teeter after committing the dog to the tunnel is another classic short-cut and is often an option any time the course makes a “U” shape (pinwheels being another common example).





## Micro Real-estate

The previous examples are mostly illustrations of thinking about real-estate in terms of the entire ring, macro real-estate if you will. However “micro real-estate” is also very interesting to use strategically and wisely. For example, dogs don’t wait for you to cover 10 feet in your front cross to determine where they are going – they act on the first step as a predictor of the direction you are setting (or more accurately, they could



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make a decision that quickly if you were consistent with your use of real-estate / footwork). Here are two examples.

Lets say the red handler steps toward #3 using a closed shoulder or rotation and the left arm and leg to send to the tunnel. The blue handler steps a little sideways toward the tunnel with the right foot first and sends with the left arm and leg. The arrows exaggerate the difference, but you get the idea. Since a push to the left side of #3 would also be done with the left arm and leg – a wise use of the little tiny real-estate associated with the first step might be to use the blue handler's cue.

Coming out of the tunnel, notice that the red handler performs a front cross by first stepping across the dog's path and then pulling to number #4. The blue handler first steps down the front cross line toward #4. Notice how different the information is for the dog, at the time when the dog needs to make a decision about turning, in these two scenarios even though both handlers end up in the same place. Again, it is the micro-real-estate covered with the very first step that conveys important information to the dog.

## **Acceleration and Deceleration**

I think acceleration and deceleration are two of the most important and difficult cues to use deliberately on course. Your change of speed (the definition of acceleration and deceleration) is a big macro cue for your dog, it is naturally highly pertinent to them, it conveys a lot of information about what you are likely going to do next (big radius turn, or sharp change of direction), and if that wasn't enough, it has a huge influence on how and whether you cover the ground you need to on course.

With respect to using real-estate wisely, I think it is helpful to know that acceleration and deceleration are relative terms. Going from a stand to a jog is an acceleration cue. Shifting weight from your toes to your heels is a deceleration cue. For example, you can create a great deal of energy and "drive" by using acceleration cues without actually sprinting and covering a lot of ground (for example in a pinwheel, or at a gamble line). The other thing that is helpful to know is that if you are standing up, there is a very obvious and natural change in the angle of your torso as you accelerate (forward), maintain a constant pace (upright) and decelerate (backward) – it is so obvious that your dog can not possibly miss it.

Without making things super complicated (and an even longer article), if you move around the course as quickly as you are able – then you will give yourself the most options for how to use the available real-estate wisely. If you are running in a straight line, accelerate. If you have some tricky footwork coming up or a sharp change of direction – do what you would naturally do, decelerate. But don't forget to speed up again as soon as you can.

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## Wrapping up

To wrap up this article, using real-estate wisely starts with being aware of how valuable real-estate can be to your handling strategy. Often that strategy is enabled via a thoughtful lead out which influences not just the beginning of the run but the handling options you have throughout the run. Choosing amongst those options is often a matter of where you can get to and making wise choices about taking short-cuts. But it isn't just getting to these positions, it is also a matter of how you move between them.

Andrea is a professional trainer, consultant and coach who takes great pleasure in helping her students, both in Seattle and elsewhere, enjoy their dog, training, agility and success, probably in that order. She can be reached at [www.agilityflix.net](http://www.agilityflix.net), where you can check out her training products and services and of course brags about her own dogs. She would welcome any thoughts you might have on these articles.

## Graphics

UR-EW-1.agl

A Nadac-style Chances course where restricted real-estate is part of the fun.

UR-EW-2.agl

Red arrows show where dogs had trouble on a similar competition course.

UR-EW-3.agl

Blue arrows show how handler pressure supports the dog's path.

UR-EW-4.agl

The green handlers path uses the available real-estate wisely.

UR-EW-5.agl

Using real-estate wisely starts with how you get to your lead out position.

UR-EW-6.agl

“cheating the corner” is typically not a good use of real-estate.

UR-EW-7.agl

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An ASCA style course, designed by Sandra Katzen, handled with a number of typical short-cuts.

UR-EW-8.agl

Very careful use of real-estate enables a handler with restricted mobility to still communicate effectively on this course designed by Sandra Katzen.

UR-EW-9.agl

Real-estate usage is not just about covering big distance and space. Micro real-estate usage (the direction and distance you cover with a single step) can be highly pertinent.

