

DOGS ACT

SCENT WORK JUDGES TRAINING PROGRAM GUIDE 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2026 Dogs ACT Scent Work Judges' Training Program. This Guide provides an introduction to the course and sets out what you need to know to get started.

The training program will include:

- Review of Dogs Australia and Dogs ACT Rules and Regulations
- Online theory course (link will be sent)
- Theory lectures as required
- Zoom sessions addressing specific theory components
- Participation in a Scent Work Trainee Judges' Facebook site
- Shadowing of experienced Scent Work Judges
- Supervised practical training sessions
- Theory exam
- Practical exam

It is recommended that the Program commence as soon as possible. We aim to have you assessed and appointed as Scent Work Judges in the third quarter of 2026.

The following timeframe is a guide with a focus on enabling trainees to build 'layers' of knowledge. Please contact me if you have other commitments that may affect your participation in some of the activities eg holidays. We will do our best to work around these commitments.

It is particularly important that the theory components stay in sync because some of these activities are being conducted with other states. The practical sessions will be organised within the ACT.

Key dates to put in your diary now:

Component	Action	Key Dates
Zoom session - Introduction to the Program	In:	Asap
Self study – Scent Work Rules, Dogs Australia and Dogs ACT Regulations	Commence	Now
Zoom session - Dogs Australia and Dogs ACT Rules and Regulations as pertinent to judges	In:	Mar-Apr 2026
Dogs ACT exam on Dogs Australia and Dogs ACT rules and regulations 80% pass rate required for entry to the program	In:	Apr 2026
Online Theory course	Commence:	Apr 2026
	Complete:	July 2026
Zoom session "Scent Vessels, Hide Preparation and Hide Placement" - compulsory	In:	July 2026 (TBC)
Zoom session "Judging Scenarios – Discuss" - compulsory	In:	Aug 2026 (TBC)
Supervised practical sessions	Commence:	Aug 2026
	Complete:	Oct 2026
Dogs ACT Written exam	In:	Nov 2026 (date TBA)
Dogs ACT Practical exam	In	Dec 2026 (date TBA)
Recommendations to Dogs ACT	Post assessment	Dec 2026
Appointment by Dogs ACT	Subject to recommendation	Dec 2026

2. 2026 STATE SCENT WORK JUDGE TRAINEES

Your interest, involvement and commitment to the training program will be pivotal not only to your own success, but also that of the group as a whole (shared knowledge and experience enhances understanding).

A Facebook site will be established to provide a forum for trainee judges to discuss matters arising during the course, including Rule interpretation and emerging issues and challenges in the theory and practical training, as well as provide support and mentorship to trainees.

3. TRAINING PROGRAM

The framework for the judges' training program is set by Dogs Australia (see below). The training course will provide you with the opportunity to meet most of these requirements.

Dogs Australia Regulation Part 3N – 5. Training Requirements - requires trainees to:

5.1 At the discretion of the relevant Approval Authority, trainees may be required to pass a preliminary theory examination based on Member Body Rules and Regulations and general requirements of the Rules for the Conduct of Scent Work Trials prior to commencing or while undertaking the Judges Training Scheme.

Trainees will be required to:

- (a) Educate themselves. This includes being conversant with the latest Dogs Australia and Member Body Rules and Regulations relevant to Scent Work trials and through attendance at lectures and/or self education
- (b) attend at least 80% of lectures and practical training sessions conducted as part of the Scent Work Judges Training Scheme, unless otherwise approved by the relevant Approval Authority
- (c) practice judging in the relevant Class(es) under the supervision of an approved Coordinator. A copy of the completed Judge's Sheets from the practice judging sessions must be forwarded to the Coordinator in accordance with the timeframes specified by the Coordinator on behalf of the Member Body
- (d) undertake stewarding or time keeping responsibilities at a minimum of three (3) sanctioned Scent Work trials.

5.2 A Coordinator must:

- (a) supervise trainees in all required aspects of performance in Scent Work trials. Sessions may include judging from DVDs or other electronic resources and/or live searches
- (b) provide feedback to trainees and answer any questions from trainees
- (c) sign trainees' Practical Training Forms, including any comments or feedback. These forms are to be retained by the Coordinator. Copies may also be retained by the trainees.

5.3 Trainees must provide documentation of attendance at all Judges Training sessions which they have attended and all stewarding/time-keeping appointments.

3.1 Theory Component

3.1.1 *Dogs Australia and Dogs ACT Rules and Regulations pertinent to being a judge*

Dogs ACT will hold a 2 hour Zoom session to review the Rules and Regulations relating to being a Dogs Australia judge. This is **compulsory for anyone who is not already a Dogs Australia judge.**

For those trainees not already a Dogs Australia judge, there will be a **closed book multiple choice examination** with approximately twenty (20) questions. **An 80% pass mark is required to commence the training program.**

3.1.2 *Online Theory Course*

The theory component seeks to provide trainees with a good understanding of scent theory, and the Scent Work Rules relating to your role as a Dogs Australia judge. This will include your responsibilities when judging at a trial with a focus on the Classes, the Elements, search area design, hide placement and judging.

The theory course is a collaborative arrangement with Victoria. The scent work components of the course and the Zoom sessions are the intellectual property of the four experts who have provided this input (Sonja Needs, Jennifer Alleyne, Angela Hervey-Tennyson and Peta Clarke). Trainees are asked to **respect and protect these materials because they have been freely given for this purpose only.**

All materials provided for the purposes of this program should not be shared outside of the Dogs ACT program without Dogs ACT approval to protect the integrity of the training (it is usual for states to keep the contents of their judges' training courses confidential to minimise the need for constant redesign for future trainees).

In order to get access to the course you will be asked to agree to not disclose or share the materials with any other party. If a trainee shares the materials outside of the Program without the express written approval of Dogs ACT, access to the online theory course and practical workshops may be withdrawn and you may not be able to complete the course.

The theory component is presented via a free online learning management system (LMS) called Thinkific. Thinkific is a user-friendly, intuitive LMS, which includes a dedicated fully-responsive website experience. The videos and presentations in the course play most reliably in Chrome and Firefox platforms. If you are using Edge the videos and presentations may sometimes not play as well. If you do not have Chrome or Mozilla Firefox you can download the programs for FREE: [FireFox](#) & [Chrome](#)

You will be able to complete the theory component at your own pace. There are nine modules for Novice and Advanced trainees. It is recommended that those upgrading to Excellent and Master review these modules as well as focussing on additional modules specifically addressing the higher Classes. Modules 1-9 cover:

- ANKC Scent Work Governing Framework (Mod 1)
- Canine Scent Work Theory (Canine Physiology (Mod 2) and Scent dynamics (Mod 3))
- Conduct of Scent Work Trials (Affiliates (Mod 4) and Judges Responsibilities (Mod 5))
- Dogs and Competitors (welfare and equipment) (Mod 6)
- Scent Vessels, Hide Preparation and Placement (Mod 7)
- Judging at a trial (classes, preparation of odour, selecting hide locations, hide placement, simple and complex scent puzzles, and the elements and their particular challenges) (Mod 8)
- Odour Search Division – a close look at the requirements for each Class and Element (Mod 9)

The link and password to the online course will be provided to you upon your acceptance of the terms of provision. The aim is to have you complete the theory course by May 2026.

3.1.3 *Zoom Session “Scent Vessels, Hide Preparation and Hide Placement”*

Our scent work experts will host a two (2) hour Zoom workshop “Scent Vessels, Hide Preparation and Hide Placement”. The session will look at different options for scent vessels to ensure a well-hidden hide. It will demonstrate hide preparation protocols and discuss things to consider when planning hide placements in the four elements and class levels. **It is important that you prioritise attendance at this session. They are not video-taped.**

3.1.3 *Zoom Session “Judging Scenarios - Discuss”*

Jennifer Alleyne and Angela Hervey-Tennyson will host a two (2) hour Zoom session “Judging Scenarios – Discuss”. The purpose of the workshop is to consider different scenarios that may occur during judging, and discuss as a group, application of the Rules, and specifically faults and

deductions in each scenario. **It is important that you prioritise attendance at this session. They are not video-taped.**

3.2 Practical training

Supervised practical training sessions

Assessors will be nominated by the Dogs ACT Coordinator for a minimum of three supervised practical training sessions to provide trainees with practical experience and the opportunity to receive feedback.

The purpose of the practical training sessions is to ensure that trainees:

- know how to set up for and judge a scent work trial Class/Element
- know how to brief and manage officials
- know how to complete Dogs Australia paperwork
- are able to apply the Dogs Australia Scent Work Rules in a reasonable, fair and consistent manner
- are able to judge searches in accordance with the Rules including applying penalties consistently
- gain experience in trial official roles eg time keeper, hide placement etc
- understand the role and requirements of a Dogs Australia Scent Work judge

Trainees will organise these sessions (suitable venues, trial officials and competitor/dog teams) which should cover every Element in the two Novice and Advanced Classes OR the two Excellent and Master Classes to gain broad experience.

It is recommended that practical sessions replicate (at a minimum) exam requirements ie three Elements and both Classes with at least four dogs running each Element/Class. Aim to get a range of dogs/handlers for each session to gain different experiences for you to consider and judge.

Assessors will provide practical written feedback on matters such as design and management of search elements and areas, briefing and management of trial officials, hide placement, and judging of searches. This will cover areas progressing well and those requiring more work.

Getting practical experience is fundamental to building your confidence and knowledge. It is recommended that you organise some 'mentored' sessions before you start your supervised practical sessions. That is, arrange for a venue, some searching teams and a mentor (ie a current Scent Work judge(s)) to come and watch and provide feedback and guidance on what happens. It may also be helpful to have someone video your practical sessions to review and learn from afterwards. It is important to work with all the Scent Work judges across the program to gain a broader range of perspectives and approaches.

Liaise early with your practical session assessors and affiliates re suitable dates.

Where practical, trainees should officiate for other trainees to gain practical experience as an official.

The member body assessors should:

- (a) supervise the trainee in all required aspects of performance of the practical sessions which should replicate the requirements of a Scent Work trial
- (b) provide feedback to the trainee and be available to answer questions from the trainee in relation to the Rules and judging practices

(c) complete and submit an Assessor Form with constructive feedback on the practical session which is to be sent to the Coordinator

Trainees must also provide documentation of attendance at all practical sessions which they have participated in whether judging or officiating to the Coordinator.

It is anticipated that practical training will run along the following lines:

Who	What
Before practical session	
Trainee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with the affiliate about use of their facilities for the session • Visit the affiliate to select suitable search areas and determine what Classes/Elements will be provided • Photograph and/or draw maps with measurements of the proposed search areas
Trainee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse and design search areas and hide placement using photos/maps and measurements • Prepare scent work aids in accordance with the Rules • Collect containers, distractors and props required
Practical session day	
Trainee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area set up etc
Trainee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive early to set up search areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ review area and redesign as required ◦ mark search area (cones and/or bunting) ◦ set up area (containers; distractions, props etc) ◦ check your hide placement with cold vessels review proposed hide placement to ensure it is suitable for the area ◦ briefly analyse search expectations based on placement and environment ◦ review staging area and search entry and exit arrangements ◦ review spectator area • Instruct hide steward (if using) on preparation of hides; and supervise hide placement • Brief stewards • Brief handlers • Run searches • Debrief on search outcomes (your handlers can also provide useful insight)

Practical sessions should commence once you have made good progress in studying the Rules and worked through the online theory course. The practical sessions will assist you in understanding and applying the theory of the Rules. 'Handy tips' to help with preparation for the practical sessions will be provided later.

Shadowing experienced judges

In 2026, it will be a formal requirement that trainees shadow experienced judges judging at Dogs Australia Scent Work trials. This should cover a minimum of three different Elements in each of the Novice and Advanced Classes OR in each of the Excellent and Master Classes to gain broad experience. There should be a minimum of ten (10) teams in each Class/Element.

Trainees will be required to liaise with judges to set these sessions up. They will also be required to document what happened in each of these sessions and the learnings they took from the sessions as part of completing their formal Program requirements.

4. COMPLETION OF TRAINING

Once a trainee has successfully completed the theory and practical training components (including the compulsory workshops), they may apply to Dogs ACT to undertake the theory and practical examinations for elevation as a Scent Work Judge.

Assessment will include:

- (a) a written theory examination
- (b) practical examination

a. Theory Exam

The Theory Exam for **Novice and Advanced Classes** will be:

- set by Dogs ACT and will consist of a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 50 questions including multiple choice, short answer and scenario analysis
- conducted as a written closed book exam
- supervised by Dogs ACT representatives
- marked independently by a minimum of two (2) Dogs ACT nominated markers (a third marker will be asked to mark the exam if there is any significant discrepancy or concern)

The Theory Exam for **Excellent and Master Classes** will have a greater focus on Rule interpretation and scenario questions. It will be an open book exam which will be completed in a specified time.

To pass the theory examination a trainee must achieve a minimum of 80%.

A trainee who fails the theory examination may make a written request to Dogs ACT within fourteen (14) days of the advice of the results, for their paper to be reviewed. A different panel of markers will, without conferring, separately remark the paper.

The theory exam must be successfully passed in order to proceed to the practical exam.

Dogs ACT will organise the venue for the written exam.

NOTE: You need a COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING of the Scent Work Rules – MEMORISE THEM!!

b. Practical Assessment

The practical examination will be organised and supervised by a minimum of three (3) assessors nominated by Dogs ACT.

ANKC Regulations Part 3N Regulations for the Conduct of Scent Work Trials Judges Training Scheme set out the minimum requirements for a pass in the practical examination:

- (a) a trainee must judge a minimum of four (4) searching teams in three (3) Elements in the Classes being assessed in the Odour Search Division
- (b) at the assessors' discretion, a trainee may be asked to judge additional dog/s or to judge from electronic resources if there are no dogs available for a particular Class
- (c) each assessor will individually make a recommendation as to whether the trainee has passed or failed
- (d) for the trainee to pass the practical examination, a positive recommendation from the majority of assessors is required

The following provides additional clarification of what you will need to do and provide to successfully complete your practical exam.

Novice-Advanced Classes

You must prepare for and judge a minimum of four (4) searching teams in each of the Novice and Advanced Classes and three (3) Elements eg Novice Containers; Advanced Vehicles; Advanced Exterior etc.

The assessment should cover at a minimum:

1. set up and preparation of search areas with an analysis of how you expect the searches will go
2. preparation for and placement of hides, including of them in place
3. briefing of Search Area Steward and Timer/Scribe

4. judging of searching teams in each Class/Element including an explanation of the dog's behaviour, faults, pass/fail, challenges involved and an explanation of environmental conditions/odour movement.

Each assessor should complete an Assessor Report with comments about the practical session and a recommendation of Pass/Fail. These should be provided to the Coordinator.

Excellent-Master Classes

You must prepare for and judge a minimum of four (4) searching teams in each of the Excellent and Master Classes and three (3) Elements eg Excellent Containers; Master Vehicles; Excellent Exterior etc.

The assessment should cover at a minimum:

5. set up and preparation of search areas with an analysis of how you expect the searches will go
6. preparation for and placement of hides, including of them in place
7. briefing of Search Area Steward and Timer/Scribe
8. judging of searching teams in each Class/Element including an explanation of the dog's behaviour, faults, pass/fail, challenges involved and an explanation of environmental conditions/odour movement

Each assessor should complete an Assessor Report with comments about the practical session and a recommendation of Pass/Fail. These should be provided to the Coordinator.

c. Re-assessment

Where a trainee fails the practical examination they may apply to Dogs ACT for re-examination. Re-assessment is not guaranteed and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5. DRESS CODE

Trainees should meet generally acceptable standards (ie neat, sensible clothes, appropriate footwear, no open-toed sandals, thongs etc.) when undertaking practice judging.

The practical examination is a formal occasion and must be treated in the same manner as a sanctioned Scent Work trial. Trainees must display an appropriate form of dress befitting a Dogs Australia official and they will be marked accordingly. It is recommended that you review the dress code required in the ACT.

6. MAINTENANCE OF SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

All Dogs Australia Scent Work Judges are expected to actively maintain their knowledge and understanding of the Rules and their interpretations as determined by the Dogs Australia and Dogs ACT.

Dogs Australia Regulation Part 3N sets out the requirements that you will need to meet into the future.

7. RESOURCES

The following documents are a 'must read' to become a Scent Work Judge.

Dogs Australia Rules for the conduct of Scent Work Trials:

[21-da-scent-work-rules-01-08-24.pdf](#)

Dogs Australia Regulations Part 3N Regulations for the Conduct of Scent Work Trials Judges Training Scheme (Amended August 2024)

[Microsoft Word - ATTACHMENTS 2 - 5 to the Submission.doc](#)

Judge's Contract

[Judge's Contract - July 2024](#)

Dogs Australia Guidelines for Judges **TBC**

National Judge's Code of Practice and Conduct
[da_judges-cop_dec-22.pdf](#)

Dogs ACT Regulation Part 9 Judges

[Part 9 - Judges](#)

Dogs ACT Regulation Part 17 Aggressive Dog Policy

[Part_17_AggressiveDogs-v1-2024.pdf](#)

Dogs ACT Regulation Part 20 Scent Work

[Part-20-Scent-Work-Orig-Mar21F.pdf](#)

Dogs ACT Social Media Policy

[Social-media-pomicrolicy-document-v1-2016.pdf](#)