

Building a Retriever

with Carol Cassity



Carol will tell you that the purpose of her book, *Building a Retriever*, is simple: to present information to help you develop the teamwork necessary for you and your dog to be successful in the hunting blind and the holding blind. She reminds us that she did not invent the drills in her book, instead crediting the many trainers that came before her. Enjoy these excerpts from her book.

DRILL #1 - MW'S INFLUENTIAL LINING DRILL

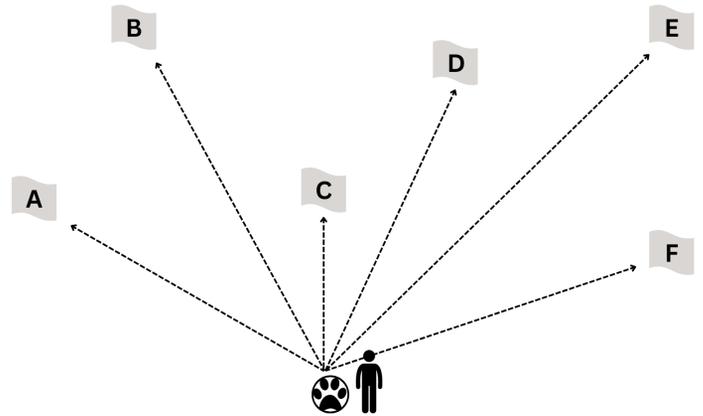
Level – Advanced

Purpose – Work on tight lines past suction, run lines through slots, correct alignment and handling are also benefits of this drill.

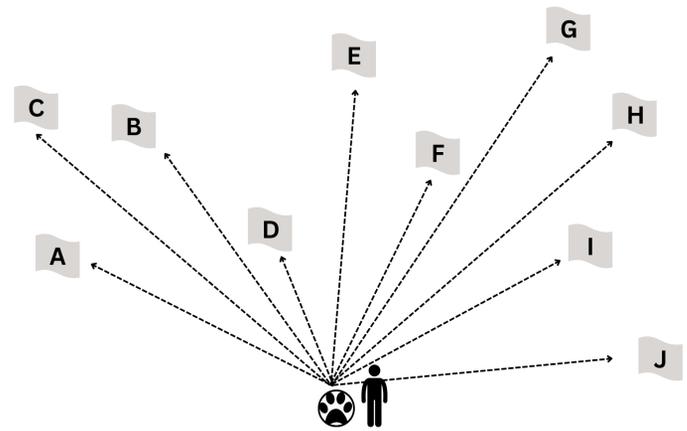
Materials Needed – Multiple marked piles. You can use buckets, flags, milk jugs on poles, lids mounted to poles, etc. Whatever it will take to give the dog a clear and visible target.

Procedure – This drill, developed by Mitch White, is like the W Drill meets Tune-Up. The big difference between this drill and the W is twofold.

1. More piles – W has five and the Influential Lining Drill has as many as you want.
2. In this Influential Lining Drill your line does not move, it is the line to each target that changes. In the W Drill, you rotate around the field and change the picture.



- This would be a relatively straight forward picture.
- Adjust the lines between piles in accordance with the level of the dog.



- This would be a very complex picture. Distance is not critical here. Keep the lines shorter than 100 yards. The emphasis is on alignment and carrying lines past suction. Make sure you have clear enough corridors for the dog to be right. This is a tough, but beneficial, drill.
- You can incorporate trees, hay bales, hills, or other factors when setting up your lines. Just be sure the picture is clear so the dog can see the corridors being developed.
- Order of pickup is handler's choice. A good order in this scenario would be: I, H, J, A, B, C, E, D, F, and G.

Potential Problem	Solution
Dog sucks to the close flag	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Handle 2. Call back and try again - don't do this too many times or you will get no-goes or major flaring.
Dog flares the close flag	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't handle - enjoy the success - the dog is trying to be good. 2. Send to the close flag for a retrieve – he may be thinking they are all poison birds.
Dog won't focus on far flag - keeps looking at the flag nearby	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move up to make the angle not so tight – open the picture up. 2. Give the dog a verbal cue when he is looking in the right direction – "That's it, good, right there," etc.

MW's Influential Lining Drill – Set Up

The following are just two potential pictures with the Influence Lining Drill. You can vary the picture depending on the level of the dog as needed. More piles and/or tighter lines are more difficult.

The order of pick-up is up to you. Some scenarios will demand to be run in a certain order, but in general, there is no single way to pick the piles up.

DRILL #2 - HEAD-SWINGING DRILL

Level – This is a fundamental marking drill and can be revisited throughout a dog's career.

Purpose – Teach dog not to look away from a gunner and mark unless cued by handler. A dog that watches the bird all the way to the ground and then continues to focus on the area of the fall is far more likely to have a good memory of the location of the bird. Dog should look at a new gunner when the handler moves, not in response to a sound or motion in the field. This is a maintenance drill and should be used throughout the dog's life.

Materials Needed – Two or more gunners, bumpers and birds.

Procedure – Have two gunners in field, out in the open where dog can see them.

1. Gunner One throws a single and Gunner Two (decoy gunner) just stands in the field. Keep dog focused on mark, and if dog head-swings to decoy gunner then refocus and send for mark. If dog head-swings, repeat until you can count to 10 before sending. Be careful not to make any movement that would inadvertently pull the dog off the mark that Gunner One threw. DON'T CAUSE A HEAD-SWING!
2. Gunner Two is quiet but swings birds/bumpers a few times and then is still. Focus dog on Gunner One with "here/heel" command, say "mark." Then Gunner One throws a single. Count to 10 and send dog. If dog head-swings to decoy gunner, refocus dog on mark Gunner One threw and then send dog for mark. Repeat procedure until dog is not head-swinging for a count of ten.
3. Gunner Two asks a question or talks. Then Gunner Two is silent while swinging bumpers. Gunner One throws single – count to 10 and then send. If dog head-swings to decoy gunner, refocus on mark and then send. Repeat procedure until dog does not head-swing.
4. Focus on Gunner Two. Have Gunner Two throw a single. Count to 10 and send dog. If dog head-swings to Gunner One, refocus and send.
5. Gunner One throws a mark. Count to 10, then move to Gunner Two who then throws a mark. Count to 10 and send for Gunner Two's mark. If dog head-swings to either gunner, refocus and send.

Before you send, you should be talking to the dog. "That's it," "Right there," "Good," "You got it" are all things that are applicable.

You are trying to establish communication to look out and keep looking.



Potential Problem	Solution
Dog won't come off decoy gunner (dog is fixed on decoy gunner and will not look at gunner throwing the mark.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move up toward gunner that is throwing. 2. Tap leg, say "here/heel" to move dog's head away from decoy gunner or physically move dog's head by pulling or pushing on collar. 3. Have gunner that is throwing move around a little (but not make noise). Dog should look first. Then have gunner make noise and throw mark.
Dog head-swings to decoy gunner after mark is thrown by other gunner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send dog sooner for mark – don't hold on mark for as long – try for 5 seconds. If you can't get that long, send faster. 2. Gradually extend time dog must look at mark before sending. 3. Tell the dog "good, that's it" or something else while they are looking at the mark to reinforce the desired behavior of watching the correct gunner. 4. Spread gunners farther apart to take decoy out of dog's immediate field of vision.

Head-Swinging Drill – Set Up

Both gunners are close to the line – within 30 yards. The mark should be very easy.

After Gunner One throws the mark, handler should keep dog looking at the mark for 5-10 seconds before releasing dog to retrieve the mark.



Steps for Decoy Gunner:

- 1st – just stand there
- 2nd – swing bumpers with no noise
- 3rd – make idle chit-chat for a few seconds and then quiet while swinging bumpers
- 4th – throw a mark and Gunner One is now the decoy

- To make this drill easier, move gunners farther apart.
- To make this drill more difficult, tighten the picture up.
- Learning is attrition based. No e-collar correction.

This drill really provides an excellent opportunity for building communication cues "Right there," "That's it," etc.

DRILL #3 - SPLIT X MARKING DRILL

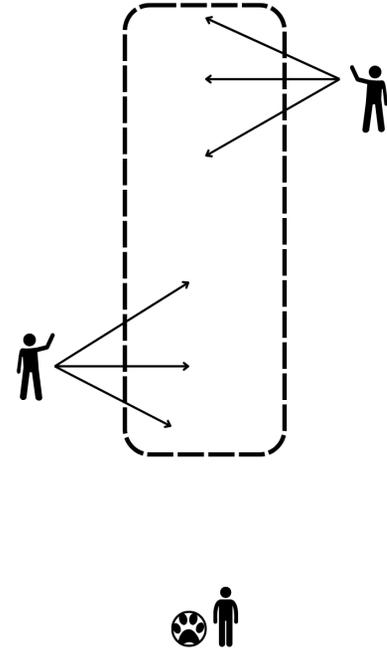
Level – Intermediate and Advanced – This is a fundamental marking drill and can be revisited throughout a dog’s career.

Purpose – This drill helps develop depth perception. It also instills the idea of marking with your eyes by requiring the dog to either drive through an old fall or, conversely, check up short of an old fall.

Materials Needed – Two bird boys and multiple bumpers

Split X Marking Drill – Set Up

- The tighter the corridor, the more difficult it will be. Start wide (20 yds) and then tighten it up. Train for success!
- Marks inside the bird boy corridor are much harder than outside the corridor. Dogs will naturally flare the short gun on the way out to a mark thrown by the long gun. This is a great drill for working on carrying lines.
- The distance from the line to the marks will depend on the terrain and the dog’s ability. In general this drill is run with the bird boy 50 to 150 yards from the line.
- All marks are run as singles



About The Author – Carol Cassidy

Carol is the author of *Building A Retriever, Drills & More*. Her book is a compilation of drills and best practices for the hunting retriever, with particular attention being paid to selecting drills that are within the means of most amateur trainers.

Carol has experience with a variety of hunting dog breeds and is familiar with the unique traits of each breed. She successfully competes at the highest levels in both HRC and AKC events and is an HRC judge at the Finished level, having judged the HRC Grand multiple times. Titles her dogs have achieved include HRC GRHRCH, UH and AKC MH. Many of her dogs, both Chesapeake Bay Retrievers and

Golden Retrievers are AKC Master Hunters and members of the HRC 500-Point Club. Her Golden “Blitz” and Chessie “Peytah” are members of the 1,000-Point Club.

Carol has helped multiple breeds and handlers in the twenty-two plus years she has been presenting seminars. Some of the breeds she has worked with include: Labs, Chessies, Goldens, Poodles, Boykins, Tollers, Drahthaars, Flat-Coats, Curly-Coats and Setters.

When not working with retrievers, Carol teaches Math, Science and Social Studies to children with special needs at a public middle school. 2023 marks Carol’s 34th year as a full-time special education teacher. ■

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