



WORKING WITHOUT SIDEWALKS

The purpose of this lecture is to discuss the ways in which using a Pilot Dog in areas without sidewalks differs from typical sidewalk travel. This lesson will explain:

- Reasons for traveling on the left shoulder
- The importance of indenting
- Different types of shorelines
- Commonly-encountered obstacles and distractions

Reasons for Traveling on the Left Shoulder

There are several reasons for traveling on the left shoulder of a road:

- It is the law in most states that pedestrians walk facing oncoming traffic.
- It is easier for the dog to see and react appropriately to oncoming traffic than it is for the dog to react to traffic from behind.
- It is easier from the dog's point of view to follow a left edge.

There are some situations in which it is safer to travel on the right shoulder of a road; this will be practiced in class, in the case that you need to travel on the right shoulder at some point.

The Importance of Indenting

Indenting in this context refers to a technique used when you approach an intersection on a road without sidewalks and you want to continue on the same road without turning down the intersecting road.

1. The dog will indicate the presence of an intersection by following the curve of the intersecting road to the left.
2. You will continue with the dog down the intersecting road until you have determined your dog has taken you off your original line of travel into an intersecting road; generally, this is 6 to 10 feet from the start of the indentation.

3. You will then stop and tell the dog to turn right. You can ensure that the dog does not turn more than 90 degrees by squaring off with your heels on the shoreline.
4. After listening for traffic, you will tell the dog “Forward.” The dog will cross the street and bring you to the shoreline on the opposite side.
5. Once you have identified the shoreline and praised the dog, you will then tell the dog to turn right, and the dog will follow the shoreline to the left at the intersection, putting you back on the original road.

Indenting is a technique used for safety and orientation. The dog’s movement to the left as he reaches an intersection gives you an unmistakable indication that you are at an intersection. If you were to cross without indenting, even a very slight veer could easily put you in the middle of the intersection, and it can be difficult to regain orientation due to minimal vehicle traffic present at many rural intersections.

Different Types of Shorelines

Commonly encountered types of shorelines:

- Curb and gutter
- Dirt road with grass shoreline
- Paved road with grass shoreline
- Paved road with dirt shoreline

No matter what type of shoreline is present in your environment, you and your dog each have responsibilities. The dog’s responsibility is to stay on the left side of the road and to indicate and work safely around obstacles. Your responsibility is to ensure that your dog is following the left shoreline and to direct your dog around obstacles after checking for traffic.

There are different methods that can be used to check that the dog is following the shoreline. Your instructor may direct you to use any combination of the following practices depending on how you and your dog are working together:

- Repeating “Over left” to have your dog stay true to the left line of travel
- Stopping to “Find the curb” even if it’s a grass line and not a physical curb, and sliding your foot forward to locate the shoreline
- Using a white cane, stopping the dog and gently sliding to the left to locate the shoulder

- Using food rewards when the dog is close to the shoreline

As you and your dog gain experience as a working team, you will learn how often you need to check the shoreline. A good guideline for a typical new team is once per block, whenever your dog navigates around an obstacle, and whenever you hear an oncoming vehicle; however, you may be advised to check more or less frequently depending on how you and your dog are working together.

Commonly-Encountered Obstacles and Distractions

Typical obstacles encountered in non-sidewalk travel include parked vehicles, mailboxes, overhanging tree limbs or bushes, storm drains, and garbage cans.

- We prefer dogs in training and new guide dogs stop in front of the obstacle so the handler can identify it and wait to be directed around the obstacle and back to the shoreline on the other side. This is because we want you to know that your dog is leaving the shoreline for a reason as opposed to leaving the shoreline for a distraction. It is also because this method allows you to listen for traffic before directing a dog into the street around an obstacle.
- Many experienced dogs will navigate around obstacles without stopping to indicate them. This is acceptable as long as there is no traffic present and as long as the dog returns to the shoreline once he has passed the obstacle.

Typical distractions you may encounter in areas with no sidewalk include wild animal scents and droppings, barking dogs (either behind fences or loose), and trash put out on garbage pickup day.

- Your dog may have more interest in exploring distractions because an area without sidewalks typically does not require as much concentration on work as an urban or suburban work environment, and you may have to be more aware of redirecting or correcting for a distraction.
- Some dogs may pull harder than normal because they have fewer obstacles to slow them down and they are excited by the smells and sounds of a rural environment; others may pull less than normal because they are bored in an environment that they perceive as non-challenging.

- It is a good idea to carry the Gentle Leader in areas without sidewalks, in case it is needed to manage environmental distractions.