

## Teaching Your Dog to Dock Dive: Part 2 (Form and Distance)

Before giving any exercises or steps, let me emphasize the goal of all dock diving: **Having FUN with your dog!** You can have fun whether your dog jumps 3 feet or 25 feet...whether your throw is right on target or 6 feet off. So while these steps should help you and your dog improve on the dock, they are not necessary to have a great time enjoying being with your dog!

If you've gone through the steps in [Part 1 \(The First Jump\)](#), your dog should be comfortable going off the dock. He's jumping a short distance, probably less than 10 feet. But, of course, you would like to see improvement.

First, you need to understand the two different type throws. One is called "**Place and Send.**" This is usually for the dogs who do not have a good sit/stay. Some dogs, however, jump better for this type throw even though they sit/stay quite well.

For the Place and Send method, the handler throws the toy out into the pool. They then take the dog to the back of the dock and release him to jump for the toy.

### Pros of the Place and Send method:

- Dog does not need a good sit/stay
- Handler does not need a good throw

### Cons of the Place and Send method:

- Dog does not get much height to his jump.
- Often jumps are shorter because there is no height (called a flat jump). There are, however, many dogs who jump awesomely using this method.

Here's a photo of one of Spud's very first jumps. It is a typical flat jump. (This was when he was just beginning to dock dive.)



The other method of throwing is what most handlers use. It's called the "**Chase.**" In doing the Chase, the handler puts the dog in a sit/stay at the back of the dock. He then walks up to the edge of the dock, releases the dog to run down for the toy. When the dog is about 4-5 feet from the toy, the handler throws the toy out over the water, and the dog jumps out for the toy. In other words, the dog literally "chases" the toy.

### Pros of the Chase method:

- Dog gets more height to the jump. (Height adds distance.) Therefore, jumps are often bigger.

Cons of the Chase method:

- Handler must have a good throw. A bad throw can cause a bad jump.
- Sometimes it's difficult to get the dog to sit/stay.

Here is a series of photos from one of Sally's jumps in Easton, Maryland. It shows the Chase method done properly.







Notice that during the entire jump, Sally is totally focused on that object and stretching for it the whole time. When she leaves the dock, she is not jumping out over the water, she is jumping *up* and out. That's because I threw the object *up* and out. Sally getting that height (also called pop) gave her extra distance.

**The key to the Chase method:** the dog has to *try* and catch it. No need to actually catch it, but he has to think he's going to catch that object. If the dog is just jumping out to retrieve it in the water, he might have a good jump, but he gets no pop (height). He has to literally chase it, trying to catch it.

Here are some exercises that I have done or now do with Sally to get the Chase method working for us. You'll notice, ironically, most of these dock diving exercises are done on land, not on the dock!

### **Gaining Distance and Height: Land Training**

1. Play with your dog by throwing object to him to catch. Do this all the time...around the house, during training sessions, while on a walk. Get your dog totally focused on what you are holding and ready to catch it.
2. Work on a good sit/stay. The length of a competition dock is 40 ft., so your goal should be the dog sitting/staying 40 ft. from you. You should be able to get all excited and shake the toy all around while the dog

becomes excited, but remains in the sit/stay. Sometimes the excitement is so great the dog will cheat by inching his way up before being released. If your dog does that, go back and reset him.

3. Once your dog sits and stays, start releasing him to run to you and grab the toy from your hand. You want your dog to be comfortable with sitting/staying, being released, and going straight for that toy.

4. Start gently tossing the toy up in the air as the dog approaches you. Don't throw it way up in the air so the dog has to jump high to get it. You just want him to learn to grab it while 1) the toy is in the air, and 2) he's moving towards it.

5. Get a hurdle (or make one) with an adjustable bar. Hold the object over and slightly behind the bar so the dog has to jump up and clear the bar to grab the object. Start low, maybe only a foot high and work up in increments. I wouldn't take the bar any higher than 24 inches. This is a good exercise even after your dog is jumping well. I still do this with Sally occasionally.

6. Practice your throws. I can't emphasize this enough. The better your throw, the better you can keep that object right in front of your dog's nose while giving it the perfect trajectory, the better your dog's jump.

### **Gaining Height and Distance: On the Dock**

1. Up on the dock, when you release your dog, throw the object very short so the dog will catch it. You will be tempted to toss it way out there trying for a big jump. But at this point, you do not want a big jump; you want your dog catching the object. Keep his focus on the object. So as your dog jumps, toss the object very short so he will stay focused on it and actually catch it. Do this type throw many times until your dog equates jumping off the dock with catching (or trying to catch) that object.

2. Gradually, toss the object farther and father, along with a little higher, each time. Remember, you want your dog to stay focused on the object and trying to catch it.

3. If you have the means and ability, rig up something to hang the object out over the water. People have used broom sticks, hockey sticks, boat paddles, PVC pipes. Use your imagination. What you want is the object suspended about 10 feet out over the water and about 4-5 feet high. (You can always adjust it as you see necessary.) Either you hold it or have someone else hold it so the object is hanging out over the water. Make sure your dog sees the object (the first time this is really important), release him to jump up and out for the object.

Now, it's all up to YOU to throw that object where you want your dog to jump. If you throw it low, the dog is going to jump low. If you throw it off to the side, the dog will jump off to the side. If you throw it short, your dog will jump short. If you throw it flat, your dog will jump flat.

*Remember, once you've trained your dog to chase that bumper, that's exactly what he will do...no matter where it is thrown!*

So, if you throw it right out in front of his nose and at the perfect angle, your dog will have a great jump with lots of pop!

Here are some photos of Sally's and Spud's jumps with bad throws. You can readily see how a bad throw or a handling mistake can negatively affect the jump.

*Throw is short and behind her. Sally is putting on the brakes in mid-air.*



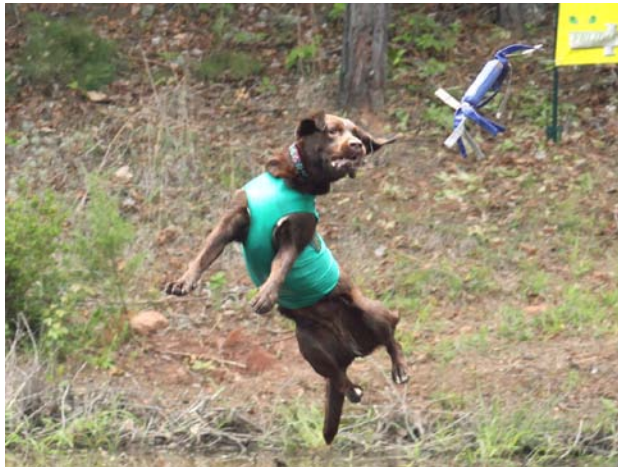
*Throw is short and too low. Sally is bending over to catch it.*



*Handler never had Spud's attention on the toy. Spud never focused on it at all.*



*Throw is off to the side. Sally is trying to stop and turning to the side instead of jumping straight out.*



*Throw is good, but Spud is not focusing on it...not even looking at it. Jump is flat.*



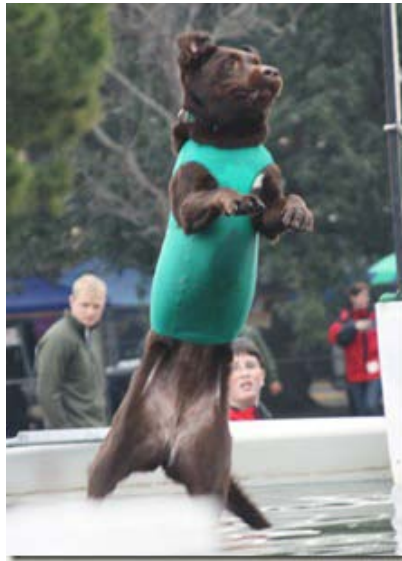
*Throw is off to the side. Spud stops stretching and focuses on object over to the side*



*Throw is too far. Sally stops stretching for it and goes straight in the water, giving up distance.*



*Throw is off to the side. Sally stops stretching and turns to watch the object.*



Now, here are some photos of good throws. Notice the difference in the jumps. Sally and Spud are reaching, stretching, and getting good height and distance. Notice the pop!







Again, let me emphasize the main goal of dock diving is to *have FUN with your dog*. In order to have fun, you do not need a perfect throw nor does your dog need a perfect jump.

So get up there on the dock....start throwing...and start jumping. No matter how it turns out, you will be successful because you will have had a great time with your dog, and the bond between the two of you will be even stronger.

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For more specific training techniques and advise, we suggest you contact [SportMutt](#).