

# Sizing your dog for a custom dumbbell

Measuring a dog for a dumbbell in AKC obedience is important for the Retrieve on Flat and Retrieve over High Jump exercises (typically in Open class and beyond). A properly sized dumbbell helps your dog hold it comfortably, pick it up easily, and present it cleanly without dropping or mouthing excessively.

AKC regulations simply state that the dumbbell must be **proportionate to the size of the dog**—there are no strict size charts or exact specifications in the rulebook. Judges focus on functionality rather than precise measurements, but a well-fitted dumbbell makes training easier and helps avoid issues like poor holds or refusals.

Most experienced obedience trainers and suppliers recommend sizing based on the dog's mouth, focusing on three key dimensions:

- **Bit length** (the straight bar the dog holds in their mouth)
- **Bit diameter** (thickness of the bar)
- **End size** (the “bell” or disc at each end)

Here's a beginner-friendly step-by-step guide to measure your dog at home. You'll need a straight pencil, wooden dowel, or similar thin rod (about  $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$  inch diameter to start), a ruler or tape measure, and a helper if possible. Use treats or patience to keep your dog relaxed—never force anything.

## Step 1: Measure the Bit Length (Main Bar Length)

This is the most critical measurement—the distance across the mouth where the dumbbell sits.

1. Have your dog sit or stand calmly with their mouth closed naturally (lips relaxed, not pulled back).
2. Gently place the pencil/dowel horizontally in the dog's mouth so it rests just behind the canine teeth. The bar should sit where the dog would naturally hold it—right behind the canines, not way back on the molars.
3. With the mouth closed, the dog's lips should touch or lightly rest against the bar on both

sides without being pinched or stretched.

4. Mark the pencil/dowel on both sides where the lips touch it (or just slightly inside where the lips meet the bar for a snug fit).
5. Remove the pencil and measure the distance between your two marks. This is your **bit length**.

•Tip: Many trainers round down slightly ( $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$  inch) for a snug fit that prevents side-to-side slipping, but don't go too small or it may spin in the mouth. For dogs with lots of lip/flew (like some hounds or mastiffs), size up a bit.

### **Step 2: Check/Estimate Bit Diameter (Thickness)**

- Start with a dowel or pencil about  $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{5}{8}$  inch thick.
- The bar should be thick enough that the dog can close their mouth comfortably around it without strain, but not so thin it spins or rolls when picked up.
- If your test dowel feels too thin (dog's teeth almost touch) or too thick (mouth gapes open uncomfortably), try a different size and re-test with Step 1.
- Common diameters:  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch for small dogs,  $\frac{5}{8}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$  inch for medium/large.

A thicker dowel often helps prevent the dog from rolling the dumbbell to the back of his mouth. You want the dog to be able to clench the dowel comfortably. It is possible for the dog to roll a thin doweled dumbbell even when the teeth are closed tightly. Also, a thin dowel on a wooden dumbbell tends to break easily.

### **Step 3: Consider End Size (Bells/Discs)**

- The ends should be large enough to allow for the dog to pick the dumbbell off the ground without hitting his nose, but small enough that the dog can see over them when picking it up (important for the retrieve).
- General rule: The ends should sit **just below the level of the dog's eyes** when held in the mouth (so the dog looks over them, not blocked). If necessary, you can cut squares out of cardboard and place them over the ends of the pencil/dowel. Look at the dowel/squares from two angles.

#### **(1) Straight on view (most important)**

Get down on the dog's eye level

- You should be able to see both of the dog's eyes in entirety over the bells, no matter

what position you rotate the bells to

## (2) Side view (dog's profile)

■ Bells should stick out beyond the dog's nose leather--allows adequate space for the dog to pick up the dumbbell without smooching his/her nose on the ground

Rough guide (adjust based on your dog's build):

- Small dogs (e.g., under 30–40 lbs): 1¾–2¼ inch ends
- Medium (40–75 lbs): 2¼–2¾ inch ends
- Large (75–110 lbs): 2¾–3 inch ends
- Giant (110+ lbs): 3–3½ inch ends
- Avoid ends so large they hit the eyes or floor awkwardly.

## **Final Tips for Beginners**

- Test the fit: If you already have a dumbbell (or borrow one), put it in the dog's mouth the same way. The bar should sit snugly behind the canines with lips resting comfortably—no big gaps or pinching.
- Comfort first: A too-large dumbbell can make the dog drop it; too small can cause chewing or poor presentation.
- Buy options: While it is ideal to have more than one dumbbell when competing, we recommend you only purchase one dumbbell to start, in case you need to adjust the size on additional dumbbells for a more accurate fit.
- Practice hold early: Once sized, teach a gentle “hold” and “give” before retrieves to build confidence.
- Ask for help: Your obedience instructor or club members can watch your dog hold a few sizes and give feedback.

With the right size, your dog will look more confident carrying it—good luck with your AKC obedience journey!