

# AKC Virtual Scent Work Test (VSWT) Regulations

*As of August 1, 2022 the VSWT will become a permanent program and will be published in the Regulations for AKC Scent Work upon the next reprinting.*

## CHAPTER 10. Titles, SECTION 12. Virtual Scent Work Test (VSWT)

**Section 1. Purpose of the Virtual Scent Work Test.** The purpose of the AKC Virtual Scent Work Test (VSWT) is to offer both dogs and owners a way to engage in an activity which utilizes a dog's natural ability to detect search items through self-reward and from the comfort of a home environment. This test will serve as an introduction and preparatory stage for a dog/handler team wishing to get started in detection work. They are able to work incrementally at their own pace, developing skills and confidence. When a team is ready, they can demonstrate basic competency in locating an item based on scent by taking this pass/fail test. The test must be recorded on video and submitted to the AKC to be reviewed by a judge. This is a great way to get started in Scent Work, maintain skills from your home or allow dogs bonding time with their owners which can help prevent boredom.

**Section 2. Eligibility.** The Virtual Scent Work Test welcomes any dog which is at least four months of age and is individually registered with the AKC, recorded in the Foundation Stock Service (FSS) program, is listed with a Purebred Alternative Listing (PAL) number, or enrolled in the AKC Canine Partners program. Owners needing to learn more can visit <https://www.akc.org/register/dog/> for more information and how to obtain eligibility.

**Section 3. Testing Format.** The Virtual Scent Work Test consists of three levels – Beginner, Intermediate and Experienced. Each level calls for specific types of search items be searched within a certain number of search areas utilizing different search environments. An environment can be different rooms or parts of the home's exterior. The search area is defined as a specific type of area within the search environment. A search area can be a garage, living room, kitchen, dining room or exterior space on the grounds of the home such as a front yard, back yard, driveway, detached dwelling, patio, deck or porch area. For the Experienced level only, an environment is defined as a combination of the interior and exterior of the home.

Each test level has its own set of testing criteria. Only one search item per search area is allowed for any test level. (*refer to the Testing Criteria table.*) For the Beginner level, the dog must find one search item, a choice of ball or toy or treat inside the home at floor level within one and a half minutes in one search area. At the Intermediate level, the dog must find two different items out of the following items – ball, toy, treat, on the grounds of the home's exterior at a height range of one to two feet in two and a half minutes across two different exterior search areas. At the Experienced level, the dog must find all three items - ball, toy, and treat within three minutes and across a combination of three search areas using interior and exterior environments and a height between two and three feet.

**Section 4. Search Items.** The search items used for the VSWT can be one, some or all of the following items depending on test level – ball, toy, treat. An example of a ball can be a tennis ball or a rubber ball. The ball should be similar in size to a tennis ball. An example of a toy can be that of a rope tug toy, a soft fabric toy, or a rubber squeaky toy or similar. All toys used should be relatively the same in size and should not exceed an approximate dimension of 6" wide x 4" long x 2" thick. An example of a treat would be a small piece of hotdog or a small milk bone. The treat used should not exceed an approximate size of 1" x ½". It is recommended the search item used be a size and shape that can be easily hidden around the home environment.

**Section 5. Virtual Scent Work Title Structure.** The Virtual Scent Work Test - Pilot Program offers three suffix titles. To earn a Virtual Scent Work Beginner (VSWB) title a dog must pass two different Beginner level tests on two separate occasions. To earn a Virtual Scent Work Intermediate (VSWI) title a dog must pass two different Intermediate level tests on two separate occasions. To earn a Virtual Scent Work Experienced (VSWE) title a dog must pass two different Experienced level tests on two different occasions. Higher titles supersede lower titles and titles must be earned in the order of difficulty starting with Beginner.

## Section 6. Conducting a Virtual Scent Work Test.

- A. The Blind** - To maintain the integrity of the search, it is required that during the placement of any search item, the dog must not be in the search area. The dog must be in another room or partitioned so there is clear separation and cannot see the placement of any item. For the purposes of this test, we will refer to the location where the dog is separated out of view, as the blind. While the dog is in the blind, there cannot be any visibility to the placement of a search item. Once all items have been placed, the dog can be released into the search area.
- B. Timing** - No hand timer will be used, the time shown in the video will serve as the official timing device. The countdown clock begins upon the dog's entrance to a search area and continues until the item is found. The collective time used to search for item(s) presented in a test, must not exceed the maximum search time allotted per test level.
- C. Separation of Search Areas** - A search area is an area within a search environment which is identified by a boundary or specific point of demarcation. If more than one search area is used and the separation between search areas are not well defined, the handler must verbally on camera show the judge during test setup, the point of reference which divides the two areas. The handler while describing the separation can reference an object as a point of separation from one search area to the next. Two search areas could be separated by significant objects or structures such as cones, ring gates, half walls, or fencing. Example: A large yard may have a row of shrubs which could be used to separate two areas of the yard.
- D. Movement Through Search Areas** – If after a dog successfully finds the first search item, additional search items remain, the dog may be directed towards the next search area or continue unassisted. Directing can be done verbally or in the form of walking the dog to the search area. The dog must be unassisted once the search area has been entered. A dog does not have to complete one search before moving to the next search area. A dog may work by searching out the items between the two search areas. Interior searches of the home should be off leash. If a search is conducted on the exterior grounds of the home, the handler has the option to work on leash. While searching on leash, the dog should be able to move freely and not be pulled or guided in the direction of the search item. Whatever way a test is configured, it must be clear to the judge when a new search area has been entered.
- E. Dog/Handler Team Communication** - During the search, the dog can receive encouragement but may not be led to the exact location of the hidden item. If the judge determines the dog is being assisted in locating the search item, the video will be returned. All decisions by the judge are final. If the dog mistakenly leaves a search area, the handler may verbally encourage the dog to re-enter the search area to continue to search. Praise and reward can be given once a search item is located. The VSWT program is meant to be a self-rewarding exercise, meaning that when the dog finds the item, keeping the item is the dog's reward. It must be evident to the judge when the dog has found the item. After the search, additional rewards and praise can always be offered.
- F. Placement of Search Items** - Each of the three test levels have their own testing criteria. When conducting a test, the correct type of search environment, area, and item must be used under the correct level as well as within the correct height range for placement of the item. Search items must not be placed near the entrance of the search area. The handler must make every effort to place the item furthest the entrance of a search area. It is important tests are setup to show the judge a reasonably challenging test was conducted. Handlers must utilize the surrounding of the home in a way that offers a quality test while understanding the VSWT is intended to show basic detection. It is important items are placed in a way that conceals them from view. Using cover such as leaves, pillows, or magazines can help prevent exposure. Examples would be placing a ball in a flowerpot covered by leaves, placing a toy on a chair behind pillows, placing a treat in a basket underneath a pile of magazines. When placing an item, the relationship and proximity of one search area to the next must also be considered and indicated verbally in the video for the judge. The dog must show a working effort in searching out the item in order to pass. Upon the dog finding the item, it must be clear the item found was the same item placed. Once the final search item is found the test is concluded and the dog may keep the item or bring it to the owner. No distractions are used for a Virtual Scent Work Test.
- G. Collars/Leashes** - Special Training devices that are used to control and train dogs, including but not limited to, collars with prongs, electronic collars used with transmitters, muzzles and head collars may not be used on dogs entered in a VSWT.

### Virtual Scent Work Testing Criteria

Test Level	Beginner	Intermediate	Experienced
Search Environment	Interior (Examples - living room, kitchen, dining room, bedroom, home office, bonus room)	Exterior (Examples - front yard, back yard, driveway, patio area, terrace, porch)	Combination Interior & Exterior (1 search item of the 3 must be placed in the interior and 1 search item of the 3 must be placed on the exterior)
Search Items	Ball or Toy or Treat	Any two of following items – Ball, Toy, Treat (the two items used must be different for instance you cannot use two balls or two toys or two treats)	All three items – Ball, Toy, Treat
Min/Max Height the Search Item Can Be Placed	Ground	1-2 ft.	2-3 ft.
Maximum Search Time	1.5 min	2.5 min	3 min
Number of Search Areas	1	2	3

The following scenarios are only suggestions. Tests should be set up to best utilize the surrounding of a home in accordance with the test requirements. Prior to the placement of the items, the handler has the dog remain in the blind where the search area and placement of an item is not viewable. Examples of the blind can be the dog stays in another room, a partitioned area or in a crating space out of view.

Beginner Level – The handler places an item such as a tennis ball in the search area which is the living room on the floor behind a basket near the fireplace. The dog has one and a half minutes to find it. The dog is released from the blind which in this scenario is a bedroom.

Intermediate Level - The handler places an item such as a rubber ball in a flowerpot covered by leaves in the front yard and places a treat under on an outdoor lawn chair on grass in the backyard. The dog is released from the blind which in this scenario is the garage and is let outside to begin the search.

Experienced Level – The handler places a tug toy under several pillows on a living room chair furthest from the living room entrance, a treat is placed on a shelf or open drawer of a nightstand furthest from the door in the bedroom, and a tennis ball is placed in a garden ornament in the backyard. The dog is released from the blind which in this scenario is the laundry room. The test may start from any of the three areas.

***Note: Each test conducted in a test level must be unique and not identical. For example: all tests submitted for Beginner cannot have the same tennis ball placed inside the basket by the fireplace for each test by the same dog. Each of the tests per level must be as diverse as possible by mixing up search areas and search items. A record of each test, test item and search area will be kept on file, on each dog's record.***

**Section 7. Video Requirements.** Each test conducted must be captured on video so that it can be submitted to AKC for review by an AKC approved Scent Work judge. In order for an approved AKC Scent Work judge to properly evaluate a dog's test, the video must meet certain requirements. The image quality of the video must be clear and not blurry. The video should be a pixel clarity of at least 720 which is a standard quality. A test may be conducted by one or two people so long as the video requirements are met. Some may find it easier to have a helper record the video throughout the entire test. Owners without a helper, may want to utilize a tripod or selfie-stick. The video must show that the dog is not able to see the placement of any search item. The video must show the dog being brought to a blind which is another room or partitioned space, so it is very evident the dog has no possible way to view the placement of an item. The location of dog in their blind must be shown in relation to the search area. If the possibility exists or there is a question as to the dog being able to view the placement of a search item, the video will be returned. While the dog has been placed out of view and is in the blind, the owner must present each item to be placed before the camera so the judge can clearly see what is being placed. While recording, the owner must carefully place each item in the necessary search area. It must be clear and visible to the judge where an item is being placed. If multiples search areas are being used the separation of each must be explained in the video by providing a point of reference to the judge. After the items are placed, the dog can be released from the blind to begin the search. At no time can the placement of items or view of the dog searching, be obstructed or blocked. The video must show the test being conducted in one continuous recording and must not stop/start or pause. At no time can the dog while under judgement be out of view or fall out of the camera frame. The searching dog must be viewable at all times during searches. Only one test can be recorded at a time. The judge will use the time on the video to determine if the length of time the dog took to search for an item was within the limit.

Below is a summary of steps that must be shown in the video. A video checklist is also included on the VSWT Entry Form as a reminder. Sample demonstration videos can be found online at: <https://www.akc.org/sports/akc-scent-work/>

1. Allow dog to enter and remain in the blind, so it is clear no viewing of the search setup is possible.
2. Pan from the dog blind to the search area(s) so the relation of the areas can be viewed.
3. Present and explain all search items to the camera for the judge to see.
4. Place the search item(s) in their search areas(s).
5. Multiple search areas that do not have clear separation between them must be explained using at least one point of reference, so the judge can understand where one area starts or another ends.
6. Return to the blind and release the dog to the search area to begin the search.
7. Continuously record the searching dog without interruption throughout all areas until all items are located.

**Section 8. Submission to AKC** – In order for the test to be reviewed, a completed VSWT Entry Form is emailed to [scentwork@akc.org](mailto:scentwork@akc.org) including the entry fee and the video link of the test or an attached a video file, typically in .mpg or .mov format. Video links can be created by using apps such as YouTube, Facebook, or Vimeo. One entry form is used per dog, per test. Upon receipt, the Scent Work Department will send an email confirming receipt and will forward the test to a judge for review. If the judge determines the dog was successful, the owner will be notified by email that a pass was recorded. In the event a pass cannot be recorded, a detailed explanation for the fail and notification the test can be re-taken will be sent to the owner.