

Training Basics

Training your dog does not have to be stressful or difficult. In fact, training with your dog should be fun and rewarding for both of you. Dogs are smart and love to learn, so training is a great way to engage and bond with your dog, prevent boredom, and make daily life easier in some cases. The tricks you can train your dog to do is limited only by your imagination! This resource will help you gain the basics to understand how dogs learn and how to use that to your advantage during training.

How do dogs learn?

Dogs are learning all the time. They learn by doing what works for them, **from their point of view**. If the dog wants attention and they do a behavior and get that attention (bark) they will continue to do the behavior to get your attention, because it worked! It doesn't matter if you yelled 'no', they got your attention, their goal was achieved.

Dogs learn best through positive reinforcement. Give them treats, toys, and praise for doing behaviors you want to see more of. Find what your dog really likes and their favorite things so they are motivated to learn. Ignore the behaviors you don't want to see. When you remove the reward for the behavior, they will stop, because it no longer works. If a dog barks at you and you ignore them (remove your attention), they will learn that barking is not the behavior that gets attention. But remember, they want your attention, so as soon as they are quiet (the behavior you want), give them your attention!

It is very important that all training uses only positive reinforcement. Punishment of any kind (a raised voice or even a stern "no") should be avoided as that can lead to escalated aggression or fear.

Set up your environment for success

Supervise your dog to prevent them from making choices that you don't want them to make. You're your environment 'dog proof'. Just like we baby proof homes, we can do the same for our dogs. We can help them have less choices that lead to behavior you don't want. When they can't get in the trash because it is closed in a cabinet or closet, they won't find a tasty treat that rewards the behavior of getting into the trash.

The Basics

1. Define the behavior you want your dog to do. Can you describe it without phrasing it like "Stop the behavior"? Example: Instead of "I want to train my dog to stop jumping" pick a behavior that they can do instead of jumping. "I want to train my dog to sit when I give attention".
2. If the behavior you want is complex, split it into small steps. The dog must first learn that sitting gets attention, before you ask it to sit every time a person enters the home.
3. Find what is motivating the dog to do the behavior and then plan your training accordingly. What does the dog get for jumping? Can you use the dog's wants to get a different behavior? Not every motivator is easy to identify. Dogs chew on things because it feels good. You need to give dogs opportunities to chew, but on appropriate items. A chew toy instead of the couch legs.
4. Use short term reinforcers (treats) to help teach behaviors and encourage new behaviors through **Luring**, **Shaping**, and **Capturing** techniques.
5. Speed of reward and consistency is vital. The dog should be rewarded immediately following the behavior and it should be rewarded every single time.

What is a Marker?

A marker is a signal that tells the dog the behavior they did was correct and a treat is coming asap! A clicker is the most common marker people know and use, but it can be anything. A whistle, a flashlight, a thumbs up gesture, a verbal "Yes!". As long as the marker has been paired with treats prior to training, it can be used. The marker is not general praise and attention, it should be brief, just an indication to the dog that a treat is coming. Markers help increase the speed of your reward and help connect the exact behavior you want to reward.

To use markers, you must first teach your dog that your marker means a treat is coming. Spend some time in a quiet room and do a few training sessions where you just use your marker and give a treat. If you pick a clicker, you will click then toss a treat. Do this randomly for a few minutes making sure the dog is doing something different each time, do this at least 20 times. Then repeat for a few sessions at different times of day and in different places.

Luring Technique

We teach some behaviors by luring the dog to show them what we want. Use a treat in front of the dog's nose and drag it to get the dog to move into the right position. Sit is often trained using luring by moving the treat from in front of their nose to behind their head, which makes the dog sit to follow the treat. Make sure not to tease the dog. If he doesn't get it, try something else or ask for something else.

Shaping Technique

Shaping is teaching through trial and error. Reward behavior that is close to the desired goal. If the goal is a shake, reward any movement of a paw first, then change the criteria for the to reward movements that are closer to the desired behavior (lifting the paw off the ground 1 inch). This technique can be frustrating in the beginning, so make sure you are asking for small changes until you get the desired behavior.

Capturing Technique

When you "capture" a behavior, it means that your dog naturally does the behavior and then you will mark that behavior when it happens and give a treat. If you want to capture a dog getting off a counter, you might click when the dog does it on his own a few times, add in your word 'off' as he does the behavior the next few times, then finally ask for it.

Tips!

- Keep the training lessons short but often. 10 minutes multiple times sprinkled throughout the day. Doing shorter sessions prevents the dog from becoming too frustrated while they are still learning.
- End on a positive note. You can finish the session with something the dog knows how to do so the dog doesn't become frustrated with these training activities.
- Reduce distractions during training, especially for new tricks.
- Scheduled training sessions can be done right before mealtime to increase your dog's motivation to eat the treats or food.

- Be patient! Dogs learn at different speeds and that's perfectly okay!
- Reach out for professional help if you are having trouble. That's what they are there for and training won't be fun or easy for you or your dog if you both are frustrated.

For more information, check out this website with many more details on the topics discussed here:

<https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/puppy-behavior-and-training-training-basics>

For help finding a trainer to work with, check out our website Resources page, or the link here:

<https://mcanimals.org/caring-for-and-training-your-pet/>