

How to Train Your Dog

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Introduction

Training a dog is much like training a toddler. You have a blank slate that one day you hope to grow into a confident and capable adult. Along the way, you can make many choices and choose among many methods. Of course, the easiest would be to hand over your dog to a professional trainer. While this could save you some time, this also causes you to miss out on the wonderful bonding experience you can have with your dog if you train him hands-on!

The purpose of this book is to show you just how easy dog training could be done at home. All you need are a few basic equipment (outlined in the book) and a lot of dedication. The four chapters offer you the basic building blocks to successful training, complete with tips and tricks to keep your sessions interesting and productive. That goes not just for your dog, but for you as well!

So save that money for the obedience school, and roll up your sleeves instead. This DIY training guide has you covered. Prepare for a lot of licks and furry hugs as you watch your dog grow the way you want them to!

Chapter 1

Training the Trainer

Your dog is, in a way, an extension of yourself and its environment. That is, it can easily pick up your attitudes and learn from how the environment works around it. This is why being informed on the best way to start a training program is most important when embarking on this journey. As they say, there are no bad dogs — only bad trainers.

What do you need?

Let's start with the materials needed for the training program:

Dog Treats. Dog training focuses on reinforcing behavior through rewards, so treats are a must. There are many varieties, so it's important to find the "flavor" and type your dog loves the most. Treats should be small and easy to eat. It is even possible to make these treats at home, such as cooked chicken bits. These ideally come in treat pouches which allow you to keep them by your side for all occasions.

Dog collar/harness. Aside from giving you a place to hang a nameplate, a dog collar also lets you control your dog. There's the martingale (flat) collar, which is just right when building positive reinforcement. There are some dogs who are innately difficult to control when outside on a walk, and in this case head halters or chain slip collars would come in handy. Those who really are stubborn and keep constantly pulling the leash may benefit from metal prong collars (these, along with chain slip collars, should always be used with caution and *only* when you are around!). And of course, there's now a variety of smart collars which contain various technologies as GPS and behavior monitors!

Dog leash. Training on a loose leash is essential for the discipline and health of the dog. Aside from encouraging them to learn, it also lets them exercise to their heart's content. As much as possible, avoid retractable leashes which let your dog wander at will (not a good idea to inculcate). The standard six-foot lead should do for walking.

Dog crate. In house training, dog crates are essential since they allow dogs a specific and confined space that can serve as their comfort place. It isolates them from household equipment (hence dissuading them from chewing or scratching on things) and yet lets you have easy access to them. This should be as comfortable as possible for the dog.

Chew toys. Speaking of chewing, these toys can provide both stimulation and entertainment by letting them chew something to their heart's content. Aside from saving your furniture, it teaches them which items are off limits for their budding jaws. When choosing these toys, however, check the ingredients to make sure they do not contain any chemicals which may be harmful for your dog.

Calming toys. Some dogs can grow fearful of certain things, such as loud noises or the voices of strangers. There are certain products that could help. However, this would depend on the specific fear of your dog, and hence would need the involvement of your veterinarian for assessment. While at it, you could also ask your vet for supplements or food items that could help calm your dog.

Clicker. This may depend on your training style, but you will find that a clicker helps a lot in training. After giving a treat, use the clicker so the dog learns to associate the sound with rewards. Later on, you can reinforce good behavior simply by clicker sound instead of having to hand a treat.

Set up a schedule

Training a dog is no small feat, and you need to block out the time needed for it. Ideally, training sessions happen around 2-3 times per day with each session only around 10-15 minutes. Dogs, especially young ones, tend to have short attention spans. Focus on one action for each session, to avoid confusion. Progress from the simplest to more complex actions slowly but steadily (more on this later).

All sunshines and rainbows

Just like in training humans, training a dog requires a happy and positive environment. By “positive”, we mean ignoring improper behaviors to focus on rewarding the good ones. This is where treats (and of course, praises) come in very handy.

Another perk of positive training is that it allows anyone from the family to join in. Normally, many punishment-based training routines (leash corrections included) would be very dangerous for the younger ones to perform. In contrast, positive reinforcement lets anyone just dispense treats and train the dog in the way you do. You don't need to scold, wrestle, or punish the dog in any way! Needless to say, these negative actions can rub off on your dog's temperament and can make them more aggressive or more fearful.

In positive reinforcement, it is important to communicate clearly with your dog on what he should do by dispensing rewards promptly. The more timely the reward is, the more likely it is the dog will learn which behavior he needs to repeat. In contrast, punishment is not so clear as your dog

would not likely be able to tell the real reason for which he was punished, even if the punishment was dispensed in a timely manner. For example, instead of the dog realizing that what he did was not okay at all, he may start thinking it's not okay only if he doesn't get caught (i.e., when you're not around). This can cause problems wherein the dog's behavior is different when you are at home and when you are not.

Beyond all these, the greatest reward for establishing a fun and positive environment during training (one where the dog is perfectly comfortable both with you and their surroundings) is the connection that it builds with your pet. Dogs are family members and lifelong companions, and can have an almost psychic-like connection with their owners. By keeping things positive, the dog would be happy and would be willing to learn more through rewards. Your pet would be looking forward to being with you and learning with you instead of hesitating because of the possibility of getting punished. This would strengthen the bond between you, letting you experience the true beauty of having a pet!

Chapter 2

The 5 Basic Commands

When humans start learning, we learn with small chunks of information that are then built up to more complicated tasks. This is the same thing with dogs! These 5 basic commands not only serve as foundations for your training, they are also useful in tackling wayward behavior. And of course, these commands create a line of communication between owner and pet, allowing you to convey ideas that can be understood and responded to.

Let's start!

Sit

This is the easiest of the bunch, and is also one of the most useful. To start, follow these steps.

1. Grab a treat and hold it close to your dog's nose while he is standing. This will get his attention.
2. Move the treat up, slowly as he tries to follow it with his head. This will cause his back side to lower, finally moving him to a sitting position.
3. Once your dog is in position, say "sit" clearly. Give him the treat and a heap of praises.

Depending on the nature of the dog, this will have to be trained everyday before he associates the sitting action with your command. Allow your dog to master it first before moving to something else.

Once he understands the basic command, train your dog to apply it to everyday activities. For example, you might want to have your dog seated before walks so that you can put his leash on easily. You might also want to have him seated before meals so he doesn't jump up before you can set down the food.

Come

This command is very useful outdoors, when you have to recall him without the leash. It's also useful in emergencies, when you drop the leash for example or if he wanders off while unattended.

1. Put a collar on your dog. This will let you "force" him to move during training.

2. Kneel down to the dog's level, and say "come". While doing so, gently tug on the leash until he gets to you.
3. As soon as he gets close, give him a treat and a heap of praises.

This command is fairly easy to master with a leash, but the real challenge is when you remove it. When doing this, you should practice in a safe area where nothing can harm your dog even if he fails the command. Practice regularly until he does it perfectly.

Once mastered, you can also practice it in tandem with sitting. You can have him sit then come to you.

Down

By nature, dogs are hunters and have an aggressive side. This command teaches them to suppress that and submit to the owner. This is also the reason why the command can be the most difficult of the bunch. In this command above others, a positive atmosphere is very important.

1. Grab a treat, ideally one that the dog finds particularly enticing. Hold it in your fist. Make sure to relax your hand, though — you wouldn't want to look aggressive with this fist.
2. Hold your fist out to your pet's nose, and let him have a sniff of the treat. Once he does that, move your hand to the floor and let your dog's head follow.
3. With his head tilted down, move your hand along the floor in front of his head so that his body follows.
4. Once he completes the position, say "down" clearly and give him the treat. Don't forget the praises!

As always, repeat this daily until he masters it without the treat. A common problem you will find is your dog sitting up or jumping up to get the treat. In this case, say "no" firmly and move your hand away. Never push him into position either — this will only cause problems along the way. Instead, do it step by step until he understands the behavior and responds to it. It may be confusing for him at first, but once it clicks then it's worth it!

Stay

Before teaching him this command, make sure he can do "sit" effortlessly first. The command starts off from the sitting position.

1. With your dog seated, place an open palm in front of your dog and clearly say "stay".
2. Step back a few paces, still keeping a hand in front. Let the dog focus on the hand moving away.

3. If he stays put for just a few seconds, give him a treat and praises.
4. As you progress, gradually increase the number of steps you are taking away from the dog. Give him a reward every time he stays.

Just like “down”, this can be difficult to learn for your dog since it teaches him to break away from his instinct of following you. Energetic dogs, or dogs who are afraid of being away from their owners, may have a harder time doing this command.

You can also practice the trio of “sit”, “come”, and “stay” in various order. This mental training will also allow your dog to respond to various commands in one sitting.

Leave it

Dogs are naturally curious, and may take a bite out of anything that appears remotely appetizing. The difficulty here is competing with that thing the dog finds intriguing, in order to get him to make an ultimately more rewarding choice.

1. Take two treats, one in each enclosed fist.
2. Show your dog one fist first. Let him smell it, then clearly say “leave it.”
3. The dog will try to get to the treat through various means. He may sniff, lick, bark, paw, or even mouth your hand. Ignore these until he stops.
4. Once he stops, show him the other hand where another treat is. Give him the treat, and his praises.
5. Over time, he will learn to move away from the first fist and wait for the second one when you say “Leave it”. You may also expand the lesson to gain his attention first before letting him have the treat. This will teach him to break all desire for the treat in your closed hand, as opposed to a dog that did back down but is still staring interested at the treat in the closed fist.

But this is not where the training for “leave it” stops. What if your dog finds something more enticing than the treat you currently have? For this leg you need two treats, one that is established to be his favorite and another that is “just fine”.

1. Say “leave it” and place the “just fine” treat on the floor. Cover it with your hand.
2. Once your dog stops going for it and looks up at you, give him his favorite treat instead and give him praises.
3. At each training, gradually move your hands away from the “just fine” treat. Ultimately, you should be able to just leave the treat on the floor and stand up while doing the command. Be ready to move and cover the treat with your feet, though, if he tries to get it.

Whichever command you are teaching, the most important thing is patience. Dogs try hard to understand the commands just as humans try hard to train dogs. Furthermore, not all dogs have the same level of intelligence, so some might find advanced training more difficult. If this

happens, drill him more in the previous level until he is ready to step up. It takes time, and ultimately it is a test for the trainer just as much as the dog!

In the next chapter, we will look more at how these 5 commands can be expanded into other sets of behavior suitable for the home and the leash.

Chapter 3

House and Leash Training

House Training

In essence, house training is the very first training your dog should undergo. It begins from the very moment that your dog is brought home! However, there's a fair chance your dog isn't a puppy seeing your home for the first time. Don't worry though, you can easily pick up and still train good habits. Just make sure to have extra patience, like in all training sessions.

Like in training commands, set aside a specific block of time to devote to house training. This includes getting up the same time each morning and taking your dog out. You should also make sure to feed your dog at the same time, and then take them out again after eating.

Keep a sharp eye for things like circling, pacing repeatedly, and sniffing, and the like. When you see this, get ready to get the door open. If you're not there when he starts excreting, take him outside to finish. The important thing here is to not reprimand or punish him aside from a firm "no". Instead, praise him as soon as he gets out so he starts understanding this is the preferred behavior. In case you find the mess afterwards but do not catch him red-handed, do not do anything to punish him. It's highly unlikely that he will associate that with the act and it will only serve to confuse him.

Choose a "catchphrase" for your command when you want the dog to go out. Something like "let's go out" or any variation would do. When going out, consistency is also key as you have to bring him out to the same spot every time. You've already heard that dogs mark their spot with urine, and once they associate this place as their toilet area it will be easier to train them. Again, keep the praises coming when he does desirable behavior.

You may use a crate to train him. This takes more effort though, as you have to visit him every 4-6 hours to let him out. This should be done even if you are at work! If you go by this route, get a crate that is large enough only to allow him to lie down. This will discourage him from soiling the area. Put him in the crate whenever you leave home, but never longer for half a day or he will be forced to defecate there.

If crate training isn't practical, you may take the longer route and assign a room where you will leave him when you're not home. This room should have a non-absorbent floor, with absorbent

“training pads” at one end and his favorite toys at another. If given the choice, dogs will mostly urinate on absorbent stuff so he will gravitate towards the training pads.

Don't get impatient as you go along. Remember, house training can take several months. Dogs by nature want to please their owners, but they first need to be taught how!

Another important aspect of house training is teaching your pet to socialize with the rest of the family. This may not be a problem when living alone, but is of paramount importance when you are with kids. As much as possible, expose them to different types of people and make sure he does not have any bad experiences with them. Adult dogs undergoing this process may require more treats to reinforce them during good behavior, but the process should be done more slowly.

Of course, the previous training would also come in handy. You may want your dogs to stay or sit when faced with strangers, or when faced with children's toys that they may find attractive (or, as is the case with some, scary).

Finally, make sure to lay some ground rules not just for the dog but for the family as well! Remember, the key is in ensuring the dog always has a positive experience in the home. Don't allow anyone to hurt or force the dog in anyway. Teach them not to interrupt the dog while eating, sleeping, or chewing on toys. And of course, never leave the young ones in the room with the dog unattended!

Leash Training

Leashes can be quite tricky. Depending on the temperament, some dogs may adapt to them almost instantly. Others put up a fight, and appear scared when seeing the leash for the first time.

To make things easier for both parties, introduce the leash not when going out but while still in the house. Start off in a room or any confined space. Clip on the leash, and leave your pet alone to adjust. He may walk around and drag it — that's how he'll get used to this new thing attached to his collar.

A common reaction might be chewing on the leash, which you will want to discourage. They may think of it as a toy, so keep some of his real toys at hand to distract him. If he still persists, you can buy an aversive and apply it to the leash (ask your vet which brand is best, so your dog does not ingest any harmful chemicals).

If the dog gets used to the leash, it's time to pick it up. Stay in the room and hold the leash as the dog does his thing. You may want to play around with a few commands while holding the leash, too. If you find signs of struggling, let the leash go and try again later.

It is also important not to pull on the leash to correct any behavior. Some leashes that restrict dog movement are only there to keep them from pulling too much. But intentionally pulling on the leash can associate it with negative experiences. Instead, use the commands you have taught your dog to dissuade him from unwanted behavior.

Like always, practice regularly, around 10 minutes each time at different times of the day. The goal here is to achieve loose leash walking. Use a catchphrase, maybe something like “walk with me” and start the walk. If he starts tugging, stop and don’t move until he settles down. This trains him to think that he can only move when there’s some slack in his leash. You may also start moving in random directions, to bring home to your dog the fact that he won’t get anywhere until he pays attention to where you want to go.

Finally, beware of distractions on the street! There are lots of things he can turn his attention to. You may try treats and praise to lure him away from distractions, but at the very worst you can move away from what is making your dog jittery. Still hand out those treats once you’re out of sight of the competition, to reinforce the good behavior of turning away.

Chapter 4

Making Training Fun

When we were young, most of our learning sessions at school and at home came in the form of entertainment. That is, our teachers went to great lengths to make training fun. This has been proven to make gaining and retaining new knowledge easier. And this is also the same for our dogs!

While we owners generally don't think of "fun" when getting ready for training, our pets see it differently. Having the opportunity to "show off" for their masters is exciting for them, and the prospect of earning treats for doing things right is also something they look forward to. Of course, making sure they train in a positive environment is also a great plus.

To make training even better for our furry friends, here are a few more tips you could use.

Switching Things Up

For the first sessions, consistency is the key. This applies not just to the time but also to the rewards you are giving. But as time passes, it's also a good thing to vary the treats you are handing out. For example, if you are used to handing out dry crunchy snacks for your dog, you may try going for something tender and moist for a change. This will engage their curiosity and excitement for that something new.

Of course, this will come with a bit of trial and error as your dog would prefer some treats over others. You can also use this as an opportunity to learn more about his preferences. Eventually, you can stick with the treat he likes the most. This also goes the same for your dog's toys — like children, getting a new toy can be very exciting for them.

As your dog becomes more responsive and adept at the skills you are trying to teach, you may also shake up the training schedule a bit. Sometimes, dogs can get "in the zone" when they see you preparing your training gear. Give them a pleasant surprise by doing impromptu training sessions complete with rewards.

You can also do it in different locations, such as while walking towards the park or while strolling around in your front yard. Note that it is essential these switch-ups come later when the basic training has already taken root in your dog. These sessions don't have to last long — even five-minute training can be rewarding for both sides as long as there is proper reinforcement.

Set the Right Mood

Another important thing when making training fun is ensuring you're in the right mood! Yes, dogs are like psychics — when you're sad, angry, or tense, it rubs off on them too. This is because even though you're smiling and talking in a cheerful voice, your emotions would find their way into your actions.

If you are feeling negative emotions, it would be much less harmful to skip sessions that to go through with them and let them affect your dog. In fact, it would be best to minimize contact with your dog during these times. You would notice that dogs tend to fool around or avoid direct contact during these times as well, since they wish to avoid any form of confrontation. Once you're emotionally ready, you can proceed again with your dog's training.

It's not just your emotions you need to keep in check, too. If your dog doesn't seem to be enjoying training, you need to double down on your efforts. A happy dog appears cheerful during training, and is excited when he realizes that a session is about to begin.

Find the Right Balance

The scale can easily tilt to the opposite end, and too much fun can cause your dog to be distracted. This is more often the case when your pet is in a new environment, where there are lots of new things for him to try out besides training. This would warrant a return to a more familiar or more quiet environment. You might also want to check that the rewards you are offering your dog are exciting enough.

Balance also comes into play when chaining together commands, such as in the “doggie push ups” we'll discuss later. A common problem with training multiple commands in succession is that the dog learns the order and memorizes it for future use. So when you chain together “sit” and “down” often enough, your dog may lie down immediately after “sit” even though you didn't (and didn't plan to) give the command!

To make sure this doesn't happen, balance out fixed sequences with random commands. This not only prevents unwanted behavior, it also poses a fun little challenge for your dog. Make sure to offer a little more reward after a successful sequence of commands to drive home your dog's achievement!

Games and Tricks

This requires a little more of an effort, but you can always bring games into the mix! For example, you can have a toy and have the dog take it, and start a little game of tug of war.

Aside from training the dog to not let go until you give the command to leave it, it's also a great little physical game especially for breeds that require a lot of activity. An even more physical activity is alternating between the sit and down positions, which is like push ups for your pet. As mentioned above, though, you should always mix up these two tricks with others so your dog doesn't learn to "anticipate" your next command.

Of course, games should also train your dog's mind. The classic game where you put a toy or treat under a cup and hide it among similar cups is good for training your dog's cognitive skill. While this will not make a K9 out of him (at least not yet), this will make him sharper and smarter as he gains reasoning skills.

It is also possible to "trick" a dog into learning while still keeping it fun. The training technique called "capturing" makes use of the dog's pre-existing mannerisms which are then called on cue. For example, if a dog likes pawing in the air in a high five fashion, you can "capture" this behavior and associate it with the "high five" command through positive reinforcement. This way, your dog gains a new skill that doesn't have to be learned from scratch. Furthermore, he'll be happy that he gets rewarded for something he does naturally!

And finally, don't stress your dog out by trying to make him learn too many things at once in a training session. You may go for accuracy in one, and speed in the other, but it's too much to expect both. By taking little steps, you not only allow the dog to master his new skills but also prevent him from feeling disappointed in himself because he was not able to please his master!

Conclusion

Of course, dog training does not just stop with the five commands listed here, or with the games, tips, and tricks you've read about. The things you have read in this book are mere building blocks, from which you could branch off. You can use the same luring techniques outlined in Chapter 2 for different commands, for example, or use the concepts in Chapter 4 to build up more complex behavior. As mentioned before, your dog is a blank slate that is happy to be molded by you, provided you have enough patience and dedication to doing so. Just don't forget to enjoy every step of the way, and make sure your dog enjoys it too!

In parting, remember that the most important element of training is the bond you are building with your pet. It's this bond that is the end-all and be-all of having a pet, and your training sessions should be nothing but instruments to nurture and enjoy this bond. It will not always be sunshine and rainbows in your life, but your pet will be happy to endure anything with you so long as you trained him right. Your dog would always be grateful to see you smile at him, just as you will forever be grateful to have that innocent furry smile everyday.

Cheers to dogs, and their trainer-owners that love them!