



TRAINING TIPS FOR YOUR DOG
William F. Doverspike, Ph.D.
and HR Twin Branch Karma's Hunter, SH, AX, AXJ, UDX3
2001 Canine Disc World Championship Finalist (IDDHA)

Drwilliamdoverspike.com
770-913-0506



Want to know the secret of dog training?

Practice *labora at ludere*. Work and play; play and work. Turn your work into play, and turn your play into work. In other words, make your training sessions playful; when your dog is playing, sneak in some training.

Want to get your dog to sit more quickly?

Make desired events contingent on required behaviors. For example, require him to sit before he gets a treat. Require him to sit before you serve his meal. Require him to sit before he walks out the door with you.

Want to get your dog to sit longer?

Reward “stay” gradually, building up time and distance slowly, and always return back to him before he “breaks” his stay. Eventually, your dog can learn to do an “out of sight” sit stay for five minutes or more.

Tired of those shoes being chewed-up?

Get a newspaper, roll it up tightly, and then hit yourself over the head with it for leaving your shoes where your dog has access to them. Remember: Never underestimate the destructive power of a dog’s mouth.

Can’t get that dog to come when called?

Have you ever noticed how fast your dog runs to the door when the doorbell rings? That’s because she has learned that there’s a reward at the door. Make sure you always reward the behavior you want.

Are you learning to use the “click-and-treat” method of training?

Remember: The “treat” should be a reward, which can be a food treat but for herding and sporting breeds it can also be a tug, jump, retrieve, or “fun bumper.”

How long should a training session last?

A good rule of thumb is to stop training before your dog does. Stop before your dog loses attention. At first, that may be a few seconds. Later, it may be several minutes. Either way, always end on a positive note.

Would you like your dog to lie around more?

Then catch her doing just that! Be quiet, careful, and gently give her a treat whenever she’s laying around. Eventually, she’ll do more of what is rewarded. Just be careful that you do not reward her for jumping up when she hears the cookie jar opening, because that’s the behavior you’ll be rewarding.

Having trouble ignoring a behavior?

Behaviorists and competitive dog trainers often use “extinction” to eliminate or decrease the frequency of a target behavior. However, behaviorists know that ignoring a behavior initially results in an “extinction burst” or increase in the target behavior before the behavior actually begins to decline. Be patient and persistent, or you will actually train the behavior to be more resistant to extinction.

Can't get that dog to quit pulling on the leash?

Quickly turn and walk in the other direction. "Oops! Where were you, Nugget? Good Nugget!" Be sure to treat Nugget when she gets into heel position. Dogs quickly learn when to pay attention—and when to not pay attention.

Is your dog having an occasional house-breaking accident?

Dogs are creatures of habit. Do reward your dog for eliminating on a regular schedule. In other words, "same time, same place." Don't rub your canine friend's nose in it, because it will cause fear, which makes matters worse.

Is your dog having elimination accidents?

Consider medical problems first. Have your veterinarian check your pet for any urinary tract or gastrointestinal disorders. Check dietary changes. Did Fido gulp a gallon of sea-water yesterday? Once physiological causes are ruled out, use a behavioral program for consistency.

Want to get your dog to sit more quickly?

Learn to use what behaviorists call the "limited hold." Establish your criterion, ignore slow sits, and reward only those sits that are "quick sits."

Want to teach your Dog "stay" in a sit?

Use successive approximations--by gradually lengthening the amount of time your dog "stays" before you reward the "stay." Go slow, be sure to raise your criterion gradually, and don't ask for more than your dog can give.

Are you clicking quickly enough?

Competitive dog trainers understand that the biggest mistake that novice trainers make in clicker training is clicking too late. A late click means the target behavior will not be rewarded. Are you clicking quick enough?

Does Buffy grab that sock and run around with it?

Instead of playing the chasing game that dogs enjoy, try running away with a treat of your own. Then when Buffy runs after you, do a "food exchange" in which she receives a treat in exchange for releasing the sock.

Want more energy from your dog during training sessions?

If you want him to be more energetic when you're training, then you've got to be more energetic when training. Remember: energy in; energy out!

Want that dog to fetch the ball more quickly?

Then always leave him wanting more. Be sure to stop the game before he stops. Put up the tennis ball or flying disc. That way, he'll look forward to the next session.

Do you find your dog constantly pulling on his leash when heeling?

Don't pull, because he'll learn to pull more. Just use a gentle "pop and release" so that there's a consequence for his pulling and a reward for his heeling.

Are you feeding your dog junk food when training?

Be sure to look on the label to ensure that you are treating your dog with a nutritious treat. Many commercial brands of food consist of mostly flour rather than protein. A good training treat should provide at least 20-25% protein.

How long should a training session last?

It often depends on the dog's age, developmental stage, genetic background, and the work ethic that's been instilled by training.

How long training to too much training?

A good rule of thumb for beginners is to stop the training session before the dog stops. Either way, end on a positive note.

Tired of having your favorite teddy bear or stuffed animal destroyed?

Your toy? How does your dog know that it's not her toy to destroy? If you don't want it destroyed, don't leave it out in the open.

Does your dog seem bored with his toys?

Rotate them. Store some of the old toys, and take them out later, when Fido finds them more interesting. Even better, make a big fuss over the toy like it's your most precious possession in the world. When Fido becomes interested, play keep away and then quickly put up the toy. Repeat this for a week, and soon Fido will have some renewed interest.

How long should a training session last?

As long as the treats last. Seriously, one rule of thumb is to take a small handful of treats, keep them in the "treat pocket," and then end the session when the treats run out.

Is there a certain behavior that you are trying to establish in your new dog?

Let him work for dinner. Doing a little training before feeding time can do wonders for the "learning curve." To keep making progress, just be sure to stop while you're ahead.

Does your dog understand what is being asked of her?

Look at her behavior. Dogs don't "know" things as much as they react to things. If you want to know if Nugget "knows" something you've taught her, look at her behavior.

Are you learning to use the "clicker" as a training aid?

Remember: Click the behavior, and reward the position.

Ever find yourself having to repeat a command?

Reward for dog for sitting when you say, "Sit." Don't repeat the command ("sit, Sit, SIT!") or you will be teaching your dog to sit only when you've given the command several times. Have a reasonable expectation, establish your criterion, and then stick to it.

Does your dog "know" what to do but still ignore you?

Dogs don't understand English, and they don't understand grammar. They detect inflections, discriminate sounds, and decipher body language. If your dog doesn't understand you, maybe it's because you don't understand her.

Are you rewarding quick enough?

A target behavior should be marked and rewarded immediately. If you wait more than three seconds, you've waited too long.

Want to know the secret of good dog training?

Turn your training into play sessions, and turn your play into training sessions. In other words, make your training sessions full of play, and keep your play sessions filled with some training.

Are you consistent in your training?

Dogs don't generalize well, but they discriminate very well. Make sure that you are reinforcing the behavior you want each time you reward.

Is your dog inconsistent in performance?

Again, dogs don't generalize well, but then discriminate very well. Make sure you are training the behavior in each and every place and location where you expect the behavior to be performed.

Don't believe in "totally positive" training?

Most competitive dog trainers agree that at least 90% of a dog's desired behavioral repertoire can be taught through the use of positive reinforcement alone. Ethics aside, if you err on the side of positive reinforcement, you may maximize benefit while minimizing harm to your canine companion.

Want to do "totally positive" training?

Behaviorists have defined four operant learning paradigms, including positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment (also called "response cost"). Ethics aside, each learning paradigm has its own costs, benefits, and consequences. Be sure to understand each of these paradigms before you use them.

How much should a dog be trained during a session?

It is better to have several short training sessions throughout the day than to have one long session. In other words, 10 minutes here and there six times a day is better than 60 minutes one time a day.

Trying to teach your dog not to jump up on others?

Try teaching an incompatible behavior, such as sitting (and then receiving a treat) when she approaches you. Another option is to engage in an incompatible behavior yourself, such as abruptly turning away from her when she jumps on you. Then, pet her when she sits.

Don't want a "counter-cruiser" in your kitchen?

Then don't feed from the counter. Dogs learn to cruise the counters when they learn there are rewards there.

Are you rewarding quick enough?

Competitive dog trainers know that one of the biggest mistakes in dog training is to not reward the desired behavior soon enough. Waiting two seconds is waiting too long. A target behavior should be rewarded immediately. Otherwise, you may be rewarding a behavior that follows the desired behavior.

Can't get that dog to come when called?

Try running the other way. Say your dog's name, laugh out loud, and then begin running away. By stimulating his prey-drive, you will stimulate your dog's interest in chasing you. Be sure to give him a treat when she gets to you.

Don't want a "couch potato" in your den?

Then don't let him on the couch. Dogs learn by habit, and dogs learn quickly. Three times makes a habit.

Can't get that dog to come when called?

Be sure that you give her a treat or reward when she comes. Remember: Treats are important; never leave home without them.

Can't get that dog to come when it's time to take a bath?

Don't ever call your dog for an unpleasant task such as an ear-cleaning or even a bath. Instead, simply go get her, calmly and gently, so that she does not learn to avoid coming when called. Call your dog only when you can enforce and reinforce the behavior of coming when called.

Can't get that dog to come when called?

Play the “restrained recall” game. It takes two, plus the dog. Take turns calling your dog, who will enjoy the game of running from one person to the other. This game will also help the dog to learn a “go” and “go out.”

Can't get that dog to pay attention?

Make sure that you are paying attention to her. In dog training, we teach attention by giving attention. Attention starts with the eyes and ends with the treats.

Is tugging okay?

Many dogs love to tug, and many competitive dog trainers teach their dogs to tug as a reward for a good performance. If you tug, be sure that you end the session with “out” or “give” so that you take the rope or toy. Otherwise, you are teaching Buffy to win at tug-o-war.

Tripping over your dog?

Find yourself tripping over that dog who you can't get out from under your feet? Who's watching who? Just walk through the room and give her a bump. Oops! Dogs learn quickly. He'll learn to watch for you coming next time.

Is your new dog too excited when training?

Then settle down. If you get too excited, so will your dog.

Are you feeding your dog junk food?

Many competitive dog trainers feed 25% to 35% of their dog's diet in the form of high quality “training treats.” Professional animal trainers often make their work for 75% of their food. If it sounds cruel, most wild carnivores work for 100% of their food. Be sure to look on the label to ensure that you are treating your dog with a nutritious treat—not processed cereal.

Want her coming back for more?

No matter what happens during a training session, always end it on a positive note. If the session hasn't been going well, then back up a bit and practice some basic skills that your dog knows well. Always end on a positive note so that she will be looking forward to her next training session.

Bill Doverspike has enjoyed training dogs and trying to understand the dog's mind since 1970, when he shaped behaviors in a dog as part of an operant conditioning experiment as a freshman in college at Emory University. Bill was involved in various aspects of competitive dog training for 25 years since earning a Companion Dog obedience title on his first Golden Retriever, Apollo of Westchester (1983). Bill's best known friend was Hunter, a Golden Retriever titled as HR Twin Branch Karma's Hunter, SH, AX, AXJ, UDX3, also known as the “land shark.” Hunter was also a certified therapy dog who competed in the 2001 IDDHA Canine Disc World Championship and who earned a total of 15 titles in four different canine sports including obedience, agility, field and hunting tests, and Frisbee®. Bill works with approximately 20 dogs a week as an Instructor at Canine Capers Dog Training Club in Norcross and at Sirius Dog Agility Training Center in Atlanta. When he is not training dogs, Bill works as a clinical psychologist who is board certified in Neuropsychology and Medical Psychotherapy.

Frisbee® is a registered trademark of Wham-O, Inc. U. S. Trademark Reg. No. 679,186, issued May 26, 1959.

Copyright © 2008 by William F. Doverspike, Ph.D.
Content last updated 2008.

The correct citation for this article is Doverspike, W. F. (2008). Training tips for your dog. <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>