

TRAINING

REX IN THE CITY

**BASIC OBEDIENCE
FOR DOGS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NANCY CLARKE

In addition to her role as Manager of the City of Vancouver Animal Control Services, Nancy is working toward a PhD as a graduate student in the Animal Science Department at the University of British Columbia. She is researching the environmental risk factors for canine aggression.

Nancy has a master's degree in social work but has had a parallel dog-training career. She trained her first dog when she was 12 years old and has been training professionally and providing dog obedience instruction to others since 1973. Nancy combined both of her professional interests under the name Pacific Canine. She offers counselling and assistance to people living with dogs who have behavioural issues and she provides pet-loss counselling. Nancy has also been active in the therapy dog movement, first as the Provincial Evaluator for the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program, then as the program's Provincial Director, and now as an advisor to the National Professional Advisory Board. For her contribution to the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program, Nancy was nominated and inducted into the Order of St. John.

Nancy has varied and extensive dog training experience and has been a competitor in numerous dog sports including: CKC conformation; obedience, tracking and retriever trials; and Schutzhund. As well, she has dabbled in the sport of canine agility as part of the Agility Association of Canada and in stock-dog training as part of the BC Stock Dog Association.



ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ANIMAL SHELTER

The Vancouver Animal Shelter is operated by the City of Vancouver. The shelter is a refuge for lost or abandoned dogs. Many dogs rescued by the shelter come from unhappy situations. Ever considered adopting? Providing a loving home to a deserving dog can change his life, and yours! The shelter also administers the City of Vancouver's dog licensing program and provides information on responsible dog ownership. If you live in Vancouver and own a dog that's older than three months, please buy him a licence. It's his best chance of being identified and finding his way home to you if he ever gets lost.

Vancouver Animal Shelter
1280 Raymur Avenue
Vancouver, BC V6A 3L8
604.871.6888
vancouveranimalshelter.ca

The shelter is open for animal viewing Monday to Friday, 10 am to 8 pm,
and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am to 4 pm.

TRAINING REX IN THE CITY

BASIC OBEDIENCE FOR DOGS

BY NANCY CLARKE

To my dogs, past and present,
for all they have taught me.

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PREFACE

This manual will help you teach your dog the basics of obedience. The beginner level exercises will introduce fundamental control commands and give you basic control of your dog.

While the approach I've taken in this manual will meet the needs of a wide range of pet owners and their dogs, it's by no means the only effective one. Nor are the methods the last word in all dog-training issues. If the techniques in this guide aren't right for your dog's particular training needs, ask your veterinarian to recommend a dog obedience trainer.

A well-trained dog makes for a better behaved pet, a better relationship between pet and owner, and a safer city. Be patient with your pooch, and yourself. You're both on the learning curve. Happy training!

Nancy Clarke

NOTE: For simplicity's sake, with no disrespect to females of any species, in this guide an individual dog is a "he."



TABLE OF CONTENTS

What’s inside 4

Week 1 – Preparations; Rules to train by; Basic dog training theory;
 Positive and negative reinforcement; Corrections;
 Hand signals; About your daily practice sessions;
 Learning problems.....5

Week 2 – Sit on command; Down on command; Heel on leash21

Week 3 – Sit on command; Down on command; Heel on leash
 (Change of direction; Right U-turn, Left U-turn);
 Automatic sit; Stays.....26

Week 4 – Sit on command; Sit-stay; Down on command;
 Heel on leash (left and right turns); Come fore;
 More about the “Front”34

Week 5 – Sit on command; Sit-stay; Return to the dog on the sit-stay;
 Down on command; Heel on leash; About-turn;
 Automatic sit; Come; Down-stay38

Week 6 – Sit on command; Sit-stay; Come; Down on command;
 Heel on leash (change of pace); Down-stay.....42

Week 7 – Sit on command; Sit-stay; Heel on leash; Come;
 Formal recall; Down-stay46

Week 8 – Sit-stay; Down-stay; Heel on leash; Formal recall49

WHAT'S INSIDE

Lesson plans

There is one lesson plan per week for eight weeks. The lessons proceed step by step in teaching your dog basic obedience, with each lesson building on what came before.

Optional exercises

You'll also find optional exercises that you might want to teach your dog. They're interesting, but not essential. They'll be in boxed sections.

GETTING STARTED

Before you start the training program, some preparation is needed.

- 🐾 First, read the Week 1 lesson plan, including the "Introduction to dog training," and follow all the instructions. It will give you some useful background and explain some of the theory behind the training. Completing Week 1 may not take the whole week, but be sure you have read and understood this section before you start training.
- 🐾 There is one lesson plan per week for Weeks 2 - 8. Each builds on the skills of the previous week(s), so it's important to complete the preceding lesson before advancing to the next.
- 🐾 Spend a whole week on each lesson plan. Don't skip ahead.
- 🐾 For best results, train your dog at least 30 minutes each day. Two 15-minute sessions are ideal.
- 🐾 Read the whole lesson plan for the week before starting. As you read, visualize what you're trying to achieve. Try to picture what the exercises will look like – and how you'll teach the skill. It's very helpful to reread individual sections before starting to teach – or even go through the motions without the dog at first.

LESSON PLAN

WEEK 1



PREPARATIONS

Get the right equipment

- ❦ Collar. A flat nylon or leather collar or a half-check training collar is best. The half-check collar is part nylon fabric and part chain link.

A choke chain is *not* recommended as this type of collar is implicated in doing damage to the esophagus. For this reason and because these collars have the ability to choke a dog to death, many consider them dangerous and inhumane. Although people do not intend to harm their pets, these collars are very easy to misuse. Despite the drawbacks, some people will decide to use this type of collar for training. If you do, it is imperative to understand how to use it properly – and for this reason, this manual includes a discussion of the correct placement and the best technique for using the choke collar (see page 25). However, it bears repeating that this is a dangerous collar. It should *never* be left on the dog. It should be taken off as soon as the training session is over.

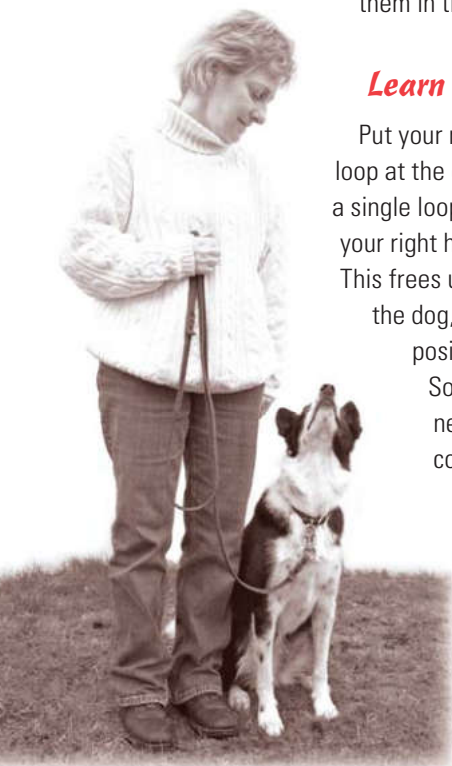
- ❦ Six-foot fabric or leather leash. A chain leash is *not* acceptable. Buy a leash that is flexible and you can hold easily. New leather leashes are often stiff; soften them with mineral oil. If you have a small dog, make certain that the leash and clasp are appropriate for the dog's size. Oversized, heavy equipment will tire out a small dog.
- ❦ 30-foot long line. Nylon or cotton webbing or polypropylene rope with a hasp on one end. Again, make sure it is an appropriate weight for the dog.
- ❦ Food tidbits. Soft food such as cubes of cheese or bits of hot dog.
- ❦ Toy. A ball or favourite dog toy.
- ❦ Fanny pack. For carrying the food tidbits.

Visit your veterinarian

Make an appointment to see your veterinarian to make certain that your dog has no health issues that could interfere with training. Deal with any problems before starting any training, and make certain your dog's vaccinations are up to date.

Get to know the characteristics of your dog's breed

Visit the library or browse the Internet for information about the special characteristics of your dog's breed and how you can make use of them in training.



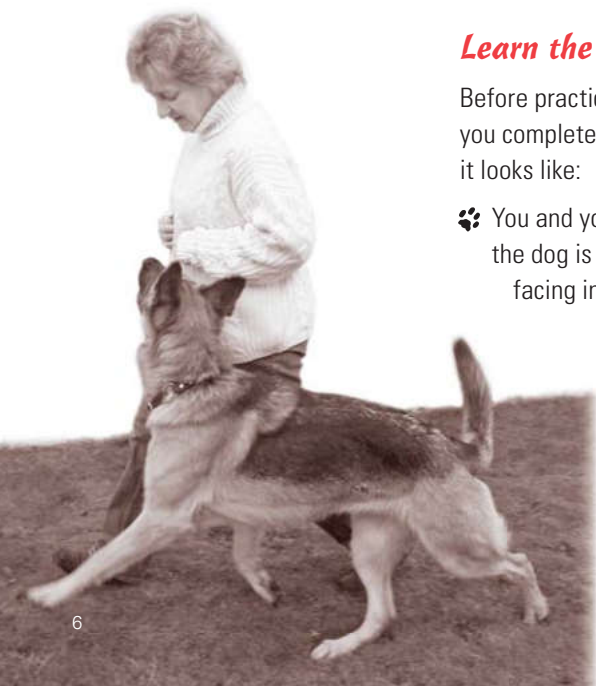
Learn to hold your leash correctly

Put your right thumb through the loop at the end of the leash. Make a single loop and hold the loop with your right hand near your waist.

This frees up your left hand to pet the dog, give him treats or help position him, as necessary.

Sometimes when it's necessary to give a collar correction, you may need to hold the leash

with both hands but as soon as the correction is completed, free up your left hand again to praise and encourage the dog.



Learn the heel position

Before practicing any heeling exercises, be certain that you completely understand the heel position. Here's what it looks like:

- 🐾 You and your dog are in correct heel position when the dog is no more than four inches from your left side, facing in the same direction as you. Whether the dog is sitting, standing, lying down or moving next to you, he is in proper heel position when the area from his head to his shoulders is in line with your left hip/leg.



Before you begin the training exercises, read this introduction to dog training:

INTRODUCTION TO DOG TRAINING

Rules to train by

To make training a safe, productive experience for you and your dog, keep these tips in mind:

1. Unless an exercise specifically requires that you take the dog off-leash, keep your dog on-leash at all times while training.
2. Don't allow your dog to sniff, pester or play with other dogs before or during training sessions.
3. Don't feed your dog for at least four hours before training.
4. Before your training practice sessions, give your dog ample opportunity to relieve himself.
5. Take a plastic bag to practice sessions. If your dog defecates, clean it up.
6. Practise with your dog only if he is well rested. Moderate exercise a few hours before training is fine and may actually enhance learning for some high-energy dogs. But if your dog has played all day or has gone for a long hike, chances are that any practise sessions that day will not be effective.
7. Consult this manual before practising. Read and reread instructions. Then go and practise with the dog. Remember to be patient.
8. Practise. Practise. Practise. Dogs learn by repetition. Set aside time each day to train your dog. At the beginner level, a minimum of 30 minutes of practice per day is usually needed. It's always better to train for shorter periods, a couple of times a day, especially with younger or inexperienced dogs.
9. Rough or abusive treatment will not serve your training well. If a dog disobeys your commands, there is a better than average chance that the problem is with you, the trainer, not the dog. Rethink what you're doing, check the training manual to refresh your memory and try again.
10. Your dog should be clean (brushed) and free of fleas. If your dog is troubled by parasites or is experiencing skin or other grooming problems, talk to your veterinarian. Aside from being a health issue, a dog with such problems will have difficulty concentrating on the lessons and training progress will be slow.
11. If you're training the family pet, one family member should take responsibility for training the dog and for practising the lessons each day. Other family members should become familiar with commands and expectations, but it's usually easier on the dog to have the same family member act as trainer and take the dog through the course.

BASIC DOG TRAINING THEORY

Teach each new skill or exercise to the dog in three stages:

1. **Teaching Stage.** In this stage, the dog doesn't understand what you're asking of him. You're now teaching the dog, using various aids, to associate a particular word or command with a desired action or behaviour. During this stage, you *show* the dog what you mean when you say, "Sit." You use food and other aids to help the dog understand what you expect when you give the command.
2. **Correction Stage.** Start correcting as soon as you feel that the dog understands your expectation. Keep the food out of sight of the dog in this stage. If the dog responds correctly when you give the command, give him praise and a food tidbit, the motivator. If the dog doesn't give the right response, correct him to get into the desired position. Once he is in the desired position give praise – and the motivator.
3. **Proofing Stage.** This final stage starts only after the dog consistently performs the exercise correctly and no longer needs correction. The proofing stage seeks to ensure that the dog's response is reliable in less-than-ideal conditions. During this stage, you gradually introduce distractions while the dog works. If he becomes distracted, you teach him to continue to work. Teaching him to obey despite distractions helps make him a safe dog and reliable in any situation.

ABOUT TEACHING DESIRED BEHAVIOUR

Dog training is simply shaping the animal's behaviour to conform to what is acceptable to people.

- 🐾 First, we need to clearly define the desired behaviour.
- 🐾 Then we break down the behaviour down into small, achievable parts. This is known as "task analysis."
- 🐾 Next, we determine what needs to be taught first. Once decided, we begin by teaching this first element and reinforcing it until the dog understands it.
- 🐾 Then we move to the next logical element in the sequence, and so on. Each element builds on the previous element(s) until an entire behaviour is learned.

There are two kinds of reinforcement: positive and negative. In the teaching stage, we rely exclusively on *positive reinforcement*. Once we get to the correction stage of any exercise, we combine positive and negative reinforcement.



Positive reinforcement

A positive reinforcer is any thing or any action that the dog enjoys that, by itself, or in combination with others, will increase the likelihood that the dog will perform a desired behaviour again. Sometimes referred to as motivators, they can include food, play with a favourite toy, verbal praise, or physical stroking. It is important that the motivator be *positive* to the dog. If, for example, you were training a dog that doesn't like to be stroked (yes, there are some) then petting the dog when he has performed a desired behaviour would actually work against your training.

When the dog gives you a desired behaviour, particularly in the early stages of teaching a specific exercise, positive reinforcement should have the following component parts:

- 🐾 Verbal praise. Make it genuine and enthusiastic.
- 🐾 Stroking or petting the dog – if the dog enjoys it.
- 🐾 Food tidbit or play with a favourite toy or ball.

Negative reinforcement

Negative reinforcement is an action or stimulus that the dog interprets as negative, which by itself or in combination with other reinforcers will increase the likelihood that the dog will perform a desired behaviour again, or will reduce the likelihood that he will perform an unwanted behaviour again. Select a negative reinforcer that will manipulate the dog into correcting an unwanted behaviour by substituting it with a wanted or desired behaviour. Here's an example of a negative reinforcement. If your dog is pulling on the leash, you quickly step to the side and pop the leash and collar so that you slightly off-balance him. To avoid the discomfort, the dog stops pulling on the leash and instead, walks with a loose leash. Note that the dog has control over this situation. He can avoid the discomfort merely by correcting his actions, in this case, by walking at your left side and letting the leash go slack.

No place for punishment in dog training

The term negative reinforcement is often used interchangeably with the word "punishment." IN DOG TRAINING, THEY'RE NOT THE SAME THING.

Punishment:

- 🐾 Is usually dished out after the fact.
- 🐾 Usually has a negative emotional component, carrying with it frustration or anger.
- 🐾 Usually fails to give the dog a way out. He cannot correct a behaviour in order to stop the discomfort.

Punishment neither increases desired behaviour nor decreases undesirable behaviour. It's useless as a training tool and has no place in dog training.

Combining reinforcers

Combining negative reinforcement with positive reinforcement starts in the correction stage of an exercise. Here's an example. Say your dog is tugging on the leash. You say, "No pulling" and quickly step to the right and pop the collar to slightly off-balance the dog. The pop on the collar is negative reinforcement. To avoid the negative sensation, the dog backs off and stops pulling on the leash. You instantly say, "Good no pulling!" in an excited and obviously pleased voice. That's positive reinforcement.

This combining of reinforcers is your most powerful teaching tool and the dog's best opportunity to learn. Combining reinforcers sidesteps punishment by giving the dog an acceptable, alternative behaviour *and* helps name that behaviour: "No pulling." If you apply the correction effectively each time the dog pulls the leash tight, he'll learn not only that pulling is unacceptable, but also what the words "no pulling" mean. Once this happens, you can start to substitute a voice correction for a jerk or tug on the leash.

More about reinforcers

In the teaching stage, you offer positive reinforcement each and every time you ask for, and get, a desired behaviour. No corrections are given.

Once we move to the correction stage, we correct undesirable behaviour. Every time you correct a dog for undesirable behaviour (negative reinforcer), you must praise him (positive reinforcer) when he corrects the behaviour. If the correction is hard, then you must praise him with equal energy when he corrects that behaviour. This is extremely important. When trainers overuse negative reinforcement and/or don't balance it with equal or better positive reinforcement, their dogs begin to lose their will to try. Their enthusiasm wanes. They try to avoid the trainer; they hate the work and they look as if they have been abused.

Reread this paragraph. It is key to successful training.

Choosing reinforcers

The positive reinforcer you choose will depend on the exercise you're teaching. Certain exercises lend themselves to food tidbits while others lend themselves better to voice praise or physical stroking. A certain amount of discretion is needed here. For young dogs, food tidbits are very motivating and using them will speed up learning. Eventually, we will want to wean ourselves, and the dog, from using food so that the dog works primarily for praise. To get ready for this, you must always PRAISE and/or STROKE the dog as you reward him with a food tidbit.



If you start training your dog using food, you must systematically and slowly withdraw food as the primary reinforcer. You can still use food occasionally to reward a job well done. In fact, occasionally rewarding the dog with a motivator in addition to praise is good practice. However, eventually verbal and physical praise need to become the primary reinforcers. Food needs to become a secondary or even a tertiary reinforcer. If you have paired the positive reinforcers, verbal and physical praise will take on more importance than food tidbits to most dogs. The choice of negative reinforcers should be based on the option which is the least intrusive to get the job done. For example, voice correction is less intrusive than a collar correction. If a voice correction will get the desired results, there is no need to apply the stronger correction.

About corrections

An important part of the art of dog training lies in which corrections you choose and how you give them. As training progresses, you'll develop an intuitive sense about the level and type of correction your dog needs. Some dogs are very sensitive. Slight pressure on the collar will produce the desired, or corrected, behaviour. Others may need a stronger pop on the collar. Situations also vary. In some cases, a voice correction will get the desired result. Others will call for a collar correction.

You need to apply corrections swiftly and give them *where the dog is*.

Trying to influence a dog's behaviour from a distance generally relies on voice commands. At the beginner level of training, such attempts are useless for two reasons:

❁ The dog lacks the experience for voice corrections to be effective.

❁ As a trainer, you have no back-up plan if the voice correction fails.

You have no way to follow through with the dog to make sure he obeys you and corrects the behaviour.

Relying on voice correction at this early stage will most likely lead you into the trap of unwittingly training your dog to *not* respond to you.

At all times you should also give corrections with a matter-of-fact style. It's a straightforward process and a correction is nothing more and nothing less than a training tool. Very simply, your dog didn't comply with your command, so you prompt or position him until he produces the desired behaviour. Take care to never charge your corrections with emotion. Anger and frustration have no place in dog training. Your own emotions should enter the picture only as part of the positive reinforcement – the praise. When your dog behaves correctly, praise him lavishly – and with genuine feeling. You *must* praise after each correction as soon as the dog complies and you must make the praise at least as strong as the correction.

Less correction is more

Most trainers suggest using the lightest, least restrictive correction to get the desired behaviour. Take the heel command, for example. When a dog heels, the leash should be slack and the dog should walk along on your left side, with his right shoulder in line with your left knee. Pretend that your dog already understands the heel command, but even after you have given the command to heel, you find he is pulling ahead and drawing the leash tight. In response, you give a quick pop on the collar and re-issue the command, "Heel." If the dog corrects the position with you praising him out loud the instant he corrects the position, you'll know that the correction you gave him was strong enough. But if he doesn't correct his position, you will have to give another correction, this time a little harder, or a little faster and sharper.

But be fair! Err on the side of giving too light a correction. You can always give the correction again. **EVEN SO, DON'T NAG.** Don't use a stream of ineffective corrections. Through trial and error, you'll find the most effective level of correction. Then use it consistently and your dog will learn more effectively. You can further help your dog by showing him what you want even after you give a correction. Continuing with our heeling example, pat your leg and show him again where he should be. When he finally does give you the desired behaviour, praise him, praise him and praise him again.

Timing

Being alert is essential to effective training. If real learning is going to take place, you have between half a second and two seconds from the time a dog exhibits a particular behaviour to respond with a correction and/or praise. With each passing second after this window of opportunity, your intervention becomes less and less effective.

This window of opportunity has profound implications for how your dog responds to training. When training, watch your dog carefully. You should always have one eye on the dog, so to speak. Immediately after he has performed the desired behaviour, you must pour on the praise.

This timing issue also affects how you start to work your dog off-leash. Novice trainers are often eager to have their dog obey without using a leash. Too often, though, novice trainers remove the leash only to find that they can no longer follow through with effective corrections. The dog, unfortunately, learns quickly that when he is off the leash the trainer has no real control. This is not a good lesson for the dog to learn. Seasoned trainers are less likely to fall into this trap. They know that they need to be able to follow through within two seconds of misbehaviour. Coming off-leash diminishes the effectiveness of your collar corrections because generally it takes more than two seconds to get back to and correct an off-leash dog. Until the dog is proofed (third stage of training), in an exercise, leashes should remain on the dog.



Inadvertent training

When you correct and praise, the dog interprets it as relating to the last thing he did. This can cause problems. For example, your dog is loose in the park, you see another dog and you call your dog. He does not come on first call and so you run after him, continuing to call him. He finally decides to come and when he gets to you, you reprimand him for not coming when he was first called. What have you just taught the dog? Among other things, you have taught him that when he comes to you, he will get reprimanded. The fact is that he has probably long since forgotten the first calls you made to him. In his mind, he is being punished for coming. He will hesitate to come again when called.

Here's another common example. An owner calls his dog that is running free; the dog does not respond. The owner goes after the dog; the dog keeps his distance and eludes the owner. Among other things, the dog is being taught that when he is off-leash, the owner has no control and cannot follow up with a correction. This is a very common problem that causes many owners anxiety, and eventually costs them money for professional training. Even worse, it has cost many dogs their lives. If you allow your dog to run off-leash before he is 100 per cent reliable working under distraction, you will teach him that he does not have to obey you. Retraining this idea is extremely difficult and time-consuming.

HAND SIGNALS

Hand signals are another way to give commands to your dog. Add hand signals into your practice sessions as soon as you feel comfortable doing so. It is important that hand signals be consistent and clear. Practise them without the dog at first. Decide exactly what your various hand signals will be and stick with them. If you are not consistent, you will confuse the dog. Think about how the dog will see them. Are they clear? Can the dog distinguish one signal from another? For example, can he tell the difference between your signal to sit and your signal to come? When you give the signals, make certain the dog can see them. Your speed is very important. If you give the signal too quickly, the dog may miss it. Give the hand signal smoothly and exaggerate your movement somewhat, particularly in the learning stages.

How to teach hand signals

For the first few weeks, each time you give your dog a command to sit, down, heel, come or stay, include the appropriate hand signal. The dog will begin to associate the signal with the action. Then start to teach the hand signals alone. Begin by giving the signal first; a split second later, give the relevant verbal command. As always, praise the dog when he complies.

Watch the dog as you give the signal. His reaction will show you how well he understands. When he starts to grasp the concept of the signal, he will at least *start* to respond. He may not completely follow through without the aid of the verbal command. Remember, the dog is still in the learning stage. Your job is to help him understand fully and to build his confidence. Praise him for his attempts and encourage him to follow through with the correct action.

Once you see the dog responding confidently without your help, start dropping the verbal command. Use it only to reinforce the signal when/if the dog does not respond quickly enough to your signal. When this occurs, repeat the signal accompanied by the verbal command. Once the dog complies, let the praise flow. Move carefully through this process. Give your dog lots of time to grasp the concept of signals.

While some dogs learn hand signals quite quickly and react very positively, others take more time to get used to their owner's silence. Some dogs will interpret your silence as displeasure and will react accordingly. If your dog appears confused or unhappy when you give only a signal, two things need to happen.

- 🐾 First, you need to be very positive, with lots of genuine praise for *all* his efforts. Smile at him when you're giving the signals.
- 🐾 Second, review "How to teach hand signals" and start the process over again with your dog. Make sure your dog is completely comfortable with each step before going on to the next.



If your dog is having difficulty with the signal exercises, he may try to avoid them. He will look away from you so that he does not have to see the signal. This generally happens when the dog perceives the signals as negative. It's easy to get frustrated, but *resist*. Make a greater effort to make signal work a very positive experience for the dog.

Go back to the section about pairing verbal commands and signals. Integrate signals into your everyday interaction with the dog. Don't wait for formal training sessions to practise them. Remember to use generous and genuine praise. Use a food tidbit or play as a reward. Don't overwork the dog; keep him interested. Make learning a game.

Suggested hand signals



Sit

From side: Start with your hands at your sides and your dog standing at your left. Move your right hand over in front of, but not touching, the dog's body, at approximately chest level. With your right hand, palm up, make an upward-sweeping motion starting lower than the dog's chin level to pass upward through the dog's line of vision.

From front: You can also give the sit signal from in front of the dog. Again, start with your hands at your sides and the dog facing you. With your right hand, palm up, make an exaggerated, upward-sweeping motion either out to your right side or directly in front of your body.



Down

From side: With your left hand, palm down, make a downward sweeping motion starting above dog's eye level and passing through the dog's line of vision to approximately chest level.

From front: The dog is facing you. With your right hand, palm down, make a downward sweeping motion starting at your left shoulder, crossing over the front of your body to approximately your right thigh.



Stay

With the dog at your left side, place the palm of your left hand immediately in front of the dog's nose, but don't touch his nose. Hold this position for a moment, then remove your hand, and reposition it back at your side. The stay signal is used in the sit-stay and the down-stay exercises.



Come

With the dog in front of you, start with both hands at your sides. In an upward-sweeping and somewhat exaggerated motion, bring the right arm up, extend it almost arm's length in front of your body then pull it back towards your body to touch your left shoulder. Hold for a moment, then drop your arm back to your side.



Heel

From the heel position, as you step off to heel, make an exaggerated forward-sweeping motion with your left hand, palm forward. This sweeping motion begins at approximately your left leg and extends past the dog's face, at the dog's nose level.

ABOUT YOUR DAILY PRACTICE SESSIONS

The more good practice a dog gets, the more successfully he'll learn. Good practice means:

- 🌿 You know how to teach the exercise, are clear in your expectations/ commands, and praise and correct the dog appropriately.
- 🌿 You move to the next stage only when the dog has mastered previous stages.

You're responsible for the quality of the practise session. Don't train when you are irritated with the dog or with anyone or anything else. Take a few minutes before each session to review the training manual and define what you want to achieve in the session. Try to predict the dog's response and work out how you are going to handle it.

At the beginner level, train each of the exercises every day, but pick an element of each to work on. Take heeling, for example. Make sure the dog gets a warm-up heel routine but then decide on which specific element in the heeling you want to focus on. Suppose the dog is interfering with you on the left turns. You would first review the material on teaching the left turn. Then during your session, you would concentrate on teaching the left turn. You may not want to do any more on heeling that day but you can move on to the other exercises. Go through the same process with each exercise. End the session with exercises that the dog knows and is most likely going to enjoy doing. In other words, end on a good, positive note and end before the dog gets tired.

At the conclusion of each practice session, spend some time analyzing what happened. Think about weak areas: the dog's and yours. Think about what you will concentrate on next session and how you will handle it. Many people find it very helpful to keep a journal at the end of each training session to track their progress.

In the latter weeks of this course, there is enough work that you will need to practise with your dog a minimum of 30 minutes a day. Better to practise twice a day for 15 minutes each session. You can teach many of the exercises indoors. I suggest that you supplement your formal training sessions with "impromptu" sessions inside. You can also integrate much of the practice into normal interaction with your dog and everyday living. For example, if your dog is near you while you are watching TV, have the dog treats handy and do a couple of obedience exercises during commercials.

Practise exercises outside each day, as well. Get your dog out at least once a day to an unfamiliar area to practise. Strip malls, parks, school grounds, inside unfamiliar buildings and breezeways are all excellent. This will help him learn to work for you even though the surroundings are unfamiliar and there are many distractions.



Learning problems

There are five major reasons why dogs do not learn the material:

1. You're not clear about the exercises.
2. You're not clearly communicating expectations to the dog.
3. Inappropriate positive reinforcers. Your dog needs to love the reward.
4. Not enough positive reinforcement – praise – or praise that isn't genuine.
5. Not enough time spent practising.

Lack of clarity

Lack of clarity is always the trainer's fault – never the dog's – but often the dog pays the price. You must be very clear about what you want the dog to do and clearly tell the dog. Once you have given him a clear command, he must either be praised quickly and genuinely for compliance or he must be swiftly corrected so that he can exhibit the correct behaviour, for which you must praise him at once.

Inappropriate reinforcers

Not every dog is a food hound. If your dog doesn't really love food, don't use food as a reward. Find something your dog really loves. Maybe he loves playing with a certain toy. If he does, consider rewarding or reinforcing his obedience by playing with him with his favourite toy. Some dogs like certain foods more than others. If you know your dog loves cheese or chicken above all else, save these tidbits for his training sessions.

Not enough praise or praise that's not genuine

Inexperienced trainers are often too intent on handling the dog correctly. Did I give the right command? Am I holding my leash correctly? What direction am I supposed to be facing? As a result, they forget the dog. While this is quite understandable, it can be very deflating for the dog. Consider what happens when the dog does a beautiful piece of work but never gets praised for it. It's not unlike you doing a wonderful job at work and never getting the pay cheque. It's very demotivating. Without your generous, genuine praise, your dog will have no way of learning correct from incorrect behaviour. PLEASE praise your dog anytime he is correct within two seconds.

Not enough practice

The more you practise, the better trainer and handler you'll become. The better your handling skills, the less likely you will fall into the traps noted above. Dogs learn from repetition. More practice will translate into more learning. Make sure, though, that it's good practice and make sure the dog remains happy and motivated throughout the session.

Keep the dog interested in learning

Don't make the dog repeat an exercise over and over again. This is no incentive for the dog to do it correctly. He will quickly lose motivation and get bored. His attitude will suffer. It's better to practise an exercise quickly two or three times and then go back to it later in the training session or later in the day if more practice is needed. Attitude is everything. A dog with a good attitude towards the work will be a quick, willing learner. It's fun to teach a dog who adores being trained. To promote a good attitude to learning, the training sessions should be interesting, upbeat and playful. Do not fatigue the dog. End the lesson with the dog wanting more and end with an exercise the dog can do well. This allows the dog to leave the session feeling he has been successful in spite of problems that may have occurred during the session.

If he just doesn't understand... go back to the beginning

Nothing is more frustrating than having your dog continually fail at an exercise. Remember that if your dog is having trouble with an exercise, most likely he does not understand what you want. This often comes from too little practice time at each stage. Essentially, the dog has been moved through the various stages of the exercise without having fully mastered the early stages. It's not unlike expecting yourself to do calculus without first knowing basic algebra.

The best strategy to deal with this is to go back to the very beginning of the exercise in question. Take each stage in turn. Don't go on until the dog has consistently demonstrated that he understands that stage completely. Specifically, the dog should be able to do the exercise ten out of ten times successfully *and* perform it under distraction.

Build on the dog's knowledge in small, achievable increments. Analyze the task at hand and decide what needs to be taught first. Teach the first element until it is fully mastered. Then decide on and teach the next element, and then the next, and so on, until the whole task has been completely learned. Make sure your steps are small; if you move too quickly through the exercises, the dog will become confused and will lose confidence. Don't rush.

LESSON PLAN WEEK 2



LESSON PLAN

Sit on command

Learning objective: When you give the command, "Sit," prefaced by his name, your dog will sit quickly, with his weight squarely distributed.

How to teach this exercise

Start with your dog standing at your left side. Both of you should be facing in the *same* direction. This is known as the heel position. Drop your leash and kneel on it, next to your dog, still facing the same direction that your dog is facing. Place your right hand on the dog's chest, left hand on the dog's withers, which is located roughly between the dog's shoulder blades (figure 1). Give the command, "Sit" *only once*, then run your left hand down the dog's back (figure 2), over his tail and as you reach the area just behind his knees (figure 3), tuck him forward until he sits, with his front legs remaining in place. Praise him verbally with "Good sit, good sit" while you continue to hold him in the sit position to a count of five (figure 4). Release the dog with "OK!" (see next page how to teach the "OK!"), then praise and pet him. Let the dog walk around for a few seconds, then do the exercise again twice more.

After several days of practising sit on command, your dog should have a fair understanding of the word "Sit." However, until your dog understands completely, keep showing him what you mean. This is still the teaching phase.



figure 1



figure 2



figure 3



figure 4

“Sit” means sit!

Any time your dog is under an obedience command, “Sit,” for example, he is expected to remain until you tell him otherwise. If he gets up before you have released him, you should correct him by repeating the procedure as described above.

Releasing the dog from the command

The only time the dog should move out of the sit command – or break any other obedience command – is if you release him. See below for instructions on how to teach the release command, which is “OK!”

“OK!”

Learning objective: Your dog is under an obedience command and you decide you want to release him from the command. You say, “OK!” in an excited voice. The dog jumps up and forward with enthusiasm.

How to teach this exercise

“OK!” is a release word that tells the dog that he is finished a particular exercise and he is free to relax until he gets another command from you. It’s like “at ease” in the military. Like all words, you need to teach the dog what it means. When you have completed an exercise, say “OK!” in an excited voice and move forward with the dog a few steps. Play with the dog and give him a food treat. He’ll come to love the word “OK!”



Down on command

Learning objective: Your dog is sitting at your left side. You give the command and signal “Down.” The dog quickly drops into a down position.

How to teach this exercise

Sit the dog beside you and stand on your leash, giving the dog just enough slack to sit comfortably. Kneel or squat down beside the dog. Face yourself towards the dog. Place your left forearm lengthwise along the dog’s spine, and with your left hand grasp the dog’s collar behind his neck. Place your right arm behind both of his front legs, grasping the left front leg with your right hand.

Give the “Down” command, and simultaneously apply pressure along the spine with your left forearm and draw the front legs forward, lowering the dog until the elbows are touching the ground (until the dog is in a down position). Praise the dog with “Good down.” Remove your right hand and quickly feed the dog a food tidbit, continuing to praise verbally. Maintain pressure along the spine with your left forearm. Once the dog relaxes, remove the pressure but continue to rest your forearm lightly along the dog’s spine. Continue to praise in a quiet but sincere way. After a few seconds, release the dog with an exuberant “OK!” Encourage him to get up and move around. Allow the dog to rest a minute or so. Then repeat the exercise.

Once the dog is in the down position, remember to praise him with “Good down,” but do so in a quiet voice to avoid him bouncing to his feet. He should not bounce up as you praise him. If he does, put him back down. Again, praise quietly. He should only break the down position *with permission*. You give permission by telling him “OK!” and walking forward with him, giving him lots of praise. Repeat this exercise several times a day for this week.



Heel on leash

Learning objective: Your dog is on a six-foot leash. You give the “Heel” command, preceded by the dog’s name. As you move forward, the dog maintains a slack leash and remains in heel position changing speed and direction as you do. When you halt, your dog sits automatically, awaiting the next command.

How to teach this exercise

Place your dog in a sit at heel position, on your left. Hold your leash as described in last week’s lesson (page 6). Using the dog’s name to get his attention and in an upbeat but confident tone of voice, command him to heel, e.g. “Rex, heel.” Move forward at a brisk pace on the heel portion of the command. Be prepared for your dog to charge ahead or otherwise get out of heel position. Any such movement will cause the leash to tighten. If this happens, you’ll need to help the dog correct his position.

Here’s how. Move your leash-holding hand(s), and hence the leash, toward the dog to create some slack in the leash. Then take one step to your right and simultaneously pop the leash and collar parallel to the ground toward your left leg. Do *not* pull on the leash. You are not hauling in a fish and you should not be in a tug of war. The pop should be a quick, sharp and instantaneous movement such that the dog is suddenly off-balance just enough to bring him back to heel position at your left leg. Continue on in your chosen direction. The instant the dog is back in correct heel position, verbally praise with “Good heel!” and offer him a small piece of delectable food from your left hand. Don’t stop when you praise or give him food. Just carry on, walking briskly. Talk to your dog to keep him interested in being near you, but if he gets out of position again, repeat the process.

This combination of re-commanding the dog, the nearly simultaneous side step, and the very quick pop on the collar is a correction. The collar correction should be just forceful enough to put the dog slightly off-balance and bring him back to heel position.

Keep the food tidbit in the dog’s sight as you teach the heel exercise at this stage and keep your dog interested in staying at your side by talking to him and by encouraging him. Pat your leg to attract your dog to the correct position. Be generous with your praise and be generous with the food treats, especially at first. Don’t tire the dog out. Especially in the beginning, if the dog gives you a few good heeling paces, release him with “OK!” and have a good play with him. Don’t forget to tell him when he’s done well.



IF YOU ARE USING A CHOKE COLLAR . . .

As previously mentioned, if your dog is wearing a choke collar for training and if the collar is popped swiftly, it will tighten for an instant and then should release itself the second you slacken the leash. This is the correct use of the choke collar. However, for this to happen, you need to make sure the collar is put on the dog correctly. Look carefully at the photograph on the right. Make sure that you are facing your dog when you put the collar on AND make sure that it looks like a dropped “p” before you place it over the dog’s head. The “live” ring should be able to move freely along the top part of the chain. This is very important because if the collar is placed upside down, it will not properly release after a correction and could choke your dog. If the choke collar slackens immediately after giving the correction, you’ll know the collar is correctly placed, that you’ve used the right amount of force and that you have released the leash pressure correctly. The leash should always be slack, except for the instant it takes to correct the dog.



Straight line heeling

Your heeling goal for this week is 10 paces without having to correct the dog to heel position. Start by asking for two or three paces of correct heeling, then release the dog with “OK!” Give lots of lively verbal praise and a food treat. Then collect yourself and ask the dog to heel again, another few paces, release and praise. Over the week, gradually build up to ten excellent heel paces.

LESSON PLAN WEEK 3



LESSON PLAN

In your third week, start practising the following exercises. You'll be introducing a motivator into the exercises you taught in Week 2.

Sit on command

This week, introduce a motivator into this exercise. Sometimes referred to as an "object of attraction," the motivator induces the dog to perform the desired exercise. Choose food that your dog really likes, such as cheese, liver treats or chicken.

As before, start this exercise with the dog standing at your left, facing the same direction you are. Hold the motivator in your right hand, just in front of the dog's nose. Give the command, "Rex, sit," and as you do, move the motivator at a 45 degree angle from the dog's nose over his head slightly behind his eyes. To follow the motivator, your dog will lift his head, causing him to drop his rear into a sit. As soon as the dog sits, praise with "Good sit," and let him have the motivator. If the motivator is a toy, let him have it only a few brief seconds so he doesn't get bored with it.

When positioning himself into the sit, the dog should tuck his rear end under himself, keeping his front feet on the spot. This is known as a tuck sit. Don't let your dog rock back when he sits. A rock-back-sit is one where the dog puts his rear end down and moves his front feet back to meet the back legs. Discourage the rock-back-sit from the start so he doesn't develop this habit. It will eventually cause problems with heeling because the dog will back himself out of correct heel position each time he does an automatic sit. (Read about the automatic sit later in this lesson.)



Improper sit



Proper sit



If the dog doesn't sit or if he tries to back into the sit instead of tucking into it, tuck him into the sit as you have been doing for the past week. If your dog jumps up in an effort to get the motivator when he should be tucking into a sit, chances are you are holding the motivator too high. Lower it so he isn't enticed to jump. Once the dog is sitting, praise and let him have the motivator. Practise this exercise five times per session.

Down on command

Add the motivator to this exercise this week. Sit the dog on your left as before. Kneel down and place your left forearm lengthwise along the dog's spine, grasping the dog's collar behind the neck. Hold the food tidbit in your right hand just slightly above the dog's nose. Allow the dog to see and sniff it. Once you have captured his interest, give him the command, "Down," and move your hand downward, angling slightly toward the dog's chest in a slow, fluid motion until your hand reaches the ground. The goal is to have the dog follow the food with his nose and fold himself into the down position once his nose, and the food in your hand, have reached ground level. Once he is in correct down position – both elbows on the floor/ground – praise the dog with "Good down" and give him the food. Don't praise/feed him until the position is correct, though.

If the dog does not follow the motivator down, place him in the down position described in last week's lesson (page 23). Give the dog the food once he is in the correct position. Release any pressure from your left forearm once the dog relaxes. After a few seconds, release with "OK!" and praise. Repeat the down exercise at least five times per day during this week.



Optional

Long down

While optional, this exercise is a helpful prelude to the down-stay exercise that comes later in the course. Do this long-down exercise once daily for the next week. Make sure that you have 30 minutes of uninterrupted time to devote to this exercise before you begin. You can watch TV, listen to music or the radio, while doing this exercise as long as you are attentive to your dog's activities.

Your dog should be on a six-foot leash. Sit on the floor and place the dog in a down position on your left side, giving the dog the command, "Down." Remove your hands and remain there for 30 minutes. Do not touch your dog except to reposition him or to prevent him from getting up. As soon as the dog *begins* to get up, apply downward pressure with your left hand on his withers and repeat the command, "Down." Once the dog is repositioned, take your hands away. This is not a play session. Do not give the dog toys or other play articles. At the end of 30 minutes, release the dog with "OK!" If he has fallen asleep, wake him up so you can give him the release.

Heel on leash

Change of direction

Start teaching this concept by introducing the dog to wide U-shaped turns: left U-turn and right U-turn. It may be useful to practise these turns at first without the dog. Hold your leash in your right hand and have several bits of food in your left. Teach the turns as follows.



Right U-turn

As you are heeling at a normal pace:

1. Re-issue the heel command.
2. Guide your dog with a food tidbit, held in your left hand just above the dog's nose. Encourage him with "Good boy heel, good boy heel," as you begin the turn.
3. Once the turn is completed and the dog has kept heel position, give him the tidbit, praising him for good heeling.



Left U-turn

Again, begin by heeling at a normal pace.

1. Before making any change in direction, re-issue the heel command.
2. Hold the food tidbit near the dog's nose.
3. Start into the turn, guiding the dog with the food.
4. If the dog moves ahead, check him by popping back lightly on the collar and reminding him to heel.
5. Once through the turn, offer the food tidbit to the dog and praise him.



Remember to watch the clasp of the leash when you're heeling. While the dog is in correct heel position, the clasp should be vertical to the ground. The dog should never feel pressure on his collar from a tight leash.

Optional

Circles left and circles right

Heeling in large circles to the right and circles to the left, although very subtle, is also helpful towards teaching the dog the concept of changing direction and changing speed while maintaining heel position.

Automatic sit

Also this week, introduce "halts" or "stops." An obedience-trained dog will automatically sit in heel position when the handler stops. So, from now on when you come to a stop while doing the heel, the dog must stop and sit in heel position. This is referred to as the automatic sit.

How to teach this exercise

When you come to a stop, use a food tidbit to guide your dog into a straight sit beside you – heel position – or tuck the dog into a sit. Do it the same way you originally taught the sit on command (see page 21). You don't have to say the word "sit," though. Once the dog is sitting, don't forget to praise him. The cue to sit is the fact that you've stopped.

Remember to watch the clasp of the leash when you are heeling. While the dog is in correct heel position, the clasp should be vertical to the ground. The dog should never feel pressure on his collar from a tight leash.

Stays

Learning objective: You place your dog in either a sit or a down position at the end of a 30-foot line. You give the command and signal to stay and you walk away from the dog. The dog doesn't move off the spot nor does he change his position or sniff the ground around him. You return to heel position and the dog remains in place until you release the dog from the command.

Be clear what you mean by "Stay." When you tell your dog to stay, the expectation is that he will stay put in exactly the spot you left him. The only movement allowed is his head and tail. Technically, all other movement is considered a break. So during training you'll have to correct all "illegal" movement.

How to teach this exercise

Place your dog in a sitting position at your left, the heel position. Make sure he's facing the same way as you and that he is sitting straight and square with his weight evenly distributed. Many dogs will try to sit on a haunch. This is a bad habit that you will want to correct because it will inevitably cause the dog to lay down during the sit-stay exercise. Insist on a straight, square sit.

Adjust the ring of the collar so it is on the back of the dog's neck. Hold the leash in your left hand so it is taut, though not tight. Issue the "Stay" command without using the dog's name, while you simultaneously give the stay signal. Lead off with your right foot and pivot immediately in front of your dog, facing your dog and positioned closely enough so that the dog is able to touch you with his nose. Remain there for only a second or two and then pivot back into the heel position. Release the dog with "OK!" and praise. Do this exercise at least five times per day this week.





Repeat this process, gradually increasing the number of seconds you are away from the dog. **DO NOT INCREASE THE DISTANCE** at this time. Continue to practise this exercise for several days with your leash held taut over the back of the dog's head as described.

The taut leash will help hold the dog in place. However, if the dog manages to get up, put him back in the sit position, *exactly where you originally left him*. Since you are still immediately in front of the dog, you can do this from in front. Correct lightly in an upward motion on the collar. Repeat the "Sit, stay" command.

It's perfectly normal for the dog to try to move. He is testing the meaning of the command and it's your role to teach him. With a matter-of-fact movement, put him back into position and repeat the exercise. Release and praise only after he has completed the exercise correctly.

It's important for the dog to be successful. Don't increase the time away from your dog too quickly. If your dog consistently wants to move out of position, reduce the time you are requiring him to stay. For example, if he breaks the stay at the ten-second mark, you need to go back to an eight-second stay. When he's consistently successful at eight seconds, gradually build the time up from there.



“Come” or recall exercise

Learning objective: Your dog is 30 feet away from you, attached to a long line. You call the dog with the “Come” command prefaced by his name. While you stand still, the dog instantly runs toward you. He stops right in front of you and quickly sits facing you, waiting for the next command.

How to teach this exercise

There are three ways to teach the “Come” command:

- 🐾 A long-line come
- 🐾 A come fore, also known as a come-front (in Week 4 on page 36)
- 🐾 A formal recall (in Week 7 on page 48).

Start this week by introducing the long-line come as described on the next page. In following weeks, introduce the dog to the other methods and practise them. Once the dog has been introduced to all three methods, make sure you incorporate all the exercises into your practice sessions.



How to teach long-line come

Put your dog on a 30-foot long line. Have an assistant hold your dog by the collar without otherwise interacting with the dog. Quickly walk 10 to 15 feet away from the dog very quickly. While you are walking away, speak to the dog in an excited and interesting voice. Look back occasionally, repeating the dog's name, asking him in an excited voice if he's going to come. Turn to face the dog. Again, in an excited voice, say the dog's name, and then say, "Come!" At this point, your partner should let go of the dog. Encourage the dog by clapping or running away from him. The dog should bound toward you. When he gets to you, turn and face him, kneel down and praise him. Stroke him, tell him he's wonderful and give him a small food tidbit or play briefly with him. Then while he is still very happy, get your assistant to help you repeat the exercise.

The come is an action command and the desired behaviour is a quick return to you. As the trainer, you need to be very upbeat. If the dog is slow in coming, get animated. Do something that will get the dog interested in you. Always use a positive and excited voice. If the dog comes but sails by you, encourage him in close enough to get the motivator, a food tidbit or a toy. Remember to praise him lavishly when he gets to you.

Do this exercise during your daily practise sessions, but don't confine it to just your practise sessions. Practise it when you're walking your dog on a long line or retractable lead and he's out in front of you. Remember to be clear when you give the command, e.g. "Rex, come!" If the dog responds by immediately turning toward you and coming, encourage him and give him lots of praise when he gets to you. If he does not respond *immediately* to your call, give the long line or retractable lead a light pop to bring him into you. When he gets to you, give him lots of praise. Then release him with "OK!" and allow him to move away from you. Once the dog is 15 to 30 feet away from you, repeat the process.

LESSON PLAN

WEEK 4



LESSON PLAN

Starting this week, train your dog at least three times in different locations. At this stage, pick settings that are relatively unfamiliar to the dog, but are quiet and free from distracting noises, sights and smells. Practise the exercises that follow.

Sit on command

Starting this week, tuck food in your right hand, but don't let your dog see it. Give the command, "Sit," and wait a second or two for compliance. When the dog sits, immediately praise him and give him the food tidbit. However, if the dog does not obey within a couple of seconds **DON'T REPEAT THE COMMAND**. Instead, immediately guide him into the sit position. Then give verbal praise and the food as a reward. Release the dog with "OK!" and play with him for a few seconds. Then repeat the exercise.



Sit-stay

Remember to be clear when issuing the command. DON'T SAY THE DOG'S NAME with this exercise. Simply say, "Stay," give the signal and lead off with your right foot. Leading off with the right foot becomes an additional signal to the dog to stay.

If the dog moves off the spot, *instantly* return to him. Approach him from the front. Place your hands on both sides of the collar. Manoeuvre him back to *exactly* the place you left him, saying, "Sit" as you do so. Re-issue the stay command/signal and leave him again. Once the dog has been successful, return to his right side, release and praise.

While this exercise is still new, return to the dog by going to his right side. Once the dog appears to be steady on the sit-stay, you will start to return to him by going to his left and around behind him into the heel position. For this week, though, continue to return to his right shoulder.

Down on command

When the dog is able to relax in a down position as you kneel at his side, try standing up with the dog still in the down position. If the dog gets up as you rise, repeat the command and put him into the down position again. Once the dog has remained in a down position successfully for a few seconds with you standing up straight, release him with "OK!" and praise. With each practice session, gradually increase the amount of time you stand beside the dog before releasing him. If he breaks before he is released, repeat the exercise.



Sit-Stay correction

HEEL ON LEASH

Left turns and right turns

This week, incorporate right and left hand turns into your heel routine.

First, some definitions:

🐾 “Right turn” is a ninety-degree turn to the right.

🐾 “Left turn” is a ninety-degree turn to the left.

In order for your dog to maintain heel position when you’re walking at a constant speed through these turns, he’ll have to learn to speed up on the right turns and slow down for the left turns. At first your dog may be confused. He’ll likely miss the right turn altogether and will get in your way as you try to turn to the left. Your task as a trainer is to exaggerate the speed changes to teach the dog that on left turns he must slow down, and on right turns he must speed up to remain in heel position.

How to teach these turns for the first few days

Right turn

Hold your leash in your right hand, food tidbit in your left hand. Snug up on the leash, leaving just a bit of slack. Heel forward with your dog on your left. Just as you are about to go into the right turn:

🐾 Re-issue the heel command to cue the dog that there is a change coming.

🐾 Drop your left hand, holding the food tidbit close to the dog’s nose.

Then, while performing the turn:

🐾 Guide the dog through the turn with the food just in front of his nose.

🐾 Encourage him, saying, “Good heel, good heel.”

Once through the turn, give the dog the food tidbit and lots of verbal praise. Continue heeling though and repeat the exercise. Then release the dog with “OK!” and play with the dog.

If the dog doesn’t maintain the heel position, try adjusting the position of the food so that the dog’s position corrects. Once you’ve corrected the position, make sure you give him the food tidbit and lots of verbal praise.

After a couple of days of guiding the dog through the right turn with the food in sight, try tucking the food out of sight in your left hand. Your dog will still be able to smell it but he will learn that he doesn’t necessarily have to see it. If his attention wanes, show him the food to rekindle his interest in the task. Once his interest is piqued again, do the turn and quickly reward him with the food. Release and praise. Play with the dog for a few seconds then set him up in heel position again and repeat the exercise.



Left turn

Heel forward with your dog on the left. Snug up on your leash holding it in your right hand. Hold a food tidbit in your *left* hand. Just as you are about to go into the left turn, cue the dog for an upcoming change by re-issuing the “Heel” command in a gentle voice. Holding the food tidbit in sight of the dog, drop your left hand to the dog’s nose. Slow your pace down a little and draw your left hand back slightly to help the dog slow down. Guide him through the turn. This conditions the dog to pause just before the turn so he does not interfere with you as you are turning into him. Once through the turn, give the dog the tidbit and quickly release him with “OK!” Praise. Repeat the exercise two or three times.

Come fore

Here’s the second way to teach the come command. It’s known as a come fore, which means come to front position. A dog is in front position when he is sitting in front of you, facing you; he’s also so close that his nose can easily touch your body.

How to teach the come fore

While heeling or casually walking your dog on a six-foot leash, call the dog, e.g., “Rex, come!” As you give the command, immediately start backing up. This will cause the dog to turn into your direction. Clap your hands excitedly and encourage the dog to come quickly to you. Continue to back up. As the dog comes straight toward you within arm’s length, slow down, slow down and gently guide the dog into a front position. Ask the dog to sit. Then give the dog a treat and, of course, praise him. Release with “OK!” and repeat the exercise.

More about the “Front”

It’s important that the dog come in very close. When you call your dog, have a food tidbit in your hand to give to the dog when he finally gets into the sit position. Don’t reach out and give the food tidbit. Hold the food right next to your body, slightly higher than the dog’s nose level, so that he needs to inch in close to get it – and look up to see it. If your dog resists coming close and consistently sits too far away from you, more than a couple of inches from your feet, lean backwards slightly to encourage him to come closer. You might be making him uncomfortable because you’re hovering over him too much. Smile at your dog to encourage him. When the dog has performed a successful front, praise him in a quiet but sincere voice. Take one or two steps back, give the “Come” command and repeat as described above. Repeat a couple more times then release with “OK!” for an all-out playtime. Heap on the praise. It helps to stand with your feet apart at first, bending your knees to form a bit of a V-shaped chute with your legs. This helps the dog target and get into a straight position.



LESSON PLAN WEEK 5



LESSON PLAN

Again this week, practise in three locations not familiar to the dog. Pick sites that are free from major distractions. Introduce new aspects of each exercise only after reviewing the work the dog knows well.

Sit on command

Practise this exercise as before but keep the food tidbits in your pocket or fanny pack. Reward with praise and food when the dog obeys. Help the dog by placing him in the sit position if he does not obey immediately.

Sit-stay

As before, start this exercise with the dog sitting at heel position. This week allow three feet of slack on the leash. Give the command, "Stay" then leave the dog. Walk three feet out, then turn and face the dog. If the dog breaks the stay, *quickly return to him*. Using both hands, grasp the collar on either side of the dog's neck and quickly *reposition him in exactly the place you originally left him*. In a no-nonsense tone of voice, repeat the signal and command, "Stay," then repeat the exercise. When you're correcting a break, interact with the dog as little as possible. Be matter-of-fact and do not touch the dog except to quickly tuck him into a sit, if necessary. Use the collar to manoeuvre him back into position.

If your dog has been consistently able to sit-stay for 30 seconds, try testing his understanding of the stay command by *gently* pulling on the leash for five to ten seconds. Then let the pressure off. After a few seconds, repeat the test. The dog should resist the pressure. If he moves, correct him as described above.

When testing, *don't jerk* the leash forward. The pressure should be steady.

Over this week, gradually increase your sit-stays to about one minute.



Return to the dog on the sit-stay

Up until now, you have been pivoting back to heel position. Starting this week, return to your dog by walking around behind him. Remember that the dog is still on a stay even as you return to him. Expect that he will break the stay when you first start making your way around behind him. As with all breaks, the dog must be repositioned and the exercise repeated.

To teach this return, stand in front of the dog and hold the leash with your right hand. Extend your left arm and drape the leash over your open palm about midway between your dog and yourself. Then as you proceed to your right past your dog's left shoulder, use your left hand to prevent the leash from getting caught in the dog's face or pulling at the collar.

Move around behind the dog and stop at the dog's right shoulder, or heel position. Once you are in heel position, wait for several seconds then give the release word, "OK!" and move the dog off the spot, giving him lots of physical praise for a job well done.



Down on command

Starting this week, give the "Down" command while you are standing upright. When giving the signal you may need to bend over for a few seconds but don't squat down or kneel.

Once you have given the down command, you must *insist* that the dog obey. Give the command only once. If you think the dog doesn't understand, go back to the Week 2 lesson and follow the training procedure for this exercise from the beginning. If you believe the dog understands what you want but won't comply, correct him by popping down on the collar. If needed, apply downward pressure between his shoulder blades using the fingertips of your free hand.

The key here is that THE DOG MUST DOWN when you command. *Insist* on a down each and every time you ask for it. Do not permit him to get up until you release him with "OK!" Once the dog does go down, though, remember to quietly, but genuinely, praise him.

HEEL ON LEASH

About-turn

This week, add the about-turn to your heeling repertoire. The about-turn is like the right U-turn, except that after the turn is made, you retrace your steps. As a result, this turn is more exacting than either the U-turn or the right turn, and the dog is required to speed up a lot to keep up to you. It's a good idea to practise this turn first without the dog so you can master the footwork.

Teach your dog the same way you taught him the right U-turn. As you start into the turn give the heel command again, "Rex, heel." Help the dog through the turn by guiding him with the collar and leash or with the motivator in sight near his nose. Once through the turn, praise the dog with, "Good heel" and give him the food tidbit, but continue heeling. Repeat the exercise a couple of more times then release and praise the dog.

Continue to guide the dog through this turn only for a couple of days to get him comfortable with it. Then, just as you did with the right-turn, begin the process of withdrawing the food by holding it out of sight in your left hand.

Automatic sit

The automatic sit should be automatic by now. Starting this week, spend lots of time practising the forward-halt. Your dog will only learn this by repetition. Remember to praise him every time you halt and sit him. Periodically test the dog to see if he is starting to sit automatically. If he shows any indication of placing himself into an automatic sit, praise him lavishly. However, even when you're testing him, don't wait more than a couple of seconds before placing him in the sit.

Come

Continue to practise long-line come and come fore exercises as you walk with your dog. Do at least three each of these exercises per day.



Down-stay

This exercise is like the sit-stay except that the dog is left in a down position. Your dog should be on a six-foot leash, with you holding the end of the leash. Put your dog into a down position by giving him the verbal command and hand signal to down. This is not an action command so don't use the dog's name when giving the command.

Once the dog is relaxed in the down position, give him the command and signal, "Stay." Again, don't use his name. Leading off with your right foot, walk away from the dog. When you get about a half metre away from the dog, turn and face the dog, still holding the leash. If the dog moves off the spot, *immediately* return to him and reposition him in the down, exactly where you originally left him. Command "Down" as you place him down again and then command "Stay" as you leave him again.

As you did in the early stages of the sit-stay exercise, leave your dog in the down-stay for only a few seconds and only from a very short distance. Gradually increase the time away from the dog. Don't increase the distance this week.

LESSON PLAN

WEEK 6



LESSON PLAN

Some obedience instructors refer to this sixth week as “patience” week. The dog seems to have forgotten everything you’ve taught, so you have to be more patient than usual. Don’t despair if you’re having trouble. Stay the course and you – and your dog – will succeed. For several days this week, practise in areas where there are distractions, local parks, shopping centre parking lots and school yards, so that your dog will learn to work, despite distractions.

Sit on command

Continue to practise this exercise five times daily. If the dog knows this exercise, try giving the “Sit” command from different vantage points. For example, when the dog is standing in front of you, ask him to sit. Of course, if he doesn’t sit on the first command, place him in the sit, praise him and release with “OK!” Try it again.

Sit-stay

Test your dog twice each session from three feet in front prior to attempting a sit-stay from six feet in front. This week, try to work your sit-stay up to two minutes. Remember that your dog still isn’t ready to be off-leash. This exercise is still an on-leash exercise.

Come

Continue to practise the long-line come as you walk with your dog. Do at least three exercises per day. This week, place the dog in front position each time you call him on the long line.

Continue to practise the come fore exercise several times each session. Allow the dog to become interested in something as you walk forward with him. As soon as he is distracted, call him and start backing up. As instructed in previous weeks, sit the dog in front of you, facing you. Pause for several seconds before releasing the dog. Praise the dog.



Optional

WALK OFF EXERCISE

When the dog has come to you and is sitting in front of you, you can walk him off instead of just releasing him with “OK!” Once the dog is in the correct front position, pause for several seconds. Then give the dog the “Heel” command and walk forward at an angle to your right. To avoid being in your way, your dog will quite likely jump into a heel position. Heel off with him and verbally praise him for good heeling. Then release with “OK!” and give him enthusiastic physical praise.



Down on command

Continue practising this command. Try issuing the command from various vantage points, such as in front of the dog or behind the dog. Make sure you follow through. Remember: once the command is given, the dog must comply even if you need to help him into the down. Also remember to give him lots of praise once he's in the correct position.

HEEL ON LEASH

Change of pace

Start to occasionally change your heeling pace, from normal pace to slow pace back to normal pace; from normal pace to fast pace, and back to normal pace.

At first, cue the dog to an upcoming change by re-issuing or re-stating the heel command. You may eventually drop this extra cue, but in the beginning it's a useful teaching aid. If your dog responds to the food tidbit, hold it in front of his nose as you make the change in pace. This will encourage him to remain in heel position. Feed him the tidbit when he has successfully executed the change in pace. Don't let your dog get too far out of heel position before correcting him with a pop on the collar. The correction should be followed, of course, by lots of praise and a resounding, "Good heel" for correcting position.

Down-stay

If ten out of ten times your dog can stay for a particular length of time, 30 seconds for example, add a few seconds onto the time until finally your dog is consistently able to stay for one minute. When he can, gradually increase the distance away. Remember, at this stage of the down-stay exercise, the dog must be on-leash and your distance should not exceed the six-foot leash length.

Time first, then distance

The rule of thumb is to build up the time first, then the distance. Once you have the time and distance built up, it is wise to vary the schedule. That is, don't always leave him for the same amount of time so that he starts to anticipate when he is going to be released. When you return to the dog to release him, always wait several seconds before releasing him.



Optional

Safety training:

Wait for permission to go through an open door

To an untrained dog, an open door can be an irresistible invitation to escape. Even if you're just stepping out to empty the garbage, he can bound between your legs and be gone – perhaps to run in front of a car. Prevention is the best solution to this bolting behaviour. Always demand that your dog "Wait" when a door is opened. Only when you release him with "OK!" should he be allowed to move through the door. This applies to all doors: buildings, motor vehicles, dog crates and kennels.

Here's how to teach it. Put the leash on your dog. Open the door. As he tries to move through it, draw back on the leash and tell him, "Wait." Once he relaxes and stops pulling ahead to get out of the door, wait a few seconds then tell him "OK!" Praise him with, "Good wait" and walk through the door with him. You may want him to sit and wait. If you choose to teach wait this way, place the dog in the sit position and follow the procedure as outlined above. If you do choose sit-and-wait, you must be consistent. Do this the same way each time so that the dog doesn't get confused.

The procedure is the same with a car door. When teaching a dog about car doors, however, practise where there is no traffic. It eliminates the risk of having the dog hit by a car. Have someone in the car help you and keep the dog leashed. Have your helper hang on to the leash in the car until you get out of the car and/or open a second door to deal with the dog. Tell the dog, "Wait." Do not let him out until he relaxes and waits for several seconds. Then when you've got the leash well in hand, give the release, "OK!"

LESSON PLAN WEEK 7



LESSON PLAN

Again this week, practise your lessons in at least three new locations.

Sit on command

Continue to practise the sit exercise from heel position and from various positions, including in front of your dog. Practise this command three to five times per session and use the appropriate hand signal in addition to the verbal command. Don't forget to praise every good deed.

Sit-stay

With all stay exercises, gradually build up the amount of time away from the dog before trying to increase the distance. Once your dog is able to stay for two minutes at the end of a six-foot lead, begin to increase the distance. Lay out your 30-foot long line ahead of time. Then when you're ready to practise this exercise, sit the dog near the clasp end of the line. Hook him up to the line and do not otherwise pick the line up. At first, leave the dog and walk out only a few feet. Stand on the line if you wish. With each practice session, gradually increase the distance until the dog is able to stay while you walk out the full 30 feet to turn and face him.

Heel on leash

Heeling exercises should still be practised individually and should include straight line heeling with automatic sits; about turns; right turns; left turns; right U-turns and left U-turns.



Optional

Heeling squares

Practise left and right turns around obstacles such as trees, posts, lawn chairs, pylons and planters placed in a square formation. Do each turn four consecutive times, praising verbally after each turn. After a square of turns, halt. Your dog should sit automatically, but if he doesn't, help him into a sit. Then release the dog and praise. By creating a square of obstacles, we have begun to string some of the heel exercises together: straight line, 90-degree turn, halt.

Changes in pace

Remember to include changes of pace, normal-slow-normal and normal-fast-normal, in your heeling practice. Walk forward at a normal pace, and then *gradually* change to a slow pace for five steps then return to normal pace. In the same way, walk forward at a normal pace, then change to a trot, returning to a normal pace after five steps. Don't make abrupt changes in pace since this is too difficult for the dog to follow. If your dog gets out of heel at any point, correct his position. The leash should be slack as soon as he returns to correct heel position. Remember to praise the dog for the correction.

Come

Long-line come: When you call the dog, include the recall hand signal. Make sure the dog comes to a front position. Pause in the front position for several seconds then walk the dog off, giving the command and signal to "Heel."

Continue to practise the come fore several times each practice session. Make sure you pause several seconds with the dog in front. Then either release the dog with "OK!" or walk the dog off with the optional walk off exercise.

Formal recall

Do not practise the formal recall until your dog is very steady on the sit-stay exercise. Until then, continue with the other forms of come training: the long-line come and the come fore. Once your dog is steady on the sit-stay, you're ready to teach the formal recall exercise.

Put your dog on a six-foot leash. Sit him in heel position. Give him the command, "Stay," and leave him at the end of your six-foot leash. Still holding onto the end of the leash, turn and face the dog, exactly as you would in a sit-stay. Call the dog in an excited tone of voice, prefacing the command, "Come" with the dog's name. If the dog does not respond, give him a quick pop on the collar. Start backing up. The idea is to get the dog to come in as fast as he can, so you will need to be animated in order to motivate him to come to you quickly.

Continue to back up until the dog is in position to sit straight in front of you, the front position. Use your food tidbit or toy motivator to entice him into position, if needed. When the dog is positioned correctly, stop and command him to sit. Allow a couple of seconds to pass once he is sitting correctly, and then release him with "OK!" Praise him. Repeat the exercise.

As the dog becomes more comfortable with this exercise, increase the time he spends in the front position before you release him. Ideally, you will want to vary this time. Sometimes release him immediately. Sometimes wait for several seconds before giving him permission to leave.

As the dog becomes more proficient at this exercise, vary the way you release him. Sometimes just say "OK!" Other times, walk him off or tell him, "Down," and then release. In any case, praise the dog lavishly and give him the motivator when the exercise is completed.

Down-stay

Return to your dog

As with the sit-stay, you learned during the early stages of this exercise to return to your dog's right-hand side. Usually, however, returns are done by walking to the dog's left and proceeding around behind the dog to the heel position. Start to introduce this return as soon as your dog is consistently successful doing the down-stay at six feet.

When you do this at first, expect your dog to move. If he does, he should be corrected because, in fact, he has broken the stay. Correct as you would any break, then leave him again and repeat the exercise.

LESSON PLAN

WEEK 8



LESSON PLAN – THE FINAL WEEK!

This is the last week at the beginner level. You've accomplished a great deal in a relatively short time and built a great foundation. If you and your dog have enjoyed the training, consider enrolling in intermediate level classes to focus on gaining greater control of your dog under more difficult conditions.

Sit-stay

At this point, be inconsistent about the time and distance you are away from your dog. Sometimes only stay away a few seconds, sometimes a minute or more. Similarly, vary the distance. Don't be so consistent that the dog can learn to anticipate a pattern.

Once you feel the dog understands the stay command, start proofing the stays. Practise the stays, always on leash, in areas where he will experience traffic noise, people and other dogs. Correct him if he breaks the stays. To add your own distractions while the dog is on the stay, you might try gently swinging the slack leash back and forth; stepping to one side and then to the other; sitting on the ground or having someone clap. If the dog moves in any of these instances, simply return to him and put him back into the stay position *exactly where he was originally left* and repeat the exercise.

Optional

Sit for examination

While your dog is on a sit-stay at your side, have a friend or family member quietly stroke the dog's head. If the dog breaks, reposition him, re-issue the stay command and have your helper repeat the exercise. Wait a couple of seconds after the examination is completed, before releasing the dog with "OK!" Walk him off the spot and praise. Once your dog is consistently able to accept this without moving, try leaving the dog a distance of two or three feet (still on-leash) while a friend or even a stranger approaches and briefly strokes the dog.

Sit and down on command

Practise sit and down commands from all positions. Remember to include hand signals with the verbal commands.

Down-stay

Increase the distance

As you did with the sit-stay exercise, lay out your 30-foot long line before doing the down-stay exercise. Take your dog to the end of the line, hook the line onto the dog's collar. Down the dog as usual. Give the stay command as usual. Then leave the dog to a distance of about eight feet. Over the course of this week, gradually increase this distance until you are finally going out the full 30 feet. Remember to correct the dog if he moves even the slightest bit. If the dog moves off the spot, return him to the original spot and reposition him in the down. The exercise should be repeated, but stay a bit closer. By the end of the week your dog should be able to stay for three minutes with you standing at the end of the 30-foot long line.



Optional

Proofing the down-stay

Occasionally when you return to your dog, try the following exercise. Instead of stopping when you get into the heel position, continue on. Don't release the dog, don't re-command the dog to stay. He's still under the original command. Walk to the end of the leash again, turn and face the dog and do a shortened version of the stay exercise all over again. The dog may try to follow you. If he does, reposition him in the original place, repeat the "Stay" command and hand signal, and repeat the exercise. Once the dog has stayed for a few seconds, return to him as usual, wait a few seconds, then release him and praise. Do this exercise periodically so the dog learns not to anticipate the release.

Also try varying the amount of time you wait at the dog's side before releasing him after returning to him. This simple proofing exercise will also stop his anticipating the release.

Heel on leash

Continue practising on-leash heeling. Starting this week, string the heeling skills together. Start every practice with a two to three-minute heeling drill that includes all heeling skills learned to date. Remember to make the heeling interesting for your dog. Use your voice and/or food to encourage him and to keep his interest. This week you should also start using the hand signal when you give the verbal command, "Heel."

You should teach skills such as automatic sit; right turn; left turn; about turn; and change of pace – separately as well as including them in your heeling drills. After you've completed the drill, select one or two of the skills noted above for more intensive work. Then in the next practice session, concentrate on two different heeling skills, and so on.

Practise the right and left turns. The optional heeling squares are great for practising these turns. Teach automatic sits by doing quick succession forward-halt-forward-halt-forward-halt patterns. Do several about-turns in succession, as well. Be careful though, not to do so many that you make yourself and your dog dizzy.

Come

Formal recall

Once your dog is able to do a formal recall on a six-foot leash, gradually increase the distance. Attach a long line to the dog's collar. Try calling him from a distance of eight feet. If your dog is successful from this distance five out of five times, add another couple of feet until finally the dog consistently comes from a distance of 30 feet. Remember this exercise needs to be taught on-leash so that you can follow through.

Be careful of too many recalls out of a sit-stay. They might make your dog unreliable on the stay command because he will anticipate the come. The occasional call to come out of stay is fine, but a better way to practise this formal recall is to allow your dog to walk on the 30-foot leash in the park. Once something distracts him and he's not paying attention to you, give the "Come" command and have him do a front when he gets to you. Praise him and release him with "OK!" and repeat the exercise.

Congratulations – you made it!

You and your dog have completed basic obedience training. Keep practising to maintain your skills. Obedience training is a wonderful way to form a tight bond with your dog. If you enjoyed this course, you and your dog might consider more advanced training. Contact your veterinarian for knowledgeable obedience instructors in your area.



ABOUT THE DOGS

“TUCKER”

Tucker is a yellow Labrador Retriever and was 12 years old when he was photographed for this book. In addition to being a conformation champion, Tucker is an obedience trial champion and has earned a Junior Hunter title and a Working Certificate Excellent from the Canadian Kennel Club in recognition of his hunting and retrieving skills. Tucker has been fully Schutzhund trained and particularly enjoyed the tracking and protection aspects of the sport. Although he is now retired, he is a certified St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog and spent much of his youth visiting the residents of George Pearson Centre. Tucker was educated by and has lived with Nancy Clarke since he was seven weeks old.



“CAITY”



Caity is a Border Collie from sheep-herding lines. She was five years old when she was featured in this book. Caity is one of only a handful of Border Collies in North America to earn a Schutzhund 3 title. Although sheep herding is her passion, she also enjoys agility and is currently competing at a masters level. Caity is a St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog, certified to visit children. Caity loves to visit and due to her propensity for jumping onto the customer counter to get pats from volunteers and visitors at the Vancouver Animal Shelter, she is called the shelter’s “greeter.” Caity has lived with Nancy since she was seven weeks old.

“DAX”

Dax is a five-month old, sable German Shepherd who lives at the Vancouver Animal Shelter. Under the stage name “Rex,” Dax is the shelter’s public relations dog, an emissary for responsible and humane dog ownership. At night, Dax goes home with Nancy Clarke and although he is completely blind he is carried by his great spirit and endears himself to everyone he meets.



“BRITTA”



Britta is a two-year-old female German Shepherd. This very sweet-natured soul is best buddy and mentor to Dax. Britta is a beginner in the sport of Schutzhund and is currently enjoying Agility, as well. Britta has a bright competitive future in both dog sports but her main role is companion and chief foot warmer to her human companion, Nancy.

TRAINING

REX IN THE CITY

**BASIC OBEDIENCE
FOR DOGS**



**CITY OF
VANCOUVER**



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