

Principles of Positive Training

Training should be an enjoyable experience for both you and your dog. The more you understand about how your dog thinks and learns, the more effectively you can communicate. Clear communication means successful training and good behavior with no need for coercion or physical corrections.

1. Behaviour that is rewarded is more likely to reoccur. In other words, dogs do what works for them. If your dog was given praise and a treat the last time they sat, they are more likely to sit again the next time you ask. If they know that jumping up on you will earn your attention, they'll keep jumping, as your attention is a reward. This powerful principle is a key component of reward-based training.

2. Dogs learn by association. When training, it is important that the reward closely follow the desired behaviour. For example, when teaching your dog to sit, the praise and treat should be given when their bottom touches the floor, not after they've stood up again. On the other side of the coin, reprimanding your dog for something they may have done hours, or even minutes ago (for example, you come home to find your slippers shredded) is pointless; your dog won't associate your shouting with what they've done, and if it happens often enough, they may begin to fear your arrival home, as you're always angry for no reason they can fathom.

3. Reward behaviours you want, rather than punishing behaviours you don't want. Most of us are so accustomed to noticing "mistakes" our dogs make that it seems strange to notice and reward "good" behaviours. For example, your dog barks, so you shout at him to be quiet. Sure, a barking dog is hard to ignore. But what about when they're calmly lying down? Most of us never consider rewarding calm, so the dog only gets rewarded with our attention (even shouting is attention) when they are doing something we don't like. Naturally, they keep doing those things! If, on the other hand, they get attention for being calm, they will be calm more often. Make it a point to catch and reward your dog for doing something right. If your dog is engaged in a behaviour that cannot be ignored (such as chewing the table leg), interrupt with a sharp verbal, "Hey!" then lead them away from the area, ask them to sit, and give them a chew toy or other activity to keep them busy. Remember that timing for this is also essential.

4. Extinction *If a behaviour is ignored, it will eventually extinguish on its own.* Imagine you are trying to buy a can of drink from a vending machine. You insert your money, press the button, and wait. Nothing happens. You press the button more forcefully, and try a few others as well. Still nothing. You jangle the change lever. No soda, no change. You might even become so angry that you shake or kick the machine. All that effort and still no can! Grumbling to yourself, you give up and leave. In this example, the drink-seeking behaviour is extinguished because there was no payoff, no reward. Kicking or shaking the machine is an example of an *extinction burst*. What that means for your dog is that if you ignore an unwanted behaviour such as jumping or barking, before your dog gives up, the behavior may actually escalate. The important thing is to wait it out rather than giving in; it will eventually stop, and will stop even sooner the next time around.

5. **Positive reinforcement is something the dog wants.** Just because you think those expensive new treats are a great reward doesn't mean they are. If your dog turns their nose up at them, they're not much of a reward in his mind. A reward can be petting, verbal praise, a throw of the ball, a quick game with a favourite toy, sniffing the grass, or saying hello to another dog. The sky's the limit. Consider which things your dog finds rewarding, and use them.

6. **Jackpot!** *The jackpot is something really special, head and shoulders above the usual reward.* Your dog can earn this amazing prize by doing something especially wonderful. While it's always important to use training treats your dog likes, save the Super-Yummy, Best-Thing-In-The-World as a jackpot. Here's an example of how to use the jackpot: In teaching Sit, your dog obviously understands what is expected, but doesn't sit very quickly. When you give the sit cue, they watch for a moment, then lazily lowers their bottom to the floor. You can almost hear them sigh, "Oh, okay, if I must." However, on the fourth repetition, they respond immediately; bottom hits floor in record time. Jackpot! You immediately give them a few pieces of the jackpot treat one after another, along with enthusiastic verbal praise. (You can also give a jackpot by tossing a shower of the usual treat.) Jackpotting makes an impression. It calls your dog's attention to the fact that they've done something really great. They are therefore more likely to perform the behaviour better than usual the next time. A jackpot doesn't have to be food, either. If your dog lives for a toss of the ball, use that as your jackpot. Know your dog and use what works for them.

7. **Find an alternate behaviour.** When you want your dog to stop doing something, give them something else to do instead, that is, something that is incompatible with the behaviour you don't want. For example, if your dog jumps up on you, have them sit instead; they can't sit and jump at the same time. Do they chew on furniture? Give them an appropriate chew toy instead; they can't chew items on both at once. Try this: Take a piece of paper, and draw a line vertically down the center. On the left side, list all the things your dog does that you'd like them to stop doing. On the right, next to each behavior, write down a behaviour they could do instead. Once you start thinking about things in this way, you'll be surprised at the creative solutions you come up with and how needless punishment really is.

8. **Raise criteria gradually** in small increments, building upon each success. Simply put, that means *don't expect too much too soon*. Build small steps to get from Point A to Point B. For example, when teaching your dog to stay, start with a three-second stay. If successful, try for a stay that is two seconds longer. If the five-second stay is too much (your dog breaks the stay), don't correct them. You've asked for too much too soon. Simply go back to three seconds and start again, then build slowly, one second at a time. Any time your dog does not perform an exercise correctly, ask yourself if you have raised the criteria too quickly. Go back to the point at which your dog was last successful, then build gradually. Raising criteria gradually eliminates the need for correction by setting your dog up to succeed.

9. **If trained correctly, behaviour is not reliant on food being present.** This is something that many people who are opposed to food-reward training don't understand.

If you phase treats out gradually and begin to substitute lots of real-life rewards (like petting, games, the door opening for a walk), your dog will perform the desired behaviours even when you don't have food with you. We use plenty of treats at first to teach and practice new behaviours. Eventually, a schedule of random (unpredictable) reinforcement, along with real-life rewards, will ensure that the good behaviour continues. You wouldn't want to stop getting paid once you got better at your job, so don't forget to reward your dog sometimes for a job well done!

10. Training should be fun!

- Keep training sessions short; three to five sessions of three to five minutes a day is fine.
- Focus on one new behaviour per session.
- Keep an upbeat attitude when training. Don't train when you're grumpy!
- End each training session on a successful note. Did your dog just do ten good sits, with the last one being really great? End the session there.
- As each behaviour is learned, incorporate it into your daily routine as often as possible.

Above all, BE KIND TO YOUR DOG AND HAVE FUN!

