

12 Rules for Training Dogs



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1. Make learning fun for both you and your dog.

Spend 10 minutes, two or three times daily. The training sessions should be separated by 4 hours for maximum efficiency of learning. Normal dogs of any age can learn if you use patience, praise and rewards.

2. Train the dog to, come, sit, stay, down, and down-stay off the leash in this order.

Be progressively more demanding. If the dog fails at any level, stop, don't reward, and start again at a simpler command. You will find that your dog's motivation to perform decreases as the complexity of the task increases. Make learning fun!

3. Use one-word commands. Do not combine them with the dog's name, which should only be used to get the dog's attention. It is easy to talk too much to your dog, and the command you are trying to teach gets lost in all the verbiage. This is a common mistake made by beginner dog trainers.

4. Train the dog in a quiet environment with few distractions. Once the response is learned, move the training location to progressively more complex, and stimulating environments. The dog will have to be trained in each environment that you wish him to respond in. You may start in the basement, move on to the kitchen, backyard, street, plaza, train station, etc. If the dog fails at any level, go back to the previous level.

5. Appropriate responses should be rewarded within ½ a second of the command. If you tell the dog to come, and he walks across the yard, give the command again, just before you reward him. This will ensure that the dog associates the command with the reward.

6. The dog will learn most rapidly if every desired response is rewarded. Once the behaviour is established, reward it immediately either with a treat or through clicker training. This will make the response more permanent, and less likely to be forgotten.

7. Use valued rewards. Find out which reward your dog likes most (food, touch, voice praise) and use that reward most frequently in the beginning. As the training progresses, mix up the type of rewards given.

8. Once the dog knows the commands, you can give them in a quieter voice. Gradually decrease the loudness of your commands, rewarding the dog for the appropriate response.

9. Once the dog has learned the commands from one person, have other members of the family train him to respond to them. If the dog knows the commands well, this should not take long.

10. How quickly and enthusiastically the dog responds is a function of the intensity of training. If your dog responds only when he feels like it, start again using these rules.

11. The longer an unwanted, learned behaviour has been performed, the longer it takes to recondition.

12. Punishment does not work – the opposite of reward is no reward, not punishment! Punishment may frighten or excite your dog, which reduces his ability to learn. If the dog is performing some unwanted behaviour, ignore it. Instead, call the dog to you, tell him to sit, and reward him for doing so. Both rewards and punishment must be given within ½ a second of the event to be effective, so if you reward him for sitting, the dog will not think that he "got away" with the previous unwanted behaviour. Your dog wants to please you, if he can do something and be rewarded for it, he will. If you totally ignore unwanted behaviour, the dog will not be rewarded for performing it, and it will eventually stop. If the dog has learned he will get attention when he performs the behaviour, the activity will increase in frequency and intensity when you first start ignoring it. Persevere, and it will stop.