



Basic Companionship Training

By Sue Myles
Companion Dogs

Food Rewards

Yes! Food rewards are a good thing. Think of them as money. A good sit earns \$5, \$10 or, if the dog's especially lucky, \$100! It's doggy lottery, sometimes he wins and sometimes he loses. The only way the dog finds out if he wins and how much is to do the behavior and see what happens.

Food Rules

When teaching a new behavior, give *lots* of food/money at first. Once the behavior is learned, the dog shouldn't win each time. Working harder to get food/money keeps the dog eager.

When training in the house with low distractions, use \$5 rewards. When training outside with high distractions, use \$100 rewards.

Always pair "good dog" or "good behavior" with the food/money. "Good dog" or "good behavior" will soon have the same high reinforcing power as food/money. Keep the food/money stashed in secret places around the house for surprise rewards.

Wear a fanny pack *backwards* when training in class, outside in the park or outside in the yard.

If your pooch has a "funny" stomach, try low salt/low fat crackers, carrots, bread, or his regular dry food.

Typical \$5 rewards: Milkbones, crackers or dry food

Typical \$10 rewards: peanut butter biscuits or "specialty" biscuits

Typical \$100 rewards: Rollover, cheese, freeze-dried liver, Oinkeroll

Bring at least \$10 rewards to class. A dog training class is very distracting! After all, if you were a dog and had to choose between playing with five new friends and learning to lie down...? Using \$100 rewards is the norm. I always have \$100 rewards with me because I never know when I'll meet a dog who says, "Oh, yeah? Make it worth my while and maybe I'll learn to sit!"

Your *voice* is the most important training tool. Food rewards are used to boost the reinforcing power of your voice. Don't depend on food to get your dog to do something. Rely on your voice, your relationship and your greater brainpower. Use food as a helper, not a crutch.

Come When Called

Well, this one can be a toughie, so we better start now! You'll need a long line (25 to 30 feet is best). You'll also need keys, handclap or a whistle. Use whatever sound stimulus gets your dog's attention *without* scaring him.

Snap the leash to itself around a tree or a lamppost in the front yard or in the park. The dog is secure, your hands are free and away you go!

Let the dog wander away. When he's facing away from you, call him, use your sound stimulus, and then say, "Come!" The sound comes between the name and the command. "Buster" sound "come". The sound stimulus makes the dog turn and look at you. He's concentrating when you say, "come" and he has a higher success rate.

Use \$100 food/money reward when he arrives. Don't make him sit or stay. Just shovel \$100 into his mouth and cheer like a maniac. Tell him "Buster, okay" and let him wander. Repeat.

You'll soon see that the dog turns around when you say his name. He's turning *before* you use the sound stimulus. That's what we want. He's more responsive and is coming without the help of the sound stimulus.

Don't rattle the keys or use the whistle or other sounds if the dog has already turned! Remember, he's learned to turn faster than you can rattle your keys. If he gets a sound stimulus while he's facing or trotting toward you, he'll back away from the nasty sound. When in doubt, hold your fire. You'll always have another chance to train.

Move the dog from tree to tree, lamppost to lamppost, and person to person. Train in multiple locations in the same area and you'll get more training results for your time.

In *safe* areas where the dog cannot be hit by a car, run into the street, or jumped by another dog, let the dog drag the line. If you aren't *certain* your dog is safe, don't unsnap

the leash! Better to keep the dog safe than risk an accident to you, your dog or someone else.

Do not ever use "come" in order to punish your dog.

The more time you spend training your dog, the faster and better he'll learn.

Leashes

Leashes are illusions. They don't train dogs, you do. Jerking, yanking, hauling, and tightening the leash are cues for the dog to take an action. If the leash isn't on, you can't give the cue. Without the expected cue, the dog can't understand and respond. So...quit using the leash as if it were important. After unsnapping the leash, give three commands before releasing him.

Snap on the leash and say, "Sit." Have him hold the sit for about thirty seconds. Don't let him become a gibbering, whirling lunatic because he anticipates a walk, training session or a ride in the car. In other words, don't let him act like my dog!

If your pooch is a nutcase when you get out the leash, fool him! Get out the leash, snap it on and go sit down. Go to the bathroom. Eat dinner. Watch TV. Go to bed (that'll get him!). Give the cue that always used to mean an outing, and now it means that anything can happen!

Chain leashes wreck your hands and can injure your dog's eye. Give them to an Alabama chain gang and get a matching nylon set.

Voice Tone

Train soft. Consciously train and speak to your dog more softly than you are accustomed. Your dog will be more responsive. You can always get loud if you need to. If you train loud, you'll have nowhere to go with sound.

Your dog can hear the refrigerator open at 500 yards. You're standing six inches away. Why are you shouting?

Praise your dog like you mean it. No, you don't have to be maniacal, but you do have to be sincere. Go ahead; let people stare at you. They've never actually seen someone *train* a dog in public. Educate a few and entertain many.

Verbally correct with a sharp (not loud) "Hey" or "Ah Ah". **Do Not** use the poor dog's name. He knows who he is. He just can't figure out why you still have to keep reminding yourself.

Wait for the Behavior to Occur

When you give a command to the dog, be patient! Instead of jabbering the command over and over again, just be silent and wait for the behavior to occur and then reward. This way the dog obeys on the first command (slow and steady wins the race) and is rewarded after the first command.

If you give a command and the dog stares at you as though you have two heads, walk away. Ignore him. Repeating commands, raising your voice and waving food in his face actually teaches the dog to wait until it gets interesting or he is *positive* you have food before obeying.

Walking away is a fabulous way of teaching a dog he must earn your affection. Hey dog! There's no such thing as a free lunch.

Who Should Train?

Anyone who wants a good relationship with the dog!! Dogs don't get confused when the whole family trains. They just get more attention, are happier and feel more loved.

Names

Name that dog! When you use your dog's name, it *should* mean "Stop. Look at my owner. He's about to say something important." Humans often teach their dog that when he hears his name, it means, "Ignore it. It's just more noise. He never says anything important after my name. He just says it over and over until I want to howl or bite his ankle." You need self-discipline, not the dog.

When you say your dog's name, the next word or phrase *must* be a command. And I'm not kidding. *However, do not* use your dog's name as a reprimand or as a prelude to a scolding.

Your dog's name is *not* a doorbell. Stop saying it over and over and over as though more repetitions make it meaningful!!

No Time to Train?

Think of training time in minutes, not hours. Practicing an hour a day is overwhelming. Practicing for three minutes is fun!

Housetrain! "Heel" around the coffee table, through the living room and into the dining room. Train without a leash in the house.

During TV time, train "place" with a "down" and "stay" added. Reinforce verbally and with an occasional food reward.

At commercial breaks "heel" the dog to the kitchen for a snack. Have him "stay" as you grab the Cheetos, then an "okay" and "heel" back to his place. Hand him a sterilized bone to keep him interested in that place.

"Wait" as you open the door. Quickly shut the door if he charges inside. "Okay" allows him in. A quick "sit" and "wait" for a wipe of those wet feet, then "okay".

"Sit" before the leash goes on. "Wait" as the door opens, then "okay" and "heel" as you go out for the walk.

"Sit" before the food dish goes down. For more advanced pooches maybe a quick "down".

"Go back" and "stay" before the front door is opened for visitors. If the dog leaves his spot, shut the door. If he leaves his spot, shut the door. If he obeys the "stay" command, then people come in to see him. Practice on a few friends first!

Use your other commands on walks. Toss in a few sits. Add a down or two and a number of stays! "Wait" as you approach the curb, followed by an "okay". "Come" as the dog wanders off to sniff a bush. "Stay" as you chat with the local gossip. "Feet" to keep the dog from jumping up on the chatterbox. "Heel" to keep him at your side (your dog, not the gossip!). "Okay" to reward him and allow a time to relax.

"Down" and "stay" as you eat meals or have the dog go to his "place". "Don't touch" for snacks in front of the TV.

What can you teach as you talk on the phone? Blow-dry your hair? Fix dinner? Pay bills? Go to the bathroom? Be creative!!

7-Eleven Stays

Well, it's probably illegal for me to use that company's name, but it's catchy. Teach this so your dog can patiently sit at your side while you chat with neighbors, wait for a light to change or stand in front of the 7-Eleven while your friend gets you a Snapple (Oh no, another lawsuit!).

Have the dog sit next to you in the heel position. That's at your left side. Say, "stay" and immediately reward with a food/money reward. Pretend you're an ATM. Practice the immediate rewards in the house, the yard, on walks and anywhere the dog goes.

Now *you* must count. With the dog in the heel position, say, "stay" and count to five then reward. Aha! The ATM is stuck. It doesn't give out money so fast anymore. The dog has to wait a bit until that \$20 appears.

More counting! Now the ATM doesn't cough up a reward until you count to ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five...oh, you get the drift. If the dog waits patiently, a food reward appears.

But, if the dog comes forward, something nasty happens! First, all possibilities of the ATM giving him food/money is gone. A bad thing happens the instant he puts a paw forward. The bad thing can be any "GOD" correction. Handclap, rattlecan, whistle, beanbag, water correction, foot stomp or earthquake all qualify as "GOD" corrections. Keep yourself out of it.

Start with no distractions. Train in the house when you and the pooch are alone. Now train the 7-Eleven stay in the house with family members cruising by.

Invite friends over. They get to watch "Seinfeld" (again!!) while you train.

Now train on walks as you wait for a light. How about in front of a park where the dog can watch kids play soccer and unloved dogs run without a leash?

Go for the gusto! Park your dog in the heel position in front of a church on Sunday morning (no, Thursday afternoon does not count), an auto parts store on Saturday afternoon, or...a local cat show! Give it a whirl.

Basic Commands

Come: Open palm to chest. Most important command for using the dog's name. First call name, then command with hand signal.

Sit: Close and lift palm.

Down: Point at the ground. May need to actually touch ground at first.

Stay: Palm facing dog (like a traffic cop!). Only command where dog's name is not used!

Heel: Slap your left leg. Most dogs are trained to heel on the left leg. At first, encouragingly talk to dog saying, "Good heel!, Good job!, Nice heel!".

Remember!!

The more you train, the better and faster your dog learns. Try to make it fun and interesting for both of you!

Above all, **be patient and consistent.**