

Tricks Put the Fun into Training

If you can keep training fun, you and your dog will both enjoy it more.

Liz Palika

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Obedience training tends to be serious stuff; you tell your dog to stay or come and want it to respond appropriately. Although necessary, training doesn't have to be so serious all the time. In fact, if you can keep it fun, you and your dog will enjoy it more and your dog will respond more eagerly. Trick training teaches and entertains at the same time.

You can use tricks in many different situations: interspersed between more serious commands to break up an obedience training session; during therapy dog visits to make others laugh and smile; while visiting with neighborhood kids, who can learn how to cue your dog's tricks so they get a chance to "train" the dog. Sometimes I have my dog do tricks for our own amusement, because when they do their tricks, I laugh and praise them and they enjoy it, too!

Shake Hands. Have your dog sit in front of you and ask it to "Shake" as you reach behind one front paw and tickle its leg in the hollow just behind the paw. When your pooch lifts its paw to escape the tickle, shake the paw as you say "Good to shake!" and give it a treat. When your dog lifts its paw on its own, stop tickling. Eventually your pet will lift its paw as you reach toward it. When that happens, offer enthusiastic praise.

Wave. After your dog learns to shake hands reliably, say "Shake. Wave!" and instead of shaking the paw, just lightly touch your hand under the paw and move your hand away so your dog continues to reach for your hand. As it reaches for your hand, say "Good to wave!" With the wave, you want the dog to lift its paw higher than the shake and to move it up and down.

Treat on Nose. Have your dog sit and stay. Hold its chin with one hand as you place a treat on the top of the nose. Say "Stay!" After a few seconds, say "Okay!" and let your pooch toss the treat and catch it. Some dogs have a hard time catching it and will simply drop the treat and eat it off the ground. If your dog happens to catch the treat in midair, praise it enthusiastically. Gradually increase the time the dog has to wait before you release it.

Treat on Paws. Have your dog lie down and stay. Place a treat on a front paw and say "Stay!" If your pet tries to get the treat, stop its nose with your hand. After a few seconds, say "Okay!" and let it get the treat. Gradually increase the time you ask the pooch to ignore the treat.

Roll Over. Have your dog lie down. With a treat in one hand, make a big circle in front of your dog's head with the treat moving in the direction you want it to roll and say "Roll over!" At first, you may need to physically help your dog roll. Praise it when it does roll over, even if you needed to help. Enthusiastically praise your pet when it rolls over by