

Puppy Class 101

Follow these simple rules when training your English Springer Spaniel.

You are about to begin Puppy Class 101. Here are two simple rules to get you started. First, the puppy must learn that you are now the "alpha dog" and his new pack leader. Second, you have to teach him in a manner he will understand (sorry, barking just won't do it). Remember always that your puppy knows nothing about human standards of behavior.

Word Association

Use the same word (command) for each behavior every time you teach it, adding food rewards and verbal praise to reinforce the positive. The puppy will make the connection and will be motivated to repeat the behavior when he hears those keywords. For example, when teaching the puppy to potty outside, use the same potty term ("Go potty," "Get busy," "Hurry," etc.) each time he eliminates, adding a "Good boy!" while he's urinating. Your puppy will soon learn what those trips outside are for.

Timing

All dogs learn their lessons in the present tense. You have to catch them in the act (good or bad) in order to dispense rewards or discipline. You have three to five seconds to connect with your puppy or he will not understand what he did wrong; thus, timing and consistency are your keys to success in teaching any new behavior or correcting bad behaviors. Remember also that the canine brain is not capable of premeditation. They do not "get even" or do something naughty "on purpose." Dogs live and learn in the present, reacting to whatever stimulus is present.

Basic Principles for Success

Successful puppy training depends on several important principles:

1. Use simple one-word commands and say them only once; otherwise, your puppy learns that come (or sit or down) is a three- or four-word command. Even when a command is two words ("Go potty"), you say it as one word.
2. Never correct your dog for something he did minutes earlier. Three to five seconds, remember?