

Make Dog Training Fun

When dog training is fun, you and your dog will both enjoy it more.

Liz Palika

Obedience training tends to be serious stuff; you tell your dog to stay or come and want her 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 her to "Shake" as you reach behind one front paw and tickle her 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 her a treat. When your dog lifts her paw on her own, stop tickling. Eventually your pet will lift her 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 she reaches for your hand, say "Good to wave!" With the wave, you want the dog to lift her paw higher than the shake, and to move it up and down.

Treat on Nose. Have your dog sit and stay. Hold her 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 her enthusiastically. Gradually increase the time the dog has to wait before you release her.

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 her nose with your hand. After a few seconds, say "Okay!" and let her 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 her to roll and say "Roll over!" At first, you may need to physically help your dog roll. Praise her when she does roll over, even if you needed to help. Enthusiastically praise your pet when it rolls over by