

Find a Great Dog Trainer

How to find the right partner for you and your puppy.

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Finally, beware of trainers who make unconditional guarantees. Puppies are individuals and there's no guarantee how they'll respond to training.

Observe a Class

Classroom observation is essential. Here you'll see how a class is run and how the dogs are treated, which will give you a sense of if this is the trainer for you. Remember to leave your dog at home so you can focus on observing the class. If a trainer won't allow you to observe a class, go elsewhere.

Amy Ammen of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, author of *The Everything Puppy Book* (Adams Media, 2002), advises looking closely at class structure. "Is it loose? Tight? What's being accomplished?" Ammen asks. "How are the dogs behaving? How are the owners? Are classroom assistants present?" How does the trainer use his hands, the collar and praise? It's the combination of all these elements that make a training class work.

"Trust your instincts. If you don't have a good sense of the trainer from observing one class, then that trainer isn't for you," Ammen says.

Trainers should provide students with clear lesson instructions, demonstrate behaviors, build on past classes and provide handouts. Approach trainers after observing a class and ask any follow-up questions you may have. It's also a good idea to talk to people in the class, and see how they feel about the training they're receiving.

The Road Ahead

Your future relationship with your puppy depends on the training you provide now.

Positive training will enhance the bond between you and your puppy, and help ensure a happy life together. Do your homework, search out a few trainers, ask questions and make a wise choice, and you (and your shoes) will reap the benefits for years to come.