

DISTRACTION, DURATION AND DISTANCE

Once you have taught your dog a behaviour you will want to make sure that you continue to scale up the difficulty over time if you want your dog to be able to reliably offer behaviour or respond to cues in any situation.

There are 3 areas you can focus on - distraction, duration and distance.

To set your dog up for success it is important to only increase the difficulty in one of these areas at a time.

Practice getting your dog to do behaviours they know well as people or dogs walk by, vehicles drive past or other distractions are present in the environment. Keep an eye on your dog's body language and if you notice them getting worried or excited, increase your distance from the distractions.

You can also work on building up your dog's ability to remain in a chosen position for a longer duration. Initially this might be a few seconds but you can gradually increase the duration so that your dog is able to settle on a blanket throughout family mealtime, or sit at a busy crossroads until it is safe to cross.

Distance is the final parameter and can relate to how far away you move from your dog while they remain in position, or how far away you are from your dog when you cue them. In both cases build up in small increments so that your dog is successful.

As always take things at your dogs pace, keep sessions short and have fun.



HAPPY TRAINING!

REWARD PLACEMENT

When it comes to building behaviour one aspect which has a huge impact but is often overlooked is reward placement. Where and how you reward your dog will impact the final behaviour you build.

For example if you are teaching your dog to run to their bed and lie down, you might choose to reward your dog on their bed. This will help to build value for being on the mat and serve to build calmness and keep your dog in position for duration, particularly if you give multiple rewards one after the other.

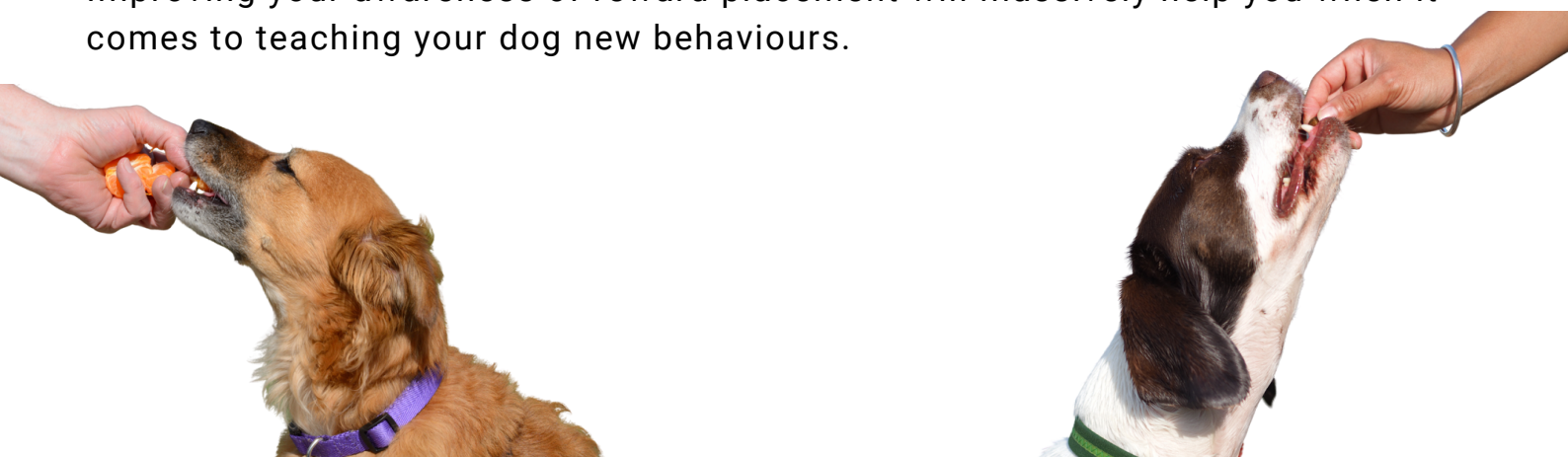
Alternatively, you might choose to reward your dog away from the bed after getting into position. This has the benefit of setting your dog up for another repetition, but also results in energising your dog, which can cause them to move more quickly into position.

There is no right or wrong way - both are perfectly valid and will teach your dog the behaviour but the detail of how the finished behaviour looks will be shaped by the choices you make.

Another example of reward placement shaping behaviour is loose lead walking. Where you choose to reward your dog will affect how close to you they walk, whether they are in front or behind and if they stay to your side or cut across in front of you as you move.

It is also possible to mark your dog for a behaviour in one location but reward them in a different place. For example when building up recall, you might as first mark when your dog turns to look at you, but then offer the reward by your side to further build the behaviour. If you repeat this several times, your dog will start to move towards you as they check in, because the placement of reward drives the behaviour of moving closer to you.

Improving your awareness of reward placement will massively help you when it comes to teaching your dog new behaviours.



HAPPY TRAINING!

DEFAULT HAND POSITION

When it comes to training your dog, one simple thing that will make a big difference is where you hold your hands by default throughout. Dogs can become distracted if your hands are constantly moving, or fixated if your hand strays to your treat pouch before they have completed their action.

To help your dog focus on the task at hand experiment with holding your hands in a set location between exercise repetitions and any time you are shaping a behaviour.

Not only will this be less distracting for your dog, it will help create clearer communication as hand signals will be more obvious and your hand positions will communicate when you are actively training or taking a break.

Find what works for you and be consistent.



HAPPY TRAINING!

LEAVE TASK SWITCHING

When your dog is able to leave items and food that you put on the floor, you can level up the leave it game to help your dog develop their ability to switch their focus from one task to another, and recall information that will enable them to quickly process situations and make appropriate decisions.

This will help your dog to navigate the world around them without frustration and enhance their focus and ability to stay on task, even around distractions.

To start practice getting your dog to leave a treat you place on the floor beside you. Mark and reward your dog where they are for staying still or even better, looking at you.

Next you are going to place the food on the floor and after marking throw your dog's reward behind them so that they get up and run away to get their treat. This will break their focus on the food you have on the ground and as they come back and notice it again, they will have the chance to make a choice. If they slow down and look at you instead of trying to take the food, mark and reward them by tossing a treat again. If they try to take the food, simply cover it up.

After a short while your dog will get really good at making the choice to leave the food on the floor when they return. They will be better able to retain information about the game they are playing with you, even after their focus has shifted to chasing their reward.

This simple game will help your dog develop their processing skills and ability to make good choices even after they become distracted or complete another task. This will have a huge impact on developing self control as well as responding to cues given.



HAPPY TRAINING!

SETTLE IN PUBLIC

Once you have taught your dog to settle in quiet environments, it's important to take this exercise out and about to a variety of locations.

Practice getting your dog to settle on their blanket as you watch the world go by. Make sure you choose a spot which is far enough away for your dog to be able to relax.

You might practice at a quiet cafe, or in the park before eventually building up to relaxing on the high street as people, dogs, children, cars and bicycles go by. Start off with short sessions and build up, until your dog is able to settle for longer.

The more chance you give your dog to practice this skill the more they will be able to happily accompany you anywhere without becoming overexcited or worried.



HAPPY TRAINING!

PRACTICE TURNS ON A WALK

Whenever you are walking your dog, they will be learning the little signals you consistently do, that help them to predict what is going to happen next. The more aware you are of your body movements, the more you can consciously develop the communication between you and your dog. This enables you to walk in harmony together, easily navigating turns and obstacles without the need for verbal cues each time.

In this exercise you are going to practice turns while walking. Turning away from your dog is easiest but you'll also want to practice turns towards your dog.

Find yourself a quiet location to practice. Start by moving in a large square with your dog on the outside. Before each turn, slow down and be aware of how you move your body. You might step into the turn with the corresponding foot to the direction you are turning. Perhaps you point your upper body in the direction you want to move, or you might signal with your hands the direction you intend to turn. Whatever you choose to do, make sure it is consistent and your dog will start to respond to your subtle body movements and move alongside you with ease. When your dog is doing well, practice moving in the opposite direction so that you turn towards your dog.

Another setup you can practice is walking in a T shaped route. Sometimes you will turn left, sometimes right and sometimes you'll turn completely in the opposite direction.

Practicing these turns in a quiet environment like your home or garden before taking it out to more distracting locations will help your dog to succeed, making walks together much more enjoyable.



HAPPY TRAINING!

RECALL TO MIDDLE

When teaching your dog a reliable recall, it is important to keep it fun. Having a variety of ways to call your dog back to you helps keep it interesting and exciting for your dog.

Calling your dog to the middle position is a great addition to your recall toolkit.

Start off in a quiet location and use a food lure or target to guide your dog into the middle position. Mark and reward them between your legs. As your dog gets really good at this you can fade out any food in your hand. When they are rushing into position every time, you are ready to add your chosen cue word. Simply say the cue and then use your hand signal to prompt your dog into position.

You will want to practice cueing your dog into position from a variety of angles so that it becomes reliable no matter where they are in relation to you.

When they can do this in your home or garden it's time to take it out on the road to different locations.

Remember to use a longline to keep your dog safe while they're learning.



HAPPY TRAINING!

CHECK IN FROM A DISTANCE

If you dream of being able to let your dog off lead with the freedom to explore, one exercise you will want to practice is getting your dog to check in with you regularly from a distance. This will help to keep them safe, enable you to recall them to you when needed or cue them to do other behaviours while they are off lead.

Walks are the most enjoyable when your dog is looking out for you as much as you are looking out for them.

To start with you will practice this on a long line to keep your dog safe while they are learning. Every time they look at you, mark and reward them close to you. You can use treats, play with toys or other rewards in the environment like sniffing and exploring interesting areas. Then return to letting them explore the environment.

The more you reward your dog for checking in, the more they will offer it.

In time you can reward your dog by releasing them to continue enjoying the environment, without necessarily coming back to you first.

Practicing this in lots of different situations and around all sorts of distractions will set your dog up for success when you are ready to let them off lead in the future.



HAPPY TRAINING!

WALKING PACE CHANGES

When you walk your dog, there will be times you need to walk quickly and other times you will want to slow down. Practicing getting your dog to match your pace will really help when it comes to creating an enjoyable walking experience for you both.

To start with practice walking at your normal pace and reward your dog beside you when the lead is loose.

Next you are going to practice speeding up your movement. As soon as your dog starts to speed up too, mark and reward them beside you. Initially your dog might find this really exciting so keep the duration short. Gradually you will be able to move quickly for a few paces and then even further before rewarding.

You'll also want to practice slowing down from a normal pace. When your dog notices you've slowed down and adjusts their speed too, mark and reward them beside you.

Keep practicing shifting your pace between slow, normal and fast speeds. The more you practice transitions, the easier your dog will find it to respond to your movement.

You'll then be able to put this into practice in real life scenarios where you need to quickly move past a distraction, or slow down to let somebody by.



HAPPY TRAINING!

WALK AND CATCH

Once you have taught your dog to catch reliably you can use this skill to help build up wonderful, focused walking beside you.

To start, stand with your dog by your side. Have a handful of treats ready and practice getting your dog to catch treats dropped from your hand, one at a time.

This can take a bit of perfecting as your dog will need to respond quickly in order to catch the treats successfully.

When your dog has mastered this standing still, it's time to add movement. Start to walk forward and as your dog follows, reward them by dropping a treat from your hand for them to catch.

Continue to move forward together, dropping a treat every couple of paces.

As your dog gets really good at catching treats on the move, consider practicing in a variety of locations. This exercise is great at building highly focused walking skills which are useful for short periods when you need your dog to stay close and ignore the environment completely.

Remember to practice in short sessions and build up at your dog's pace.



HAPPY TRAINING!

RETURN TO SIDE

Sometimes when out walking with your dog you will want to call them back to your side from in front.

One way to do this involves prompting your dog to move beside you before turning to face forward.

To teach your dog to do this you can use luring or targeting. Guide your dog using a large signal at first to move to your side and turn to face forward.

Mark and reward as soon as your dog is in position.

After some practice you will be able to reduce the size of the signal you give to your dog and add a verbal cue if you'd like to.

Make sure to practice in a variety of quiet environments first, before taking their new skill out to busier locations.



HAPPY TRAINING!

WALKING BACKWARDS

Adolescent dogs don't often have very good body awareness. They are growing rapidly and it takes time and practice to develop controlled movement.

We can help our dogs as they are growing by teaching them to move their bodies with skill. One activity which really helps is teaching your dog to walk backwards. There are many ways to teach your dog to reverse. One way involves using treat placement to set your dog up to walk backwards onto a raised platform. In a quiet environment start by standing or sitting with your legs apart. Place a treat on the ground just behind you. Let your dog move forward to get the treat and place a small platform behind them. Wait for them to reverse backwards from underneath you, marking when they step on the platform. Reward by placing a treat in the same spot again to set them up for the next repetition.

Soon your dog will realise that they are being marked and rewarded whenever they feel the platform under their back feet. You can lengthen the distance away it is, so that they continue to walk backwards until they find the platform.

In time you will be able to add a cue to walk backwards and fade out the target so your dog can do it anywhere.

As always build up in small increments and keep it fun for your dog.



HAPPY TRAINING!