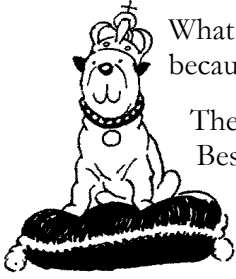


# BASIC TRAINING



What is this gorgeous dog doing in the shelter? Why would someone give him away just because they are moving?

The answer may be that he's just plain rowdy and unmanageable. He's a turbocharged maniac. Besides lunging at everything in sight, this dog doesn't come when called; he runs away.

Because the dog is a chore to walk, he doesn't get exercised often enough or long enough for him to blow off steam. If he's a suburban dog, he spends too much time in the backyard digging, pacing or perhaps fence fighting. His urban counterpart is chewing everything in sight and bursting into a volley of barks at each and every sound in the hall. These are the very behaviors that landed him in the shelter.

It doesn't have to be that way. Teaching a dog functional skills: SIT, DOWN, STAY, HEEL, LEAVE IT and COME can change things dramatically. In the process of giving the dog some basic vocabulary and setting some rules and guidelines, the relationship between person and dog becomes enhanced. They become a team. There is much information available in the form of books and videos that makes humane training skills accessible to anyone who wants to learn.

Videos are the best thing to happen to dog training since the printing press. Books talk a great game, but videos make it come alive. Watching again and again, the viewer can pick up all the nuances of training; the timing, body positions, use of equipment and more. The action photo shows technique, but not the energy or coordination that is involved. Videos allow you to see it and hear it. . . all in your own living room! Rent a few. Get a feel for a few different techniques or ideas.

The leash and collar are important pieces of training equipment. Good quality equipment will hold up well and be an asset in helping you teach and direct your dog. Poor quality or ill-fitting equipment can break or come loose and foil your best efforts.

There are several types of collars that are readily available. Buckle collars wrap around a dog's neck in the same way a belt goes around your waist. They are made of nylon web or leather, rolled or flat in appearance. The collar must fit well or the dog will be able to slip out of the collar. Check to make sure it cannot slip over the dog's head. Be prepared to buy several collars for a puppy since they are in a stage of rapid growth. Remember to check the collar frequently. Buckle collars are a must for puppies and small dogs; they are best used with dogs that don't pull and forge or fearful and geriatric dogs. All dogs should wear buckle collars with their license and identification tags securely attached.

The slip or choke collar is a valuable training tool for some dogs. The slip collar must be put on correctly and used properly or it stays tight even though the handler has let up on the leash. They can do damage to a dog's trachea or spinal cord if improperly used. Dogs should never be left in a crate or unsupervised while wearing a slip collar. Nor should they be allowed to play with other dogs. The result could be strangulation. Fearful dogs that may bolt in panic should never be walked with a choke collar.

Ever controversial is the prong or pinch collar. It may look like a medieval torture device but it does have its place in training. Dogs that are extremely touch insensitive and/or have thick coats or are easily distracted may benefit from a collar that communicates better than a slip or buckle collar can. People who lack strength and stature may also find it easier to train using a prong collar (or head halter) to gain initial control. The number of links in the collar must always allow the collar to close fully without putting excessive pressure on the dog's skin. Using too few links can puncture the dog's neck, too many links makes it a useless tool. Once training has proceeded beyond basic control, most dogs can graduate to a slip collar and then finally to a buckle collar. Think of these tools in the same way that many people use training wheels on a bicycle — temporary.

Head halters are relatively new in dog training. Fearful, mouthy, bold, independent or aggressive dogs may benefit from being led by the head (like a horse) rather than being led by the neck. Halters give handlers better control without putting stress on the dog's fragile spine.



The training leash should be 6 feet long and no wider than an inch; preferably less. The width should be in proportion to the dog. Cotton web or leather leashes are more comfortable to work with than nylon. Pay special attention to the bolt snap that attaches the leash to the collar. Make sure that it is not too cumbersome or heavy in proportion to the size of the dog, and can be easily attached or disconnected from the collar. Stitching or braiding as opposed to tacking or stapling are indications of good quality.

If the dog bites at the leash, chewproof it. Do not give in to the dog's attempt to get control; do not use a steel chain leash. Use a cotton web (absorbent) leash and spray it down with an anti-chew agent. This type of product is readily available in pet supply stores and catalogs. If the dog tries to mouth the leash, it will taste awful. Combine that with a firm warning, "LEAVE IT" or "STOP IT" and the dog will get the message. The leash is an extension of the hand and he should not put his mouth on it! Don't confuse the dog by playing tug of war with the leash.

Voice and posture must accurately reflect what you are feeling but it must be delivered in a way that the dog understands. To warn or reprimand, stand tall, lean toward the dog slightly, speak in a deep strong voice. This can be challenging for women who have soft voices. When surprised or stressed, some women have a tendency to become shrill or whiny. To let the dog know that he did well, relax your posture or kneel down. Speak in a cheerful happy manner. Remember to smile. Men with deep, resonant voices will have to work at developing a lighter praise tone.



Dogs respond very well to training with food lures and rewards; hard corrections and harsh physical manipulations do not build confidence. Never train when you are angry or in a hurry.

Good relationships are not built on intimidation. A well-trained, well — behaved dog does not happen by accident. She is the product of a carefully nurtured relationship based on trust.

Training sessions should be short and frequent rather than long drawn-out affairs. Work on one variable at a time. For example, if you are working on SIT/STAYS, remember that length of time holding the stay, the distance from trainer to dog and the distractions in the area are points to be considered. Don't work the dog off-leash until he is quite proficient on-leash. Get a longer leash to do distance work! To go from a 3 minute to a 4 minute DOWN/STAY, reduce the level of distraction and move in closer to the dog. Set it up so the dog can be successful and that you can catch the dog before he begins to break his position. Once the dog can hold the position for the desired time, add either the distractions or the distance, NOT BOTH SIMULTANEOUSLY. Dogs do not generalize well. In order to understand that sit means the same thing indoors and out, on carpeting as well as linoleum, practice it in many locations under varying circumstances.

Use common sense when training. Don't try to teach new things to a highly distracted dog. Those same distractions will later become training challenges. When working on a new concept or exercise it is best to work with a calm and focused dog. When teaching and training, act like a leader. Don't repeat commands again and again. No chanting "sit, sit, SIT!"

Lastly, remember that there is more than one way to work with and train a dog and that one method won't work on all dogs. Be fair. Your dog should enjoy a training session. If what's being done causes the dog to become frightened or intimidated, physical and/or vocal corrections may be too harsh. If it's not working, don't keep doing it! Perhaps the book or video being used is for dogs that are more resilient. Just because a certain method worked with another dog doesn't mean it will work with your current dog. If the dog begins to scratch and pick, yawn or shake off with each command, he's getting stressed. Take a break. Play a game. Reassess the training routine. You may be moving too quickly. Or the dog may just be responding to the realization that he can no longer control the situation.

If you feel your home training has stalled, perhaps group obedience classes or private one-on-one lessons are in order. It will be worth the investment. A well-trained dog is a joy to live with and a good-will ambassador for its kind.

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