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Training in Small Segments and Keeping a Log Book

If you are having a problem with an exercise you should break the exercise down into small segments and once the dog is doing the small segments, put the exercise together. The same holds true for groupings of exercises. The first week of any set of classes that I teach I hand out a worksheet to follow. Each week emphasizes certain exercises. During those weeks, your training routines at home should stress those exercises learned for that week. By breaking your training into small segments, you are not bombarding your dog with too many new exercises thereby frustrating your dog and yourself.

Not only do I suggest breaking each week into small segments of new exercises but I also suggest that you keep a training log of the date, new exercises taught and how the dog did as well as previous exercise reviews of how your dog did. This way you can see improvement on a weekly or monthly basis, figure out the problem areas and see where your dog needs extra help. You can also keep a schedule for yourself; i.e. July 2005 – begin off leash work. August 2005 – non-verbal hand signals. This schedule will motivate you and can give you a time frame for the completion of new exercises. But break the schedule down daily (i.e. Monday – Heel, Tuesday – Recall, Wednesday – stays). Each day, your training sessions should stress 1 particular exercise.

If you don't plan on teaching new exercises and are content with your dog's vocabulary, plan variations of basic exercises to keep it interesting. Example: Come: sit front, call dog with your back turned, drop on recall, finish, drop on recall with you returning to your dog, sit on recall, recall with play, recall with you standing crooked so your dog must adjust himself to sit front.

Remember, that each dog's ability to learn is different. Every dog's personal performance should be evaluated individually. Your training log will give you an idea of improvement and where your dog needs extra help. Each dog's personality is different. An active and playful dog may have problems with the stay exercises. This is because their heads are going in too many directions and they concentrate better when actually doing things. A quite, lazy dog may do great with the stay exercises but may lag horribly with the 'heel' and 'come' exercises. A shy dog probably will give you a hard time with the stay exercises because he is afraid to be far from you and looks to you for protection. An aggressive dog might do great with stay as long as no one is moving, easier to keep an eye on the enemy, but the moving exercises probably will make him nervous.

The age and sex of your dog is important also. Many dogs' go through a goofy age between 7 months to 1-½ years. Work through it. This is the age of sexual maturity. Spayed or neutered, it doesn't matter; the hormones are kicking in. That is why I usually don't recommend off leash work till the dog is over a year. There are so many things happening in their bodies that they can't concentrate on work. But it doesn't mean not to expect them to work. We had to go to school and so does the dog. All I'm saying is understand that it is not stupidity – its hormones and the fact that your dog is having a hard time concentrating. If your dog is working beautifully and doing advanced exercises great – if not – it's normal.

Don't give up. Keep the training fun. Expect to be disappointed and you'll be very surprised when the dog finally understands. Problems are good. Problems help you work through your dog's fears and faults to achieve a confident and obedient dog. It might be a hell of a ride getting there but your success will be worth the agony.