

Dog Training Articles
By Beth Bradley

What is Dog Training?

Training consists of (1) teaching your dog commands and (2) re-teaching him new behaviors to replace bad habits. In essence, training is creating habits in your dog. Going outdoors to relieve themselves, sitting on command, heeling next to you on a leash, stealing food from the counters, jumping on people; they are all habits.

There are three very important phases to training dogs: (A) The Teaching Phase; (B) the Correction Phase and (C) The proofing phase.

The Teaching Phase:

This phase consists of creating the association between a command and an action on the dog's part. This phase is sometimes taught by you, the owner, because the completion of the action on the dog's part elicits some type of reward; i.e. either a toy, praise, treat or all three. For example, you give the command *Sit* and raise a treat above your dog's head, he sits because he is 'following' the treat and you praise him and reward him with the treat for doing so. After some repetition, the dog understands that when he is commanded to *Sit*, he will receive a treat or reward of some type once he places his 'rump' on the ground.

In order to have success in this phase must acknowledge his correct response to your command with praise and a reward of some type, food or ball or toys. Your dog's reward should be his most favorite thing.

This phase can also be self-taught by the dog for a bad habit. For example; the dog smells food, he jumps on the kitchen counter and steals the food on the counter. In essence, the dog just taught himself that if he jumps on the counter he can self-reward himself for jumping by stealing food.

The amount of time it will take you to complete this phase depends upon the command being taught, the amount of time that you have to teach this command and the intelligence of your dog. Each command you teach will go through a Teaching Phase. My recommendation is that the Teaching Phase is done in a place that has minimal distractions so your dog can focus on your command and learn what he should be doing.

The Correction Phase:

Before entering this phase in dog training, it is very important that you, as the handler and owner, are 100% certain that the dog understands what you want of him and that your dog is deciding that his response to the command is not

important. If your dog is unsure of the command or what you want from him, then you need to spend more time in the Teaching Phase. When you are in this phase the reward is given intermittently and the dog does not see the reward.

Sometimes the reward is just not enticing enough to a dog to respond to a command or the dog believes that his choice of misbehavior outweighs the reward in which you will give him. It is during this phase that you are teaching your dog that his response to obedience commands is not optional.

When your dog misbehaves or is disobedient, you must immediately reprimand him verbally and with some type of compulsion if necessary. The correction should immediately stop the disobedience. If your dog returns to this behavior, then your correction was not meaningful enough. If a verbal correction is enough and your dog does not return to the disobedient behavior, then there is no reason to physically correct; but if your dog does return to being disobedient you didn't make a big enough impression on him. It doesn't matter what method of compulsion you use as long as your dog responds, respects and learns from the correction.

You know you are ready to move on to the next phase when you are training with your dog and he always responds quickly and without a correction to a command; only using verbal praise and without a physical reward. If you are still correcting your dog through most of your training session, you are not ready for distractions.

The Proofing Phase:

It is during this phase that you will be using distractions and new environments to teach your dog that training is a way of life not something that is done at a certain place or at a certain time. In the Teaching Phase you taught your dog in an area with minimal distractions, now that you are 100% certain that your dog understands the command you begin to add distractions; slowly add distractions. Some dogs have problems in new areas without distractions. That is because the NEW AREA IS A DISTRACTION. If that is the case, take baby steps in that new area and then once the dog is proficient in that area with distractions, off to another new area but again take baby steps. You want to train in areas that are populated by people and other animals. Sometimes, it only takes one dog at a distance to distract your dog, you must know what is going to be distracting to your dog and how close in proximity you can get to the distraction before your dog completely loses control. Sometimes it is just adding another person on a walk that will distract your dog from the *Heel* command. If that is the case, don't go to the park where you will not only have the distraction of the person walking with you but also children, other dogs, bicycles, wildlife, etc.

Conclusion:

It is important that you take ample time in moving from each phase so your dog completely understands what it is that you want from him. If your dog is confused,

this will lead to mistakes not disobedience to commands. Don't be afraid to take a step back in training to convince yourself that your dog understands what you want from him and/or to move slowly from step to step to ensure your dog's success. The goal is to keep the training fun and positive; if your dog is at all confused training then ceases to be fun and instead becomes riddled with stress.