



True North Training

How Do I Start Training My Puppy?

So...your new arrival has just come home and is so adorable that you wonder if it's even legal to have a puppy that cute! But you also want your puppy to grow into a lovely dog that listens well to you and is welcome everywhere you take her (or him). The good news is that your puppy is a sponge for learning! Puppies love to learn new things and this can create an opportunity for a wonderful bonding experience for both of you.

Your first step should be to sit down somewhere, and decide what you want your puppy to know. This seems obvious, but many people don't take the time to identify the items on their puppy's "knows and can-do" list. The result is likely to be confusion: the puppy won't magically figure out what is on your list, and if you don't start with a good list, you will not be as consistent with the puppy as you could be. Once you have your list of "Things To Learn" it's good to spend a little bit of time on prioritizing. Which things need to be trained right away, and which things may be able to wait a bit? And yes - it's ok to add to and adjust your list over time as you develop additional interests.

Many people have a list something like this as a starting point:

- Potty-trained
- Crate-trained
- Comes when called
- Knows how to sit and lie down on command (and will sit and lie down on command anywhere, anytime)
- Walks politely on a leash (without pulling and/or weaving all over the sidewalk and tripping the human)

Facts to keep in mind as you begin to train your puppy are:

- Puppies have short attention spans and will do better with 3-5 minutes of training multiple times over the day.
- Puppies need you to be consistent in the training process.

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Potty training should start as soon as you bring the puppy home. If they are taken from the litter and brought home at the right age, he or she will already have begun learning a “surface preference”. However, it’s good to be aware that your dog can learn not only to potty outside, but also to potty in a specific location and/or when you give a verbal cue.

If you know that you want your dog to potty in one corner of your backyard, and that you would like to be able to tell the dog to go (for instance in a driving rainstorm or a blizzard), you will be able to set up the conditions that will yield those results, right from the start. Placing your puppy in the crate when you are not focusing on them is an important step. It is those times when you get distracted that the puppy can slip under your radar and make a mistake, and every mistake will set you back! Likewise, keeping your eyes on the puppy if he's not crated is equally important. Make sure the crate isn't too big as this will assist the puppy by creating a “this is my den; I do not defoul it” behavior. Assume that the puppy will need to go out about fifteen minutes to one half-hour after eating or drinking as well as first thing in the morning and last thing at night. When it’s “Time to Go”, take your puppy out on a leash and guide him to the potty location. Be prepared to wait until he goes which may take a while. When he is in the act, begin saying your cue word, quietly, so as not to distract the puppy. Keep saying it until he is finishing up, then have a big party, with treats and lots of petting, and finally take the puppy away from the potty location for a game.

Don’t give your puppy free-choice water (instead, until he is reliable about going potty outdoors, offer water after meals and at set times in between meals. Give no water after 8:00 pm (this will help the puppy to make it for as long as possible overnight). Be prepared to get up with the puppy in the middle of the night for the first few weeks, go outside to the potty location, and then come right back inside once they do their business. Puppy bladders have LIMITED CAPACITY so don’t overstress them. A puppy can understand that he shouldn't go inside, but may not be able to hold it if you make your puppy wait too long. It can be helpful to understand that accidents are actually the fault of the owner – either by waiting too long or not paying attention to the puppy’s signals that they are in need. (Assume that the puppy can “hold it” for the same number of hours as the puppy’s age in months, and you should be safe. When the puppy is not crated, it's wise to take your puppy out every hour or so during the daytime when they are more active.)

Teach the puppy that “Crates happen”. The first step in successful crate training is to have a crate of the correct size. Wire crates will often have a movable wire partition that can be used to create the crate size you need as the puppy grows. With plastic crates you will need to buy larger crates as your puppy grows. The key thing is that your crate should always be big enough for the pup to stand and turn around, but not big enough for activities other than lying down and chewing on a toy.

Getting in the crate should not be a life sentence (for either you OR your puppy!). If the puppy goes in the crate after successful potty events, with a nice chew toy or some sort of reward such as their dinner, and comes out again fairly soon for interaction with the people, then another potty opportunity, then back in the crate to rest, the crate will very quickly become the puppy’s comfy spot. The one rule of puppy life, with regard to crates, is that puppies who vocalize in their crates *never* get out of those crates, ideally until the vocalizations have stopped for about 30 seconds. Sometimes this rule will be very hard for the humans to keep, because puppy vocalizations can be extremely annoying, but if you make sure that the puppy ALWAYS goes potty before going in the crate, you can be comfortable just ignoring the yips and yaps and cries. If you have to, to keep your sanity, go outside for a while, but do not let the puppy out of the crate in response to yipping, barking, whining, howling, pawing at the crate door, or any other attention-getting behavior on the puppy’s part. Also, if you find that your puppy becomes attention seeking after a specific bit of time in the crate, 10 minutes for example, then keep the amount of time in the crate below that threshold for a while and work towards lengthening the time your puppy successfully spends in the crate. It is much better to have successful times in the crate, which are increasing in length over time, then it is to deal with a yipping and pawing puppy. If you are having trouble with this training project, it can help to call a trainer for assistance.

For other behaviors, just as with potty & crate training, consistency and planning is the key.

Know exactly what you want to train that puppy to do, and work towards it incrementally. Be willing to reward a good effort on the way to the finished behavior. You can teach “sit” and “down” by luring the puppy with a treat, or by “catching” the puppy doing either one, and rewarding it. When the puppy is offering the behavior in a specific setting and at a specific time, and you would be willing to bet someone five dollars (and not just Monopoly Money) that the pup will sit or lie down there/then, you are ready to “name” the behavior. Once the behavior has a name (for example, “Sit” or “Down”), then you can start moving it around. Start indoors, with low distractions. As the puppy gets quicker at responding to the verbal command, ask for “sit” and “down” in new spots in the house. If you started with “down” in the living room while you were watching TV, try using the word in the next room. When the puppy is responding there, move to a new room, and work on it there. Once the pup will sit or lie down anywhere in your house, take the behavior outdoors but give yourself a chance; keep the puppy on a leash and ask for the sit or down in a spot where you can get the puppy’s attention (not on a busy sidewalk or in the middle of a playground, or where the puppy can see other dogs playing, etc.). The more you practice, and the more careful you are about how much “challenge” you give your puppy at one time, the better the response you will get.

Coming when called can be a life-saving behavior. Your puppy, when she first comes home, is naturally inclined to follow you, so take advantage of this and teach your puppy that coming when called is ALWAYS a Good Thing For Dogs! Carry special treats that the puppy loves, and call the puppy at all different times and places. Run away from the puppy, calling her name. If she is playing in

the backyard, call her to you at the back door, give a treat, and then let her go back to what she was doing. Call her from play with other dogs and then let her go back to playing. You want, insofar as possible, to imprint on their puppy brain, the following facts: Coming when called results in GOOD treats; is only a momentary interruption in the fun; does not mean (ever) that she is going to be punished for something OR that something unpleasant is going to happen (so, if you have to give her a bath and she hates baths, for example, don't call her to you; go to her instead). If you call her and she comes, she gets treats and hugs and lots of puppy fun!

At some point your puppy will become an Adolescent. At that stage, your puppy may sometimes seem to forget about coming when called (or about sitting and lying down on command or about other things that you thought he or she was perfect at doing). Do not be dismayed. If you have to, put your pup back on leash until they consistently remembers their manners once again. Continue your training sessions including the items that are once again needing to be practice. Adolescence passes, in time, and you will wake up one day and find that in place of your teenager you now have an adult dog who remembers ALL those things you taught them!



FAQ's about training a puppy:

Why should I train my puppy?

Your puppy is always learning. Your choice to train him will simply direct his learning in a direction that benefits you both. You'll be teaching him how to interact appropriately with other dogs and people, and while you do this, you'll build positive communication skills that will last you a lifetime. Positive and fun training projects improve your dog's confidence and build your relationship into a partnership. Since you don't speak dog, and your dog doesn't talk, it's in both of your best interests to take the time to enroll in a good dog obedience class.

How long will it take to train my puppy?

This always depends on a number of factors; including how much time you practice when you are not in class (and what the quality of your practice time is) and what activities you want to do with your dog. Because training your dog is really a process of learning to communicate with her, however long you spend will end up improving your long-term relationship. Generally, however, you should plan to spend about 15 to 20 minutes per day, in 3 to 5 minute increments, training your dog or puppy. And as in any other pursuit, your results will depend to a great extent on your commitment to the program!

What qualities should I look for in a trainer?

Find a trainer who:

- Is committed to finding positive ways to teach and train
- Really enjoys working with and teaching the human students as well as their dogs
- Has experience working with many different breeds and backgrounds of dogs

- Not only understands the science of behavior and how it works, but is good at explaining it to you and helping you apply the principles to training your dog
- Engages in regular continuing education
- Your trainer should model good training practices with their own dogs as well, wherever they are on the training continuum.

Before finalizing who your trainer will be by signing up for a class – it can be helpful to ask if you can observe a session that they are currently teaching. This will give you a feel for how they interact with the owners and puppies/dogs so you can decide if they will be a good match for you.

How much will it cost to train my puppy/dog?

Good training classes can cost anywhere from \$100 – \$150 for a 6 to 8 week class that meets for about an hour each week. The classes you take are really an investment in the quality of life you and your puppy will enjoy together. They help you to learn to work together while building a foundation for your relationship.

Should I train my dog myself or send him out to a board and train facility?

It's highly recommended that you take your dog to class yourself if at all possible. Good training teaches you how to communicate with your pet, so any time you spend learning how to train your dog will benefit your skills and your relationship. If you find that you're struggling in a particular area, you can contact your instructor for extra help. Often, they may offer private sessions or be willing to work on a problem area for you while you are at work or have other things to do. If for some reason you must hire a trainer and place your dog in a board and train setting, make sure the trainer has the ability to communicate to you how to work with the dog after the training is over. Sessions to work with the owner and the dog should be an integral part of the Board and Train package.

Should I teach my puppy to do tricks?

Absolutely! You must remember that from your dog's perspective, all obedience training is "trick training". David Letterman notwithstanding, there really is no such thing as a "Stupid Pet Trick". Tricks are fun to teach, for both you and your dog, and they help engage your pup's brain as he learns how to do them, they build his confidence, and improve your positive training and communication skills. Add to this the fact that most dogs who know how to do tricks on command are perceived as smarter than average, and you can see that teaching your puppy tricks will have long term benefits for both of you.

