

Creedons College

Adult Education in the Pet Industry

Professional Dog Training Instructor

Module 4 – Dog Obedience and Training

Lesson 1 – Dog Training Success



Introduction

This lesson will take an in depth look at how you can combine your acquired knowledge from the previous three modules to apply it to the art of training dogs. This lesson will focus on successful dog training, without yet doing any training!

Goals of This Module

By the completion of this lesson you will have gained a superior understanding in the very best practices when teaching a dog, a new behaviour. This is very important, as your behaviours will be the difference between a well-trained, and a poorly trained dog.

Dog training opportunities come in many forms, from training new puppies, to helping dogs change unwanted behaviours, to training assistance dogs to keeping elderly dogs 'young'. Whatever path you pursue, this lesson will build your knowledge in the very best way to set up a training session for success, and you will be able to use this knowledge throughout your career to continue to provide the very best for both your human and four legged clients.

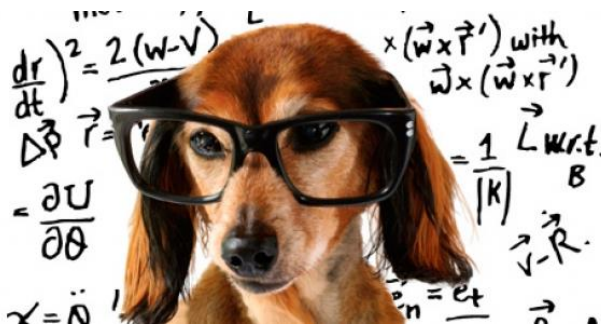


What is Dog Training?

Dog training has such a wide meaning in today's society. From working dogs who sniff out drugs, herd sheep, assist people in need and more, to dogs engaging in sport, from agility, to fly ball, to freestyle dance, and then to our pet dogs, who learn basic manners, fun tricks, and behaviours to help them fit into family life. Dogs receive training for many, many reasons.

Training dogs all ties back to our learning theory – and every single dog training video visible on YouTube can be broken right back down to very simple learning theory processes which are still carried out today.

Many modern dog trainers preach that they exclusively use positive reinforcement training, yet the ability to use one trial learning, classical conditioning, negative punishment, and more are skills that can help you think outside the box, explain to your client why their dog is carrying out behaviours, and will allow you to devise sophisticated training programmes without relying on a 'go to' of training plans devised by other trainers.



As highly knowledgeable dog trainers, you will also be able to use your superior knowledge of the nervous and endocrine system when working with dogs. You will understand that a dog in a sympathetic nervous system

dominant state is not in the right mind frame to learn, and you will be able to use that knowledge to explain to clients why their dogs may be unable to focus, or you will be able to remove a dog from a situation that may prompt a SNS dominant state so that you can carry out your training session successfully. You will also be able to understand that a dog that has had a stressful experience will have cortisol rushing through its system shortly after, and how chronically elevated cortisol levels will make it difficult for the dog to learn.

Your knowledge of different neurochemistry, and how to alter neurochemistry will help you in dog training. You know that chewing will release dopamine, so chewing may be beneficial prior to training a hyper dog, or that exercise increases endorphins so a dog that is unmotivated in training may benefit from a brisk walk before beginning your training.

Your knowledge of A B and C will help you when training dogs, as you know that the consequence to the behaviour must occur in two seconds or less for learning to occur, which your clients or less educated competitors may not know.

Your ability to interpret body language means that while other trainers may miss that the dog has begun to yawn, perform a paw lift, or is carrying out head turns, and that trainer is likely to continue to be an unwanted presence whereas your education in interpreting body languages means that you will be able to listen to that dog and respond, perhaps by giving that dog more space or removing an aversive from the environment.



All of the education you have received in the first three modules is critical in helping to build you as an elite dog trainer. Remember, while Ireland is crying out for qualified and competent dog trainers, in reality there are more unqualified dog trainers available than qualified, so you should be proud of what you have achieved to date, and continue to revise and review the material we have covered because, as you can see, it is all relevant.

Dog training as an industry is much needed. Many trainers will work with pet dogs, both in their home and in group classes, to teach them how to understand basic cues, help to stimulate them mentally, and allow their owners gain control over their behaviours so that both can live together happily.

Owners and dogs that train together are far less likely to be surrendered to the pound, or euthanized for behaviour problems. Training really is the solution to many of the unwanted elements of dog ownership, and a career as a dog trainer is rewarding and truly makes a difference.

The choice between offering one to one training or group training classes will depend on your preference, the demand in your area, and what the clients are looking for. Many trainers will offer both, but as your business grows you may find that you prefer to specialise in just one field. We will explore this much more in the final module. At the end of the day, training is the same. You are training the dog, and then training the owner how to carry out the training.

The vital element to both is that you have the ability to train dogs of different personalities to a highly skilled level. Dog training handling skills are known as **motor**

skills and can be likened to learning how to drive. Where you position your hands, how you stand, how you speak and so much more all provide a vital piece of dog training, so before you unleash yourself upon the general public you have to learn how to become a fantastic ‘driver’ so that you can then teach others how to ‘drive’. If you cannot lure a client’s dog in to a sit position, then it would be unfair to expect the client to be able to do the same.

An important element to improving your motor skills is practice with a wide variety of dogs. Big dogs, small dogs. Unmotivated dogs, obsessed dogs. Shy dogs, bouncy dogs. Young dogs, old dogs. You get the message! What works for one won’t work for others, and there are many more elements than just that.

Experience will build your knowledge far more than any manual or webinar can. For example, I have not seen in any dog training book or DVD that intact male dogs may struggle to learn to sit if the floor surface is cold – it’s an anatomy thing ;)



This module will focus on making you a knowledgeable and skilful dog trainer, then our final module will focus on improving your skills as a dog training instructor.

We will look at presenting skills in this module in the final lesson, though this is so that you can become comfortable ‘speaking’ dog training before working on your confidence presenting to clients in the final module.

What is Success?

When training a dog, we all want a successful outcome. However, it is important to have a goal and targets in mind before you begin the session.

Are you working with a client? If so, what do they want to achieve? Discuss this with them. Ask the 'magic wand' question. If I had a magic wand, what would you like? If the client has unrealistic expectations, you can introduce milestones. For example, if their magic wand request is to have a dog 'stay' on the porch while the owner parades cats around the garden, suggest 'how about today we aim to achieve to have your dog stay on the porch while we cross the garden, and tomorrow we will increase that to having your dog stay while we carry a cat in our arms in the garden. Start off with a goal, and make sure that goal is realistic.

When beginning your session, it's important to look at your priorities. Is success to you a happy client that will recommend you to friends and family? Or is your idea of success helping that dog feel more confident around traffic? Perhaps your goal is to achieve the client's goals. Training can be an endless task, but breaking down the training into small, individual sessions until you reach the final behaviour will help to keep morale high, success rates high, and will help reduce any feeling of overwhelm from the owner and trainer. Writing out a detailed plan from the beginning is advisable.



How Can We Achieve Dog Training Success?

Setting up for success should be a mantra that you follow, and pass on to your clients. It's important that, as the 'more intelligent' species we use our knowledge to put many management techniques in place to ensure that we are maximising the likelihood of success in every training session.

Early Learning

When learning a new behaviour it's important that we ensure that we make it as easy as possible for the dog to understand what we are trying to teach. Frustration can occur quickly, especially in some dogs, so early wins, and jackpot reinforcements early on will drastically increase the dogs focus, dopamine levels, and enjoyment of the process. Clients will also become positively reinforced every time their dog succeeds, so start off easy.

I recommend that when training a new behaviour the client initially recaps on prior training, choosing a behaviour that the dog has already mastered. If this is early days and the dog does not yet have any behaviours under stimulus control, then I recommend starting off by luring the dog to follow the food reward for one-two steps, before rewarding. This should be easily achieved and will help motivate the dog.

Next, when introducing the new behaviour you should have clearly laid out the steps to the training. Start with the very foundation of the behaviour, using a continuous reinforcement schedule.



Motivation

Setting up for success requires an understanding of motivation. This comes in many forms. Animals can be motivated into performing a behaviour to avoid pain, to escape fear, to gain food, and more. Each individual dog will have different motivating factors, and these factors can and will alter, even on a day to day basis depending on the state the animal is in.

Understanding motivation will help you to design your training plan accordingly.

You can conduct a preference test with a dog by offering the dog two reinforcing stimuli at the same time and seeing what they choose. Will the dog leave a toy to gain access to the garden? Will they choose chicken treat over a cheese treat? Do they prefer tactile attention to play? This is an area where you will build up your 'tool box' through experience. For example, in the past when working with a dog that the owner claimed was impossible to motivate, we discovered that the dog could easily be lured by following fabric that smelled of dog, as this dog was highly motivated by dog-dog interactions.

Nothing in Life Is Free is a controversial dog training programme where the dog gets no attention, rewards, access unless it first 'pays' by performing behaviours. While this can be considered extreme and excessively controlling, it is worth implementing regular training into the dog's life. When the dog wants something, it is an opportunity to request the behaviour from them so that you can reward with real life rewards such as attention and so on without having a treat-reliant dog. However, the dog should still be able to have some control over their lives and should get a lot of 'freebees'.



The Three D's

We have met the three D's before, distraction, distance, duration. However, when setting up for success we need to manage all three.

Distraction is the big one. Start your training in a room where the dog is not easily distracted. If your dog is fed in the utility room this will probably not be a good choice. If your kitchen floor is full of smells of dropped dinner this isn't good. Hallways generally are not great as there is a lot of activity about. Choose a location that the dog uses to relax in. If this is the sitting room then ideally, depending on the dog, there should be no one else in the room (especially if this is a multi-dog home, training begins one on one with each dog individually), televisions and radio should be off, if the dog is distracted by passers by outside curtains can be drawn. Look at the environment through the individual dog's eyes, what distractions do you see?

Ensure that the dog is at a comfortable distance when starting the training. Attempting to get a dog to focus on you from a distance can prove difficult. This especially applies to behaviours that you want performed at distance, such as stay, or leave it. Begin close.

Duration is important when it comes to the duration that the dog is required to do the behaviour, but also the duration of the training session. The general recommendation is that an individual training session only lasts 5-10 minutes, though each dog is an individual. The duration that the dog is expected to perform the behaviour is also important. Early in training it is important to reinforce the dog for short performances of the behaviour, though as you are strengthening the behaviour you can ask for longer.



Types of Cues

To successfully train a dog you must decide what exactly you want them to do, and how you are going to signal to the dog to perform that behaviour.

Often hand signal cues are trained, which will usually become a modified version of a lure.

Verbal cues are very popular amongst pet dog owners as they can consider successful training to mean that their dog will be able to carry out the behaviour when asked to do so. When teaching a verbal cue to a dog it is important as a trainer that you choose the word carefully to ensure it won't become confused with another verbal cue that sounds similar. You must also, as trainer, remember that the dog will not understand the word, but will associate the sound made to the behaviour performed. Therefore, it is important that the cue sounds the same upon each repetition. You must also remember, and teach your clients, that the cue should ideally only be given once. "Sit!" sounds very different to "sit, sit, sit down, sit!". If the client wants the dog to perform the behaviour upon the first request then they, and you, must remember that when training the dog keep the cue consistent and just say it once.

Environmental cues can also be taught, so that the dog learns that in X situation they must perform Y behaviour. If you train your dog to sit at the back door before gaining access, then sitting at the back door becomes the cue to sit. If you train your dog to sit in the car until you call them out of the car, then being in the car with an open door can become the cue for 'wait'.



Luring

When training a dog using a food lure there are many elements that need to be considered for successful training.

The size of the treat should be very small. Dogs will not taste the treat as much as they will smell it, and using large treats can both fill a dog up quickly, and take longer to consume. Treats for small dogs should be no bigger than your baby finger nail, and treats for giant dogs should be no bigger than your thumb nail.

If the treat is a dry biscuit type, and too large, it can result with treat fragments falling on to the ground causing the dog to sniff the floor and become distracted. Small, meaty, smelly treats work best when luring.

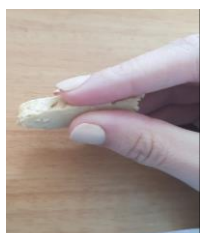


Figure 1 Too easy to snatch.

When luring, the way you hold the treat is important. A treat in your fist can be too difficult for the dog to see or smell, resulting in them losing interest quickly. If the treat is too easily accessed the dog may grab it and consume it without following the lure resulting in the dog learning to snap the treat out of the trainer's hand. The treat should be pinched between your thumb and first two fingers. You should be able to see the treat but it should not be protruding.

The distance of the lure from the dog is very important. If the lure is too far away from the dog's nose it can become difficult for the dog to enter the position you want, and the dog may lunge forward for the treat. The lure should be virtually on the dog's nose, so that your hand becomes an extension of the dog. Luring needs to be learned by the dog, and they learn quickly when done right. The dog learns that "If I follow this treat it will be given to me when I do the right thing". If the dog becomes snappy toward the lure, then the trainer needs to instantly remove the lure each time the dog snaps. The dog will learn that the treat only stays close by if they do not snap at it, and snapping will be negatively punished.



Ideal position

Ideal position with first finger removed to see treat

Front view. Dog can see and smell treat but not access it.

Capturing

Often a dog may not have the confidence to follow a lure, or its physical design may make luring a behaviour difficult (it can sometimes be difficult to lure a small dog into a down position). Your knowledge of, and experience in, using capturing training can help increase the likelihood of success of that plan.

When using capturing training it is important to again remember, what is the end goal? How can you break that into mini goals? What will motivate this dog?

Capturing works best with everyday behaviours, you simply need to wait for the dog to perform the behaviour naturally, then mark it with the cue and reward. Clicker training can be beneficial with capturing, and this will be covered more in a future lesson.



Timing

When training a dog, timing is vitally important. When in an environment without distraction research has shown that on average, dogs cannot form an association between a behaviour and the consequence if the consequence occurs after 3 seconds of the behaviour. If the dog is in a distracted state, then this 3 seconds decreases.

Bridging can be done. This is where you lengthen the time between the behaviour and the consequence. If the behaviour is being performed at a distance the bridge will allow the animal to understand that the consequence is coming. If you instruct a dog to 'leave it', or recall from a distance it is likely that you are already using a bridge, often in this situation the praise secondary reinforcer becomes the bridge to the primary reinforcer. The bridge must be given instantly to extend the 3 seconds.

Body Language

Observing the dog's body language throughout the training session is important for success, you will be able to see if the dog is becoming demotivated, distracted, bored, overwhelmed, nervous and so on, and you will be able to alter your programme accordingly.

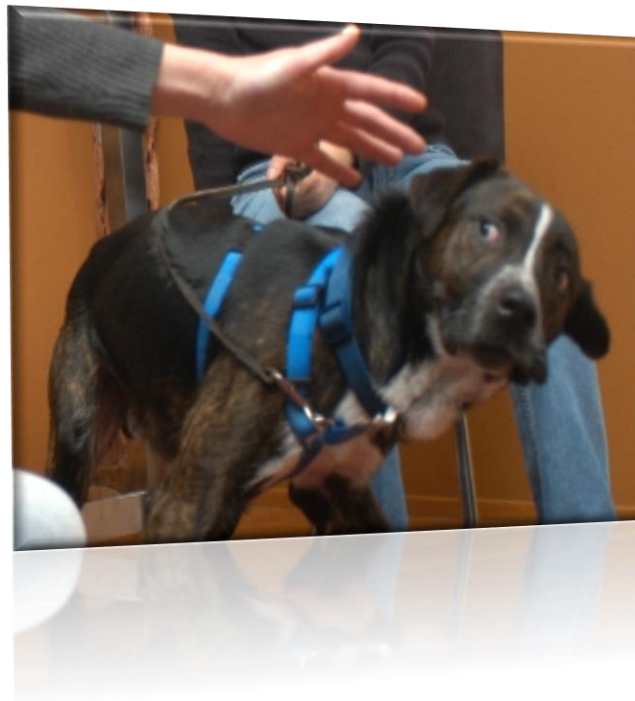
Watching your own body language is equally important. The way you stand, move and interact with the dog can alter the success of the training programme so it is important to remain aware of this.

Leaning into the dog's space can be intimidating. Allowing the dog to follow you is recommended. Staring at the dog can be intimidating. Leaning over a dog is also intimidating.

When handling the dog, it is vital you greet it correctly, bend down, side ways to dog, hand outreached but low, averted eye contact, talking gently, allow dog to sniff, scratch dog on chest if allowed.

You can help to calm an overwhelmed or nervous dog through 'speaking dog'. You can yawn, blink, and carry out head turns toward the dog to show them that you will not be pushing them about.

Never turn your back on an aggressive dog, back away slowly.



Presenting Skills

We will look at presenting skills more in our final module, but you need to start working on your presentation now, so that you can fine tune it in the final module.

If you are working with a client on teaching their dog a new behaviour you need to start off by explaining why this behaviour is relevant, how it will help them achieve their idea of success, and how breaking the training down to steps will result in the final goal. This will help them to understand the programme and will help to increase their motivation and commitment to the programme.

When speaking to a client, it is important to speak clearly and at an appropriate speed. The information you are giving them will be important so they are likely to attempt to memorise what you say. If you speak too fast, or do not allow for enough pauses you may overwhelm them.

Information should be bite size. If you give your client too many steps, or too much information they will not be able to retain it.

You need to have confidence in your knowledge, prepare your programme, and deliver it in a manner that will maximise client understanding.



Targets and Reviews

When training a dog, the trainer also needs regular reinforcement. Achieving milestones will result in a dopamine hit for the trainer, so whether you are training the dog yourself, or creating a plan for your client, mini goals, targets, and reviews will help to keep the training success rate high. Your initial programme will outline the targets and milestones, but without review it can be useless. Set dates in your training programme for reviews.

Checking in with your client to review their training success, or simply checking in with yourself, will allow you to review how the training has gone. This is where tweaks and modifications to the plan will come in to play. Perhaps the reinforcer will be changed, or the location of the training sessions will be updated. The client may be struggling with practically applying an aspect of the training which will need to be changed, or they may be making a small error that can be adjusted to increase success.

Reviewing the sessions allows time for reflection, the trainer can see how far they have come, and how near the final goal has become.

Response reliability can be calculated for a newly trained behaviour. The response reliability is communicated in percentages, number of responses / number of requests. So, once the client has trained the behaviour, they can communicate with you the response reliability. Once the response reliability is 90% in many different environments and situations then it can be considered that the behaviour is under stimulus control.



Make sure goals are S.M.A.R.T.E.R.

You get a call from a national television soap. They want you to train a dog for their show to carry out specific behaviours for a scene where the dog saves the day. Once you calm down from the call, you need to set your goals. Pull out this module, and get working on it! Smarter goals, higher success.

Specific. The goal needs to spell out exactly what you want to achieve to the very detail. Your goal isn't 'train Fluffy for TV', your goal should be Train Fluffy to walk to a marker, then train Fluffy to sit and bark, then train Fluffy to roll over and freeze. The more specific you make your goal, the more focused the programme will become.

Measurable. How will you know when you have achieved your goal? This is where response reliability needs to come in to play.

Achievable / Attainable. Have they asked you to teach Fluffy to fly? Probably not an achievable goal! Is the goal that your client has in mind achievable? Do they want to teach their 14-year-old dog, who has never liked dogs, to play with their new puppy? That may not be achievable, so your clients goal may need to be changed to tolerating the puppy. When designing your programme setting smarter goals will increase the success for both you and your client.

Realistic. Are you setting a goal that you will be willing and able to achieve? Have you committed to teaching 10 dogs to bark in unison? Is that realistic for your skill set?

Have you the resources? Make sure the goal your client wants to achieve is realistic – watch out for the dreamers! When evaluating the realisticness of the goal being achieved take a moment to ensure you are not over-promising. There is no problem in telling a client that you may not be able to achieve their goal, but there is a problem in telling a client you will be able to if you cannot.

Time bound. It's easy to throw a goal out there. But to have success in your training programme you need a deadline. Your client will not be happy if you promise to stop their dog from barking – eventually. Set realistic time goals. In 7 days your dog will.... And in 14 days your dog will....

Evaluate. Goals need to be regularly evaluated to adjust them as needed. Evaluation is a vital part of dog training so put evaluation dates in any training programme.

Re-do or Reward. After evaluation its probable that the programme will need to be re-done, possibly not in full but in parts. Re-do your training programme to ensure you get to the final goal. If the goal has been achieved, click and treat yourself!

There is No One Size Fits All. Training programmes should all come with the disclaimer that 'this is the first draft'!

It is worth remembering that there are many ways to train a dog, and as a dog trainer you must understand the animal you are working with as an individual, plus remember that you will have your own natural style and strengths, so there is no 'one size fits all' in dog training.

