

Helping Get It Right!

The Top Ten Most Important Dog Training Knowledge Concepts For Pet Owners to Understand

The collage features several key dog training concepts:

- Acquisition, Fluency, Generalization, Maintenance:** A vertical stack of four blue boxes on the left.
- Train-Test-Train:** An orange vertical bar on the right with three orange boxes labeled "Push", "Drop", and "Stick".
- NO = ?**: Large black text with a question mark.
- YES/NO:** A dog sitting next to a sign with a checked box for "YES" and an unchecked box for "NO".
- Reinforcement:** A green box with text: "Reinforcement (Increase/maintain behavior)", "Add pleasant stimulus to", "Increase/maintain behavior". Below it is a blue box: "Positive (add stimulus)".
- Training Scenarios:** Images of a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a shoe, a dog with a sign, a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a red checkmark, a dog with a red checkmark.
- Commands:** "Sit", "stay", "Down", "Wait" written in various colors.
- Equipment:** Images of a harness, a dog, and a bag.
- Hand Signals:** A hand giving a thumbs up next to a red button and the word "YES".

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Introduction

As professional dog trainers and behavior consultants, we know that training your dog requires a combination of knowledge and mechanical skills; after all, dog training is a hands-on project. We also recognize that there are several ways to train a dog, lots of different methods, and many conflicting and varied philosophies about how training should be approached. So, choosing your professional dog trainer is an important decision for you to make. We recommend you choose a force-free trainer, as they will not only guide you in decisions on the equipment you will need and the best way to train your four-legged family member, they will also ensure that a key factor of the training program is supporting the development of a loving and trusting relationship.

Choose a training professional who can guide you on:

- Age appropriate behaviors for your dog, based on its individual living scenarios and your life together.
- Choosing skills for you to train, that are applicable for you and your dog to meet your personal goals.
- Suitable training methods using positive reinforcement, to build appropriate behaviors and/or modify or reduce inappropriate behaviors.
- Safe and feasible management strategies, to prevent unwanted behaviors at home while new and appropriate behaviors are being developed.
- Finding suitable food, toy or play scenarios, that are highly motivating for your dog and can be used to reward new behaviors.
- How dogs communicate and what each of these key communication signals looks and sounds like.
- How dogs are sentient emotional beings and our obligation is to their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Choosing the correct management, training and care equipment for your pet - Equipment that fits appropriately and is not designed to function through pain, force or fear.
- How to safely and appropriately play with and exercise your pet, ensuring their physical needs are met.
- The different toys and equipment that can provide your pet with mental enrichment, particularly through meals and play sessions.

With any training program there are key concepts, knowledge pieces, that are required to help support your skill training. Here we have listed what we consider are the top ten.

Enjoy
Niki & Louise

Concept #1 Your Best Decision



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#1 Your Best Decision

Hello, thank you for making the decision to invest in your pet's education.

We consider it an honor that you are trusting us to help guide you on this journey together.

It is such an important decision, the one you have just made. A decision to invest the time and effort into helping your pet successfully integrate into your life and home.

As data shows us, more pets are surrendered and euthanized due to behavioral issues than any for any other reason. Yet for many, training is considered a luxury and not a necessity.

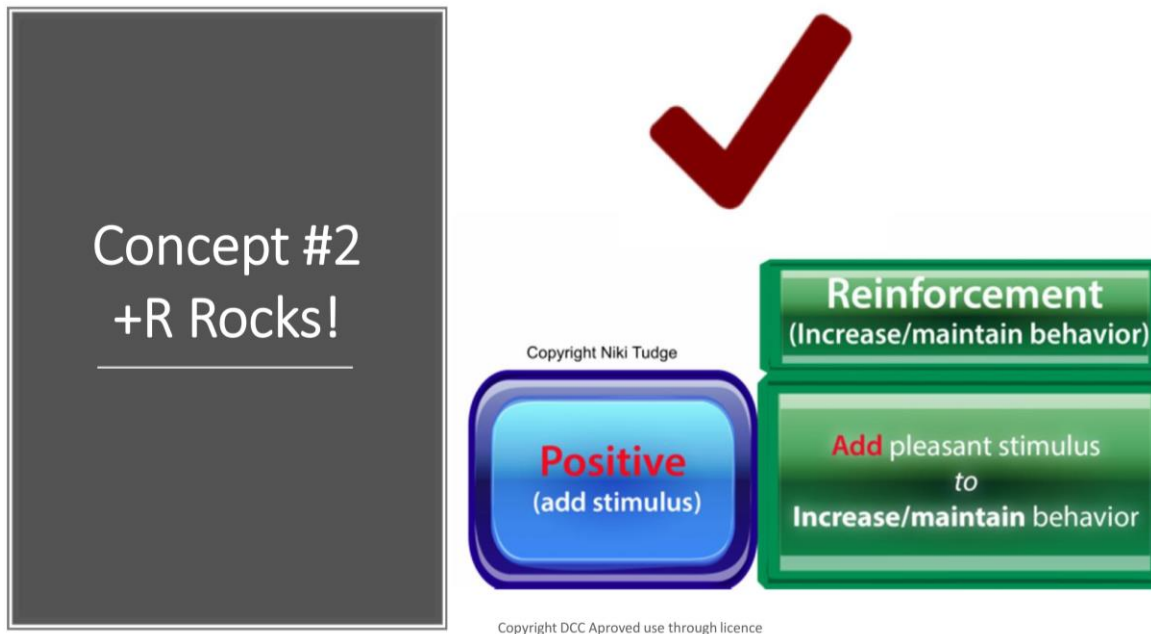
As humans we place lots of expectations on our pets and make lots of assumptions about how our pets should behave. Some of these assumptions are based on old outdated information and cultural myths.

We are going to help you navigate this journey with the most up-to-date information and training advise.

All of our systems, processes and methods are grounded in science and supported by ethics.

By partnering with us, you and your pet will develop the skills and knowledge to live happily together.

So, are you ready to begin this journey? We promise it will be fun for everyone!



#2 +R Rocks

Dogs are cognitive, intelligent creatures that experience emotions such as fear, anxiety, and joy. They are subject to the same laws of Applied Behavior Analysis as any other living being.

Forcing dogs to comply to avoid being shouted at, told “no” in a threatening manner, or having some other discomfort forced on them through voice control, body language or eye contact, does not enhance the canine-human relationship, nor does it create an environment where healthy learning can take place.

So, if we are not going to use NO, then what do we use?

How do we teach our pets in a non-threatening, communicative scientific based manner?

Rather than stopping behavior, we will use a constructional approach, where more appropriate and acceptable behaviors are encouraged and reinforced via positive training protocols.

The preponderance of research and evidence presents that training and behavior programs should be conducted in a manner that encourages pets to enjoy training and become more confident and well-adjusted pets.

This means that our methods and the application of Positive Reinforcement is backed and supported by the scientific community.

We encourage the use of positive reinforcement training methods, both personally and professionally.

All pets are motivated by food. Food is necessary for survival. It is therefore a powerful primary reinforcer (reward) and a critical component when used correctly as part of a strategic training or management plan.

This is positive reinforcement. Giving our pets access to desirable consequences when they get it right!

Let's take a look at our key concepts for rewarding your dog:

- We are going to 'reward' the behaviors we want to see more of.
- The dog is the one who chooses what is reinforcing (rewarding), not the human. For example. Some dogs will love chicken, others will place a higher value on cheese.
- What is reinforcing (rewarding) to a dog in one situation, may not be reinforcing in another. For example: Your dog may find chicken reinforcing at home alone but have no interest in chicken when an opportunity to play with another dog presents itself!
- For new behaviors and more difficult activities, we will quickly feed lots of yummy, high-value treats. Perhaps some chicken, beef heart or best steak!
- We will use medium-value treats for training sessions where we are recapping information.

- If your dog refuses food in a situation where he would normally eat it, ask yourself if he is stressed or anxious.
- Empower your dog by offering him choice. This will increase the 'value' of the reinforcer (reward) - The simple choice to move forwards an inch to take the food from your hand, rather than it being thrust into his mouth; between sitting and lying down; between this treat and that one...

Remember, your pet is learning every minute of the day!

By teaching and rewarding new behaviors, as well as rewarding all the desirable behaviors your dog offers throughout the day, you are not only giving instant feedback to your pet, you are also encouraging and supporting the development of a healthy trusting relationship.

Positive reinforcement really does rock, you and your dog will love it!
You can foster happiness and pride in all you accomplish together!

Concept #3
No! isn't a
Behavior!

NO = ?

Sit stay
Down
Wait



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#3 "No!" isn't a Behavior.

As we know, dogs do not speak English, French or Spanish, nor do they speak any other language we humans share. They speak dog! For this reason, we must use our words very carefully.

Actually, we need to recognize that our pet dogs pick up far more about our feelings, intentions and intended communication via our body language and the way we approach them.

To our dogs, we must always be safe. They need to trust we will always look out for them both physically and emotionally.

We need to harness our carefully spoken words to clearly communicate what we would like them to do, our expectations, and we need to support that with happy, stress free skill training.

In that vein, remember that "NO" is not a behavior.

Often, when we say this word, we are frustrated, emotionally stressed or impatient. Our dogs read that in our communication system and it can lead them to be hesitant, unsure, or in some cases scared of us.

Maybe we have used “NO” when we have punished them, so now the word is a precursor for something unpleasant, making us unsafe and them uncertain!

Let’s always communicate in a happy upbeat manner, encouraging them to behave in the way we would like them to.

Let’s ask them to do something specific instead of just saying “NO”

It reminds me of the story of the small girl drawing on her bedroom wall. When her mother shouts: “No Sarah, do not do that!”

So as soon as her mother left the room, Sarah began drawing on the floor!

Had her mother provided clear instructions about where to draw, this could have been avoided. By teaching Sarah to draw in a coloring book, everyone's goals are achieved.

Have a think about all the situations where you may be saying “No” to your dog and develop a list of the behaviors you would like your dog to do instead!

Then you can work through the list, helping your dog develop the much-needed skills to happily coexist in your home.



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Concept #4 Management for Success

#4 Management for Success

Did you know that good management is an essential part of any training or behavioral change plan?

In fact, management is an important part of your dog's life, like it's important to manage your children's environment.

If your dog is behaving in a way you do not like, then limit the dog's opportunity to practice the unwanted behavior.

Management strategies can be put in place while you learn how to teach your dog new and more appropriate behaviors.

Here are a few suggestions for managing some common problems.

If your dog:

1. Pulls when walking - Invest in new equipment. – A front-clip harness will help.
2. Steals food from kitchen counter - Don't leave food out.

3. Chews shoes or clothes - Put them away! And offer an appropriate, irresistible chew item.
4. Drinks out of toilet - Close the toilet lid or bathroom door!
5. Does not return when called - Keep on a leash. Use a long-line for more freedom.
6. Growls around toys or food - Feed in crate or in a separate room.

Sometimes it can make sense to manage a situation rather than trying to change a behavior.

However, although management strategies can always be put in place, if a dog is displaying signs of fear, anxiety or stress - seen through snapping, biting, growling, avoidance or retreating - then please contact a professional immediately.



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#5 You've Got It

How do we tell a dog “Yes, that’s it. That’s exactly what I want you to do! Yay, you got it.”?

We mark (indicate to the dog) the correct behavior!

We are going to say “yes”, or we might click every time your dog does the required behavior.

Think of it like your teacher marking (ticking or checking) your correct answers on your homework assignments at school!

When you first begin, the word “yes” or the 'click' sound will not mean anything to your dog, but he will soon learn that they indicate a tasty treat is coming. You will notice that your pet soon starts to pay close attention, asking himself exactly what he was doing when you clicked or said ‘yes’, and he will try it again, in order to get another yummy treat!

You may be asking, why can't I just say, “good boy” or “good job”? Why do I need to “click” or say “yes”?

A “yes” or “click” are very short and precise and they are tools that will be unique to our training sessions. Your dog may hear “good boy” a hundred times a day in all kinds of scenarios.

We aren’t saying that you can’t praise your dog, but we are saying that we want you to hold off on that praise until you have finished your training session.

Let’s look at the order of using “yes” or “click” with a sit behavior:

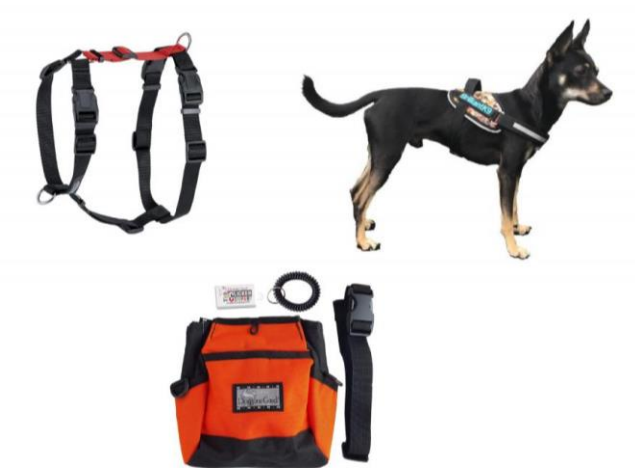
You ask your dog to sit – “Sit?”

1. As his bottom makes contact with the ground, you mark it – “Yes” (or click)
2. After you have marked the behavior, you reach into your treat bag for a tasty treat – You deliver the treat to your dog.

To sum up:

- The click or a “yes” is used to mark the behavior you would like your dog to repeat. It means “Yay, you got it!”
- It is a promise of a reward coming soon!
- If you say ‘yes’ (or click), you must give a treat – always - even if you marked the wrong thing. The error was yours, not your dog’s!
- It is a clear form of communication between you and your dog that, when used precisely, will lead to speedy learning!
- A hand signal can be used to mark behaviors when working with a deaf dog.

Last, but not least. Don't worry – We will demonstrate everything to you in class and if we want you to use a clicker, we will show you exactly how to do so. There is no need to rush off and buy one now.



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Concept #6 Your Training Gear!

#6 Your Training Gear

What training gear are you going to need?

Let's start with the essentials!

You will need:

- A comfortable, well-fitting, flat cloth or leather collar for your dog's I.D. tags. - You should be able to slip two fingers between your dog's neck and collar.
- A comfortable, well-fitting, body harness.

For specific recommendations on collars, harnesses and leashes please refer to your training expert who can best advise you on the equipment needed for your specific class. They will guide you, ensuring it is not designed to work through pain, force or fear.

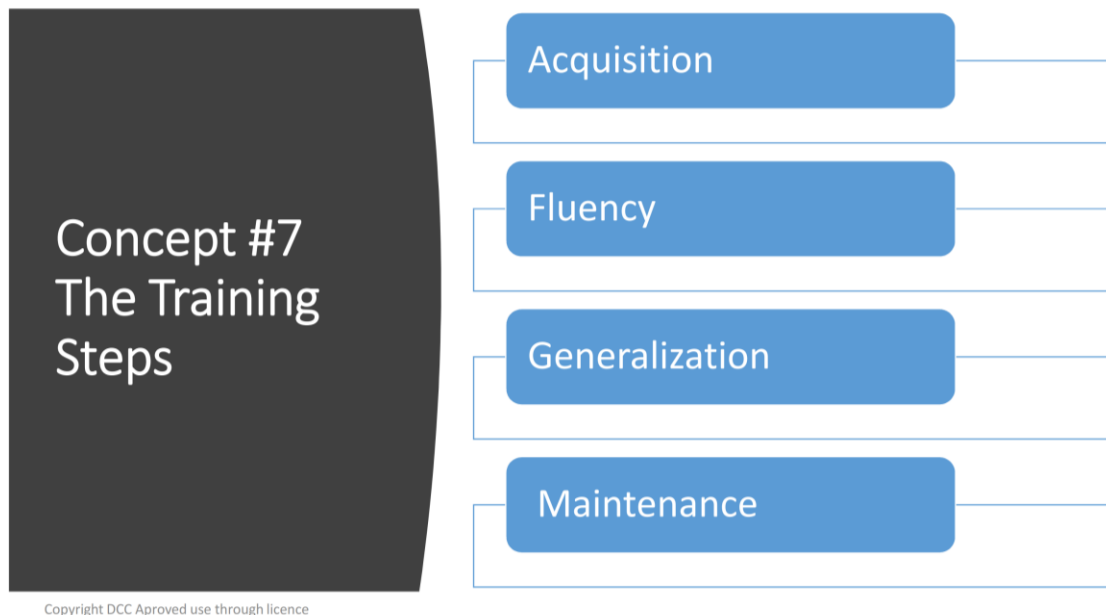
What else?

- Lots of small moist treats. The best treats are healthy and nutritional, soft and easily swallowed. How about some chicken or cheese - whatever your dog loves...

- Don't forget a treat bag, as this can make training much easier. We do, however, suggest that you vary where you keep your treats. We don't want your dog to think he is only going to be rewarded if you are wearing a treat bag! Wherever you choose to store them, please make sure they are easily accessible.
- We also recommend - A mat for your pet and your pet's favorite toy. Toys can help motivate, distract and reward your pet in a busy distracting environment.

And finally, if your trainer recommends it, a clicker (This is not essential, as the word 'yes' can be used to mark all of your pet's lovely responses).

You will need to be taught how to use it correctly, so hold off on that clicking until you been advised by your trainer.



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#7 The Training Steps

We follow a simple method for each behavior we teach. When used with the Train-Test-Train system this is very effective and lots of fun!

There are Four Key Training Steps called:

1. Acquisition
2. Fluency
3. Generalization
4. & Maintenance

We will refer to them as steps 1 thru 4:

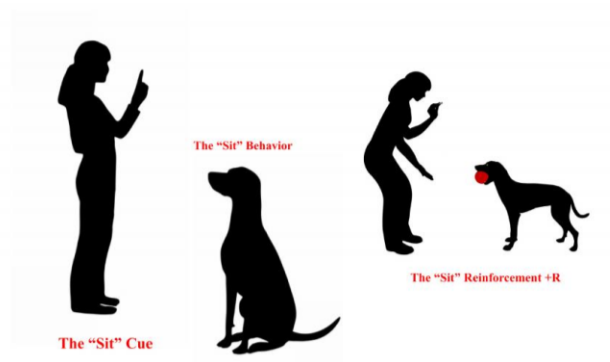
1. Step One - First, we have to get the behavior, so we can reward it. This is the stage where your dog learns the behavior. There are several methods to get behavior. We will use the most appropriate for you and your dog considering the particular behavior they are learning. (Remember behaviors need to be age appropriate)
2. Step Two - When the behavior is fluent – accurate, strong, reliable and consistent – we will name it. The name may be a verbal name or a physical gesture, a hand signal.

3. Step Three - We now take our behavior on the road so that your pet can perform it in a range of settings. The more places you practice the better and more reliable your pet's response will be!
4. Step Four - This is the maintenance phase. Use it or lose it! Your pet will need to continually practice their skills.

Tips:

- We recommend different games to keep your dog's new-found skills in tip top condition.
- We advise that you keep all your training sessions short and fun – Stop on a high note, before fatigue or boredom kicks in!
- We also advise that you build all of your new skills into your daily life.
- Make good use of it, as we taught it for a reason!

Concept #8 What Will You Name It?



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#8 What Will You Name It?

We are teaching our dog new skills. Once the skills are in place and reliable, we will give them a name. We will only name what we like and what is performed correctly.

Now let's not fool ourselves. Do we really teach a dog how to "sit", "down", "come", "wait", "stay"? No, we don't. Dogs already do all these things, all the time.

What we teach our dogs is that when you hear this cue (the name) and you perform the behavior, then lots of cool things will happen, things you love and want. This means we can reliably request the behaviors when we need them.

Most pet dog manners are skills your dog offers up most of the day. Some of them maybe too often, or at the wrong time or in the wrong place!

When you first start training your dog, we recommend that you make a list of all the behaviors you would like to know. This list may include simple pet manners like polite greetings or maybe tricks. It's up to you.

Once you have this list, then begin deciding what you will call each behavior.

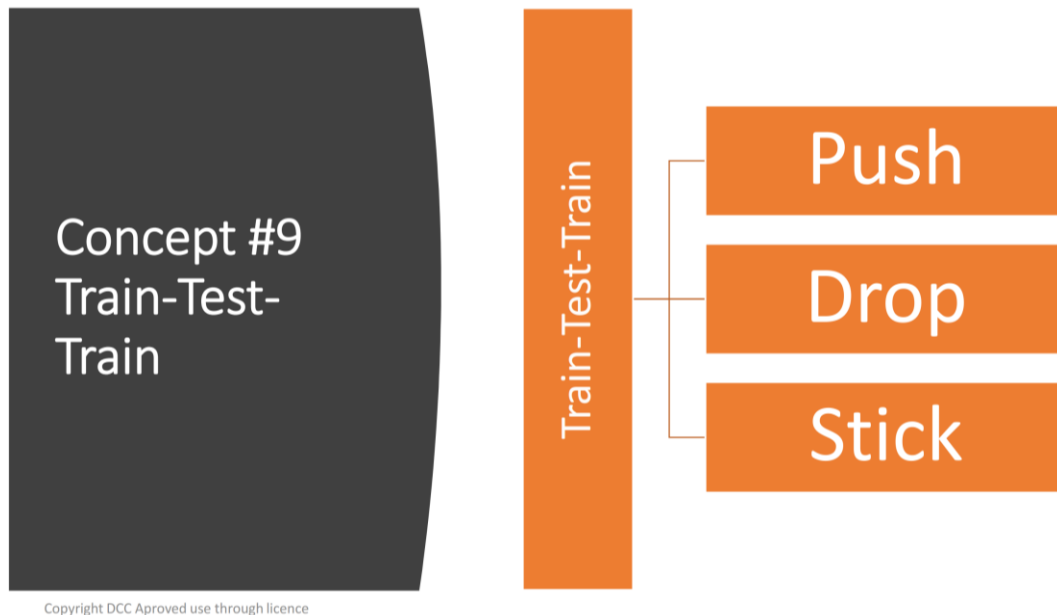
Chat with your family and make sure everyone is on the same page and in full agreement to the names.

To be fair to our dogs, our names for behaviors need to be clear, concise and consistent. So, if “down” means lie down, then nobody should be using “down” when they want the dog to take his paws off somebody’s lap. That behavior would be “off”. See how this would be confusing to your dog?

You will also need to be honest about some of the names you are currently using. If they have not been trained correctly they may be unreliable.

For some things you may be ok with this, but cues like “come” or “wait” may be needed in an emergency and should be reliable.

Names can be easily changed. For example, “come” may be changed to “here”. And last, we need to add here that cues are not commands. Commands are threats, “do or else!” We want cues that our dogs lovingly perform because they trust us, and we provide great rewards for them!



#9 Train-Test-Train

One of the many benefits of learning how to train your dog with a training and behavior professional is that you not only learn how to train your dog, but you also learn one of the tried and tested systems that professional dog trainers use. This will ensure that your dog is learning at the right pace and with the correct amount of reinforcement (rewards) for optimal learning.

Why should you use this method?

- Train-Test-Train gives you a recipe that you can use on your own.
- It can be used for teaching a new skill or increasing the difficulty of an existing skill.
- Let's remember that any kind of education is age appropriate. We do not teach algebra at nursery school for a reason!
- Train-test-train helps develop a strong foundation from which we can build up our skills.
- We need to teach skills and concepts in the correct order.
- We need to train our dogs in fun short sessions.
- We need to ensure our dogs are successful.
- Our rates of reinforcement need to be very high.
- If you are not clicking and treating at least 30 times per minute, then you need to make your training step easier for your pet.

SO, let's review our system Train-Test-Train

Each training step will be repeated five times.

- We do this to ensure the pet knows how to reliably perform the behavior, before we increase the level of difficulty.
- The level of difficulty may be the gap between you and your pet, or the time you expect your pet to remain in its position.

So always start with five small treats in one of your hands.

Each time you cue the behavior and it is correct you will 'mark' and pay – click or say “yes” and then deliver the treat.

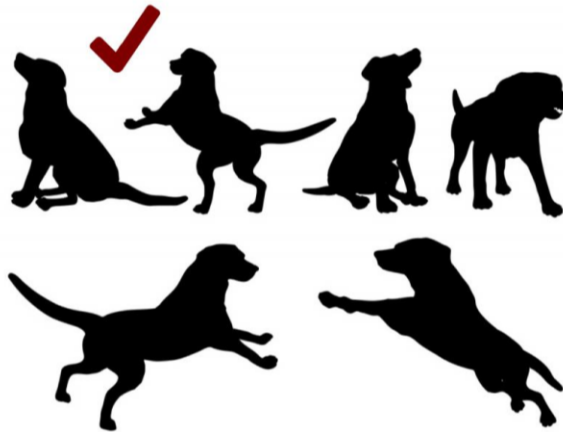
At the end of the set of five you will then count how many of your pet's responses were correct.

To determine whether your pet can move onto the next level, think of the scoring like this:

- If they score 4 or 5 correctly, then that's a great percentage. In the next set you can increase the difficulty. You can push the skill.
- If they score 3, you may decide to stick on this level and repeat the set or
- For a score of 3 correct behaviors or less, we urge you to drop the level of difficulty - Make it easier for your pet to get it right!

To understand the finer details of this, and how to add in the dimensions for our behavior while maintaining the correct system, please consult your trainer

Concept #10 Practice Makes Perfect!



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#10 Practice Makes Perfect!

Don't you just love the expression "Practice Makes Perfect"? Well we know that practice only makes perfect, if when we practice, we are practicing correctly. Yes, we acknowledge that dog training is not always easy, but it can always be fun. We also recognize that we are all super busy people, with jobs, and kids and family commitments.

So, let's set ourselves up for success. If we are strategic about our training, we can incorporate our practice into our existing schedules.

- We will commit to providing you with homework that you are able to perform.
- By using our Train-Test-Train system, you will always feel confident that you can comfortably train your pet.
- With each new skill you learn, we will help you find ways to incorporate it into your daily life.

For example, the behavior "Sit":

This can be practiced while feeding your dog; when putting a harness or leash on; when your dog is being petted; when waiting for a tennis ball to be thrown; when a door opens The list goes on.

So simply incorporate you new skills into all these activities!