

Basic Dog Training in A Nutshell (Or, in a boxer's case, nut job!)

A few things before we get started...

Your dog will make mistakes. YOU will make mistakes. At times, your dog will not listen. At times you say your dog's name 50 times to get his attention, having him respond to none of them, you will say it 50 more times with the same results.

Basically, you and your dog are not perfect. You're not looking for perfect. Perfect is boring! But, you do want your dog to learn some manners. Technically, there is no "good" or "bad" behavior. There is "acceptable" and "unacceptable" behavior. Your dog is just being a dog. He will need to learn the rules of living with people.

Which brings me to another point: most of the behaviors that you will be trying to stop are natural dog behaviors. They just do it. Dogs bark, jump, pee and poop where they want, eat what they want, run, pounce, chew, bite, and a lots of other behaviors we might not like or find unacceptable. It's much easier to teach a dog what TO do as opposed to teaching them what NOT to do. So, many times we teach a dog to do a behavior that is incompatible with the behavior we don't want. Simple example: if we teach the dog to sit, he can't jump. He can't jump if he is sitting.

OK. Enough blabbering, on with the good stuff!

I'm not going to go into Operant and Classical Conditioning. There's tons of information about them by folks WAY smarter than me, so Google away if you'd like to know more about them (You should at least know what each method is and how they differ. Don't worry. It's not like school and there won't be any tests! But, you will get a few, "Ah-ha!" moments as you read about them.)

I do find it best to use treats for training. BUT...they are used for training. They should be very small. The size of an eraser on the back of a pencil. Anything that have to chew, or they go and eat it on their favorite bed or rug is not good for training. Takes too long. Needs to be giving right after they successfully complete the task you asked for. Again, this document is to give you some ideas and the basics of training. If you want to use clicker or marker training (similar to clicker, but the word, "yes" is used to replace clicker among other words) please, look them up. They are very involved and there are MUCH more knowledgeable people out there on these subjects.

The basic principles to remember in training are: **consistency, repetition, and patience.**

Consistency: Use the same word and or hand signal for a particular command the same way ever single time and have all family members use the same word or signal. Anything else will confuse the dog. Even something as simple as one person leaning towards the dog and another not while giving the same command can confuse the dog.

Repetition: Practice, practice, and more practice! Your dog may not "get it" the first, 10th, or 20th time. But, he will get it. It's magic when it finally clicks! I will get into how to repeat later on.

Patience: Self explanatory! Don't yell at your dog! Do I ever yell at Java? Of course I do! Remember what I said about not being perfect?? If you're having a bad training session, just stop. Maybe make him do something easy, give him a cookie, then end the session. This sounds like it contradicts the "repetition" principle...but not really. Ever teach a kid to hit a baseball or have someone teach you? I was terrible at baseball. But, dad and I would go to the field and he would pitch the ball and I would miss. Pretty much every time. There were times where I wasn't concentrating and dad knew it, so it was best just to stop and do it another day. In the case of training your dog, if he really isn't "in to it" (you can tell), drop the session, but try again later in the day.

OK. Here's are some basic behaviors or commands **I** think all dogs should know. I say **I** think, because others might have some other commands they think a dog should know. And, I have do letters after my name (other than Jr., but that doesn't count), so this is basically my opinion from experience and some book learnin'!

Here they are: look at me, sit, stay, down, wait, leave it, drop it (because they don't always leave it), off, recall (come), no, enough.

There are no tricks in the list, but I encourage trick learning, too. Some tricks are easy to teach and the dog gets excited when he gets something right and you make a big deal out of it. High five, shake, speak (bark) are based on things the dog already does, so just give it a name then ask him to do it.

Before you begin any training, you need your dog's attention. Just saying his name over and over isn't going to work. You've probably already used for a dozen different things today alone! You want him to come: "Fido!" He did something wrong: "Fido!". You want him to stop barking: "Fido!" Eventually you have, what they call, "palliated" the word Fido, so it has no meaning to your dog anymore.

Which brings me to another point. If you DID pollute a word like, "Come". If you've already used that and he has pretty much ignored it, stop using it. Choose a new word (Here, maybe) and teach him to come, but now use the new word and train him using what we talk about here.

So, getting back to getting his attention. Teach your dog a "look at me" or "watch" command. Obviously, you and your dog have to be within eyeshot of each other.

Start by treating him every time he looks at you. Not when he's staring at you at dinner time, but if he's just lying around or he's looking out the window and turns to look at you. After a while he should be looking at you more often.

Then, start saying "look at me" when he looks at you, then treat him. After a while, if he's not paying any attention to you, say, "Fido. Look at me." When he does, treat him. Keep doing this until he does it pretty quickly. Then, start adding some distractions.

When he's playing with a toy say, "Fido. Look at me." When he does, treat him. Work your way up to him staring down a squirrel or stalking the mailman, then say, "Fido. Look at me." Then treat him. See the pattern developing??

If at any point he doesn't respond, you've gone too fast to the next step and go back a step or two until he listens again, then work your way back to bigger distractions.

Now that you've got his attention, you can start teaching him commands. You may not need it for sit, down, stay but you may need it for leave it or to break his concentration on something that will get him into trouble, like chasing small animals, children or delivery folks.

I will go over sit, here, because it's simple, maybe deceptively simple and pretty much all dogs know it. So, you say, well I stand in front of him and say sit and he sits right down. Will he sit if your other dog is barking at something outside? Will he sit if you are across the room? If he's about to run into the street and you yell, "Fido, sit!" will he?

Which brings us to the next principles of training: the three Ds: **Duration, Distance, and Distraction**. In that order.

So, using sit as an example, after your dog sits reliably in a room, with no distractions, start making him sit longer before he gets his treat. When he sits for a really long time he gets a "jackpot"...a bunch of treats!

Once he sits for a long period of time (not an hour, but, you know, a reasonable time), then see if he will sit when you are further and further away from him. Start a few feet and just go back further and further. Not all in one session, but a little more each training session. Again, if he fails too many times, go back a few steps (or in this case, closer a few steps) and try again. Then work on further away again once he gets it at the closer distance. (This is where something like clicker or marker training is useful because you "mark" the behavior from where you are, then go give him a treat, but you can just go up to him and say, "Good boy!", and give him the treat.)

Next, see if he will sit with distractions. Again, start with small distractions. Maybe tell him to sit and throw a toy or object that he's not particularly thrilled with away from him. If he stays seated, he gets a treat. Work your way up to bigger and bigger distractions. This is a hard one for dogs, so take baby steps. If your dog goes nuts when the doorbell rings, then that's like his final exam. Don't test that until he's reliable under lesser distractions.

Well, that's basically it for basic principles. You just apply these ideas to anything you want the dog to do. Remember, athletes practice their craft before they play in a game. How many stories have we heard about basketball player throwing hundreds of free throws in practice or baseball player hitting hundreds of balls in practice before the game. Dog training is the same. You can't teach a dog not to jump on people when you've invaded over a bunch of people and he doesn't even know the command yet or doesn't know it reliably yet. It's not fair for the dog...or your guests!

Make training fun for both of you. Make it something he looks forward to. Set aside a few times throughout the day for training. Get the whole family involved. Friends, too!

I'm sure there's a ton of grammatical mistakes, misspelling and rambling! I kind of just sat down and typed this all out in one shot, so forgive me if it's a tad messy!

Enjoy!

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