

A photograph of a dog, likely a Border Collie, sitting on a grassy lawn. The dog has a white chest and face with dark brown and tan patches. It is looking towards the right of the frame with its mouth slightly open. Behind the dog is a white plastic lattice fence. The background is a blurred green field with some trees in the distance.

# Beginning Obedience CAN be Fun!

By  
Susan M. Beals

Dog Obedience Training Secrets That Your  
Instructor Forgot to Tell You!

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# Beginning Obedience CAN Be Fun!

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## Dog Obedience Training Secrets That Your Instructor Forgot To Tell You!

These are some thoughts I jotted down for students in my beginner obedience classes over the years. I hope you find them useful and instructive.

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## Treats and Markers and Theory, Oh My!

There are many styles of training. All of them work – some better than others. None of them work for every dog. Some dogs are smarter than others. Some dogs like to please their people. Some dogs have their own agenda. Part of the journey with your dog is to find the training style or styles that let the two of you communicate and work together.

I use a mixture of motivational training (sometimes called “reward-based”) and logical consequences. Putting it this way makes it a little more intelligible than learning-theory-speak. There is a discussion of definitions and learning-theory-speak below. You don’t actually need to know it to train your dog, so if you want you can just skip down to the section that is titled “Rules for Treats”.

“Reward” based training is not exactly that. First, you need to understand that dog/animal trainers did themselves no favors, at least in the area of comprehension, when they co-opted terms from learning theory. For example, what do you think “positive reinforcement” means? (Fill in your answer here.)

Nope. Unless you are well-versed in learning-speak, I’m pretty sure you are wrong. “Positive reinforcement” means something added to the immediate environment (“added” is the positive or plus part) that will influence the animal to repeat the behavior its addition *immediately followed* (“repeat” is the reinforcement part). And the “immediately followed” is critically important in achieving good training results.

Similarly, “negative reinforcement” means something removed (i.e., negative or minus) from the immediate environment that will influence the animal to repeat the behavior its removal *immediately followed*.

The other two parts of the learning quadrants are positive and negative “punisher” although I prefer the term “diminisher” because punish has significant emotional meaning in everyday language – where diminish does not. Can you guess the definitions of these terms in learning-speak? I bet you’re right. A “positive diminisher” is something added (positive) to the immediate environment that will influence the animal to not repeat (or diminish) the behavior its addition *immediately followed* and a “negative diminisher” is something removed (negative) from the immediate environment that will influence the animal to not repeat the behavior its removal *immediately followed*.

Once you have these definitions you can try to apply them to the real world, but sometimes it is difficult. People often confuse negative reinforcer with positive diminisher/punisher. Negative reinforcement involves the removal of something which results in a *strengthening* of a behavior’s occurrence. Positive diminishment/punishment involves the addition of something which results in a *weakening* of a behavior. It can be confusing, especially if multiple things are happening at the same time. For example – baby is crying, mother picks it up, baby stops crying. The next time the baby cries, the mother picks it up again. In learning-speak, what happened there?

- Was the baby's behavior of crying reinforced or diminished?
- Was the mother's behavior of picking the baby up reinforced or diminished?

In learning-speak, positive and negative are descriptive terms that have no emotional value. When translated back to the language normal people (some trainers among them) use, however, they become emotionally loaded – positive is good and negative is bad. And reinforcement is good and punishment is bad. This makes for circular, incomprehensible discussions between trainers that quickly disintegrate into arguments. I prefer to say that the terms “reward” and “punishment” act at the level of the animal because the animal can have emotional reactions to things it considers rewards or punishments and I leave “positive” and “negative” out of the conversation entirely. “Reinforcers” and “diminishers” work at the level of the behavior – where emotional reactions are not involved – and “positive” and “negative” mean simply “add” or “remove”.

Clear as mud, right?

That's okay. This is probably the last time you have to try to understand this – except that when trainers are throwing around terms like “purely positive training” you will know that, while they might be great trainers, they've got no clue about learning theory.

### **Rules for Treats (aka Cookies)**

So anyway, we use things that the dog finds motivating to encourage the dog to do the behaviors we want. Depending on the circumstances, things the dog finds motivating can change. For the vast majority of dogs, food is very motivating. Many labs, for example, will work for pocket lint if they think there might have been something edible in the pocket at some point in the past. But in a stressful situation food might lose its appeal. I expect that many – perhaps all – of the dogs in class will not be taking food when the class begins. Some will settle down quickly and begin taking treats. Some might be so stressed and distracted that it may be several weeks before they will take treats in class, even though they are little vacuum cleaners at home. Either of these extremes is quite normal. For the dogs not taking treats in class, make sure you pay attention to the rules for treats so that you can train efficiently at home.

1. Something the dog likes! This seems pretty obvious, but not everyone gets the concept.
2. The more stressful/distracting the situation, the more value the treats must have. A dog who will happily work for pieces of his regular kibble at home is likely going to think you're a major cheapskate at class. Up the ante with things like string cheese, hot dog pieces, frozen meatballs (easy to break into small pieces), chopped up leftovers, etc. There are all kinds of commercially available training treats too. Soft treats will work better than hard. Experiment with a variety of kinds until you find something that your dog likes well enough to eat readily in class.
3. Your dog should be interested in food when you train. In other words, if he normally gets his dinner before class time – wait and feed him after class. It will only help if he's a little hungry, but judge his reaction. These are mostly young dogs. If waiting for his

whole meal leaves him too frantically *starving* to concentrate, give him half his normal meal and the rest after class.

4. Treats should be small (really small!!), soft, and easily swallowed. You're not going to get much training done if the dog has to crunch for a couple of minutes before he's ready to work again. For the bigger dogs in class something about the size of the eraser on a pencil is pretty much the right size. Smaller dogs mean smaller treats!
5. Dogs can count, but they're not all that great at concepts like volume. One treat is one treat. One treat can be a dollar-size piece of steak or an eraser-size piece of steak. Since dogs generally swallow them whole anyway, as far as your dog is concerned it was one treat. If you want to jackpot (give extra for a really good job) then give many small treats, not one big one.
6. Feed for position! If you want your dog to lie down, don't give him a cookie if he sits. If you want your dog to sit at your side, don't give him a cookie if he sits in front of you. If you want him to walk at your left side, give him treats by your left side. If you want your dog to go to his mat, give him lots of cookies on his mat. Dogs will tend to hang out in places where they have received reinforcers.
7. Have your treats ready. Remember the definitions up above? A positive reinforcer is something added to the environment that will affect the behavior it *immediately* follows. Dog sits. You dig around in training pouch for treat. Dog wiggles. You're still digging. Dog makes eye contact with neighboring dog and curls his lip. You deliver treat. You just rewarded your dog for calling the other dog a bad word. Timing is VERY important.
8. Almost immediately start varying the interval between treats. When you are first training a dog to sit, give him a cookie when his butt hits the ground. There should be no more than 3 cookies for "butt on ground" before you start expecting some duration – and duration of varying lengths. One of the most dangerous things you can do with an animal is to set up a rigid expectation of reward. Dogs are pretty easy, and generally if you set up a rigid expectation a dog will just blow you off if the reward is not forthcoming. Other species are not so forgiving. Setting up a rigid expectation for reward is one of the main reasons for injury and death of exotic animal trainers. Whale expects fish. Whale doesn't get fish. Whale says "@#%& you!" Trainer is a grease spot on the deck. Not a good scenario. A rigid expectation of reward is the exact opposite of a relationship based on mutual respect.

### **To Click or Not To Click, That is the Question**

A lot of people use what they call a marker or bridge. They are the same thing. A *marker* tells the dog the instant that he was correct and *bridges* the gap in time between when the dog was right and when he receives the reward. You may have heard of clicker training. Clicker training is marker training. The clicker serves as the marker. You can use marker training without a clicker. Personally, I'm not coordinated enough to handle leash, treats, clicker and dog all at once so I use a verbal marker. To be most effective the verbal marker should have characteristics similar to a click. It should be a hard, sharp, fast sound. Actually a verbal marker can be more

precise than a clicker because a verbal marker can and should be a one beat sound. Clickers, by their very nature, make a two beat sound. Plus you always have your mouth with you. You may not always have a clicker.

I tend to use “good!” most often, although I will sometimes use “X!” or “yes!”. As I said above, the marker should be hard, sharp and fast. “Gooooood” is not a useful marker. Your marker does not have to be a word.

I also use something called an intermediate bridge. It is a way of telling the animal that it is on the right track. There is a lot more to it than that – whole seminars worth of information on how to use it effectively – but don’t be surprised if I am helping you work with your dog and suddenly you hear something that sounds like “x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x.x” followed by “X!”. I do it pretty much unconsciously now.

### **Logical Consequences – or – I’m so sorry that happened to you!**

Now you probably want to know about logical consequences. Usually these fit into the “diminisher” half of the learning theory model I defined for you at the beginning – they can be either positive (adding) or negative (removing). I hesitate to use the word punishment because, as I said above, it has such strong emotional connotations. A time-out when your young dog gets over-excited is a logical consequence. I would call it a negative diminisher. You are removing stimuli and with luck it will have the effect of encouraging your dog to not let himself get out of control the next time he is in a similar situation.

I have worked with a couple of rescue dogs who were very mouthy. They had no hesitation about putting their teeth on human skin when they objected to something. I did not experience what I would categorize as an actual bite, but one owner did. A logical consequence of not being able to keep your teeth to yourself is not being able to use your teeth. Rather than removing teeth, I sometimes opt to add a muzzle. Every time either of these dogs would put teeth on skin, he would immediately be fitted with his muzzle. Positive diminisher. Add muzzle, stop mouthing. It took relatively few repetitions for both of these dogs to change their behavior.

Perhaps you have a young, strong, squirrel-obsessed dog who has more than once come close to pulling you face first through the park on your morning walks. I am not a fan of head collars (Halti, Gentle Leader, etc.) for dogs, and I don’t think most dogs like them much either, but they provide excellent leverage when walking an unruly animal. That is why they have been used for centuries with large livestock like horses and cattle. A logical consequence of your dog being unable to control himself in the presence of squirrels would be to have to continue the morning walk in a head collar so that you can control him.

### **In Conclusion**

You must be flexible in your training. You must be able to adapt the things you learn and the things other people suggest you try to yourself and your dog and the relationship between you.

You have to know yourself and your dog and understand what you are capable of both individually and as a team and you have to be willing to adapt your expectations to fit. Not every technique will work for every dog, but for every dog there is somewhere a technique that will work.

## Loose Leash Walking

For those who have never done this before, bear in mind that this is hard! Dog training is just about the only place where you take an untrained animal and stick it with a novice person and expect them to muddle through. If you were working with horses, you would have a well-trained horse to make your mistakes on so that the horse could help you while you were learning. At this point your dog doesn't know any more than you do!

I also wanted to talk a little about walking on a loose leash. Everyone thinks that, since this is stressed so much in the early beginner classes, it must be easy to do. It is not! It is one of the hardest things to teach a dog and many many dogs and handlers never accomplish it with any consistency. So if you have been feeling like a lousy trainer, or have been thinking that your dog is stupid or stubborn or a whole list of uncomplimentary words – none of it is true.

There are a lot of reasons why this is such a difficult skill. Mostly they boil down to – the dog gets rewarded for pulling. First of all, pulling on the collar is intrinsically rewarding to the dog. Dogs have something called an opposition reflex – kind of like a 2-year-old. If you pull on them, they tend to pull back. If you push on them, they tend to push back. They almost all do it, so they almost all pull against a collar.

Secondly, their perception is that when they pull on the collar they get where they want to go. Thus pulling is rewarded. That may not be what is going on in your head, but I'm pretty sure that's what's going on in the dog's head. Perhaps you were planning to go there all along, so you didn't even really notice that the dog was pulling. Perhaps the dog really did pull you, but you went along with it because he was aiming for a bush and you want him to pee. Perhaps he pulled so hard with one of those 'knock you off your feet' jerks that he got there before you could stop him. They are closer to the ground and they have four feet rather than two. Believe me, their leverage is way better than yours! Whatever the scenario, I can almost guarantee that you and your dog are taking completely different experiences away from it. Dogs are very linear, literal thinkers. They have no interest in the overall picture as the human sees it. People wander around with this huge cloud of other stuff floating around their heads. The dog sees – bush, pee, let's go!

It is very difficult, even for an experienced trainer, to not allow the dog to be rewarded for pulling at least once in a while. And unfortunately, as we know from learning theory, variable reinforcement is the best way to make a behavior incredibly persistent. So not only do we have a behavior that is intrinsically rewarding, but we also have a behavior that is virtually impossible not to reward externally at least once in a while, intentionally or not. This is a recipe for a habit that is incredibly difficult to break. This is also, in my opinion, a recipe for strongly instilling one of the behaviors that is most likely to make an owner give up on their 6-8 month

old dog and dump it in a shelter, and just because of the way shelters work, by the time the dog is adopted out again the behavior is even more ingrained.

So what can we do about this? There are as many suggestions as there are trainers. There is not one of them that will work for all dogs or for all handlers. But with persistence and the willingness to try different things, there is at least one that will work with you and your dog.

In my opinion, the best way to accomplish loose leash walking is for the dog to understand what it is you are trying to get him to do with you so that he can be a partner in the endeavor. That's easy to say – not necessarily easy to do. That is one of the reasons work on attention and focus is so important. Attention and focus, which help the dog to understand that you have relevance to him other than as the opener of the food bag, are the key to all dog training.

When you look at things from the dog's perspective you sometimes get a "eureka" sort of revelation. I believe that, in addition to the reasons above, a key point in dogs not keeping a loose leash is because the tight leash is how they keep track of you. Obviously if they can feel you puffing along behind them, they know where you are. They don't have to worry about you running off, or getting lost, or doing one of the random inexplicable human things that you do without telling them. And I think this is especially true of dogs who have not been taught that it is their job to be paying attention to you. Now granted, most of my dogs are herding dogs and herding dogs as a generalization tend to be very good at attention (probably because somewhere in the hardwired part of their brain they do truly believe that you and your friends should be standing together in a small circle and it is their job to put you all there), but attention is a skill all dogs can learn no matter their breed or background.

And again from the dog's perspective, it takes a very long time for them to connect a tight collar with that random spasm thing you do to them with the leash, especially if you are not completely consistent. If you do not correct them EVERY SINGLE TIME the collar is tight, then it is not fair to expect them to make the correlation. And if more than one person walks the dog and does not do things the same way you do, then the connection is just that much harder for the dog to make.

Loose leash walking also has no truly defined parameters. On the human side, the leash should not be so tight that the dog is putting enough tension on it to pull your hand or arm out of position. But this leaves a lot of stuff still in the air. For example, do you care if your dog is near you or at the end of the leash? Do you care if your dog is beside you, in front of you, or behind you? Do you care if your dog crosses either behind or in front of you and walks on your other side? Do you leave your leash hand and arm at your side or do you hold them close to your body? And there are probably many more.

From the dog's side, is this a pleasant walk where he gets to stop and sniff stuff or is this a power walk for exercise? And how does he know? Is there a way he can tell you he needs or wants to stop or does he just get hauled along? And if he does just get hauled along, how come

you get to make the leash tight if he can't? If he's paying attention to you, do you accord him the same respect?

### **Loose Leash Walking the SATS Way**

So how DO you teach loose leash walking? I'm going to tell you how I do it. And be aware that it is a continuing process, sometimes for many years depending on how consistent I am and also the personality and previous experience of the dog I am working with. The first thing to do is again, think of it from the dog's perspective. The name of the activity tells what it is the humans think they're doing. The humans are trying to walk with a loose leash. But what is the dog doing? The dog could not care less about what is going on with the leash. What the dog perceives is the collar. The COLLAR is either tight or loose, not the leash.

I define for the dog the concepts he needs to be able to help in the activity. He needs to know what his collar is, what a tight collar feels like, and what a loose collar feels like. So I name his collar for him – "Zippy, I'm going to put my hand on your collar" – take the collar, run your fingers on it, under it, all around his neck, talking about it all the time. Next - "Zippy, I'm going to take the collar off." Take the collar off, show it to him and talk about it to him, using the word "collar" many times. Say "that's collar off, now let's put the collar on" and do it. Talk about the collar being on. Repeat this a couple of times. If you have more than one collar, give them different names – pinch, choke, flat, etc. Put them all on and off.

Next define "tight" and "loose". With the collar on, hold it and pull it tight. Say something along the lines of "That's a tight collar. Do you feel that? That's tight." Release the tension and say "That's loose. Do you feel that? See how I can run my fingers under it? That's loose." Do that once or twice more, then hold the collar and say, "The collar is loose. Can you make it tight?" Encourage him to pull against the collar (you may have to help) and when he makes it tight have a big party, with treats and balloons and streamers (well, treats anyway). Make sure he knows how brilliant he is that he made his collar tight. Then, with the collar tight, ask him to make it loose. "That's a tight collar. Can you show me loose?" Again you may have to help, but have another party when he makes it loose. Within a very short time, the dog should be able to toggle between tight and loose on your request.

Now, when you go for a walk, he will have the vocabulary to understand when you say, "That collar is tight. Can you make it loose?" And then praise, lots of praise. And don't forget to notice when he keeps it loose without reminding and express your appreciation for that. And another thing. Don't just always ask for a loose collar. There are times when a tight collar is appropriate. Maybe you're on the back end of a long walk and there's a hill. I have no problem with asking my dog to pull me up the hill!

As I said in the beginning, there are as many ways to teach loose leash walking as there are trainers, but this is the way that has worked best for me. And so you don't think I'm brilliant and thought all this up myself, this comes from Kayce Cover's work. Her website is [www.synalia.com](http://www.synalia.com).

## Other Techniques

There are lots of other ways to convey to the dog that it is more comfortable for the human and more fun for the dog to have less tension on the leash. All of them work for some dogs. None of them work for all. And they can all be used in conjunction with the loose vs. tight collar technique above. They all pretty much work on making the dog understand that he will not get where he wants to go by pulling, so they all depend on consistency by everyone walking the dog.

Penalty yards – if the dog hits the end of the leash, turn quickly and walk the other way.

Freeze – if the dog hits the end of the leash, stop moving until the leash is slack.

Both of the above work better if you are engaged with the dog. For example, with penalty yards the dog will find himself kind of swinging in an arc at the end of the leash (be careful about this especially with a small dog – you don't actually want her flying through the air!) and most of them will hurry to catch up and then trot along beside you for a second with a questioning look. This is the instant where you catch their eye and say something along the lines of "There you are! I wondered where you went!" and deliver a treat quickly, while still on the move and while the dog is in the position you want to reinforce. Remember – FEED FOR POSITION.

With the freeze, the dog will look back at you (sooner or later most dogs will anyway), some dogs with a question, some with a look of disgust because you are so contrary, and when they do the leash will slacken just a little. Mark that! Good! Or yes! Or a click if you are using a clicker. In this case, you do not necessarily need to use a treat. The reward for the looking back and the slackening of the leash can simply be moving forward again. This technique can work very well for smart, self-aware dogs who understand cause and effect. For those who charge through life with great energy and little thought, however, especially if you decide this is your method of choice because it is the gentlest one you have found, it can take you half an hour to get into the building because you can only get one loose-leash step at a time!

Another technique is the back-away. Dog hits the end of the leash, you start to back up. When the dog turns to orient to you wondering what you are doing, mark the attention – yes!, good!, click!, whatever you use. To help the dog understand the position you want him in you can continue to back for a couple of steps and then YOU swing into position at the dog's side and deliver the treat when in position. Remember – FEED FOR POSITION!

Another technique that can work extremely well is Dawn Jecs *Choose to Heel* technique. You can look it up on the internet, but essentially you need a safe area where you can work off-lead. It helps if the area is not too large so that the dog doesn't have a lot of choices that are more interesting than you. Have a good supply of treats, let the dog know you have them, and start walking. When you start out, ignore the dog. Walk quickly in an interesting and engaging

manner and pretend you are having fun all by yourself. With any luck the dog will want to have fun with you and will catch up or run over to see what you are doing. When the dog is in correct position mark that and deliver the treat. Remember – FEED FOR POSITION!

The trick to this one is – as soon as the treat is delivered, turn away from the dog and move quickly off in another direction. So, if you want the dog in position on your left side, after you deliver the treat turn 90 degrees to the right away from the dog and move off quickly. The aim is for the dog to think “Hey! I thought we were working here!” and run to catch up.

If possible, do all of this as the dog’s choice. If you can’t get her attention for the first couple of treats just by being interesting on your own, then you can call her and let her know a treat is available but make sure the treat is only delivered in position – and then turn and walk away as soon as the treat is delivered.

And of course, last but not least, there is the correction method. The methods above are designed to teach the dog the position you want him to be in – walking calmly at or near your left side with a loose leash/collar. That is the position he has to be in for treats to appear. If you just want a dog who walks nicely on a leash, that is probably all you need for criteria. If you plan to go on to competition obedience your criteria will be stricter – encompassing a specific distance, with a specific head carriage, etc. – and that is the position required for a treat to be delivered. But in either case, before the dog has an understanding of the position you want him in, in my opinion it is not fair to be correcting him for being out of position. Once he does understand the position, however, using leash corrections to enforce correct position will make more sense to him.

So these are the techniques I use to teach loose-leash walking to my dogs. I hope they help for your dogs.

## Beginner Recalls

First of all, as a trainer friend of mine says, your dog needs THOUSANDS of cookies in the bank for recalls before you can expect to make a successful reliable treatless withdrawal. So, following are my suggestions for training a recall.

As the absolute beginning point, I expect my dogs to know their names and to orient toward me and, at the very least, check in with me when I say their names. Most of my dogs come to their name unless I give a different command. I start to train this by saying the dog's name in a bright, cheery voice and giving a treat. It should not take more than about three times and you should see the dog turning his head to look at you when you say his name. Pair his name with a treat many times randomly over the first few weeks you have him. It can never hurt.

Another exercise is to toss a treat. When he runs to grab the treat, at the moment his mouth touches the treat, call his name. When he looks back at you, toss another treat across the front of your body in the opposite direction. Your aim is to have him running back and forth in front of you, getting the treats you tossed first to one side and then the other. What you are doing is building muscle memory for him so that, even when he is moving fast, when he hears his name he will turn to orient toward you.

To begin training for the recall, starting in the house, carry treats and call him. I ask for a nose touch on the 2 finger target recommended by Kayce Cover ([www.synalia.com](http://www.synalia.com)). I would make touching/holding his collar part of the game very quickly. "Here!" - present the 2 finger target - give treat. Repeat maybe 1 or 2 times. Next time - "here!" - present the 2 finger target - "collar!" - touch collar - give treat. Again, repeat 1 or 2 times. Next time - "here!" - present the 2 finger target - "collar!" - hold collar - give treat while holding. Repeat these exercises in the house many times a day. After the first couple of repetitions, vary the sequence. For example, do the collar grab the first time you call, rather than the third. Jazz it up and change it around too. Maybe sometimes just call him once, from another room and then toss a toy or play tug. Don't be predictable. Don't be boring. Make it so that he ALWAYS wants to come and see what foolish thing you are doing this time.

If you have a training partner available, you can also play puppy ping-pong. Both people have treats. Start about 5 or 10 feet apart. First one calls the dog. As soon as he comes, while he is still getting the treat from the first person, the second person should call him. Do this back and forth and make it fast. The faster you can make it, most likely the more he will enjoy it. After only a couple of repetitions, the trainers should get further and further apart. You can quickly play this from opposite ends of the house or on different floors. My daughter and I have done

this with sheep (although not in the house!), and if a sheep thinks it's fun I'm sure your dog will too.

If you don't have a training partner, you can still do this. Toss a treat to get the dog to move away from you. When he is eating the treat you tossed, call him back to the 2 finger target. After a couple of repetitions this way, toss the treat and then start moving away in the other direction. Call him back to the 2 finger target. Build this up so that you toss the treat and then RUN to get away from him. You can even try to hide from him as long as that doesn't stress him. Make him work to get back to you to get his second treat. You can build an amazing amount of drive to come to you using techniques like this.

I would also practice the collar command without the recall. For example, when you are sitting around and he comes up for attention I would say "collar" - hold his collar, maybe tug on it or move his head with it a little, praise (treat if you have them with you) - "good collar, what a smart dog," etc. etc. I would also practice leash on and off and attach a word to it - "leash on" - snap the leash on, praise and treat. "Leash off" - snap the leash off, praise and treat. For example, Tristan (who often will not come when I call) will come immediately at a dead run from across a field, sit in front of me and stick his little neck out when I tell him it is time to put his leash on. His reasoning baffles me, but I take advantage of it!

Also start teaching him the obedience front position in the house. "Front" means you come and sit in front of me, within reach, in a sit, straight in front. When I call my dogs, if I am not calling them to a target then I almost always call them to front. You can do this in the house off lead. Have treats in both hands, let him know you have them, and ask him to sit in front of you. If he is crooked, back up a step or two, encourage him to get straight, and give him the cookie when he is sitting as close as possible without touching you and straight. Either give a treat from both hands at once, or randomly from either hand. If you always treat with the same hand, he will not come in straight but will sit on the side of the hand you treat with. Dogs are all about the shortest distance to the treat.

After he knows front, you can start playing the "find front" game with him. Call him to front, turn left or right a few degrees and ask him to front again. Help him get straight if he needs it. Lots of dogs find this a fun game. They seem to feel like you are trying to trick them and if the dog is competitive enough he will not want you to succeed!

This gives you four (here, collar, leash on, and front) ways now to call him to you - all of which are different to him and all of which should have lots and lots of treats attached to them in his memory.

Now take the show on the road.

Get a long line (not a flexi if you can find a rope or training line - you can cut your fingers to shreds on a flexi) and practice the same recalls in the yard with a long line. Your dog's not stupid, he will know he's on a line - but you want him to know that and you want him to start understanding the position you want him in when you call and you want him to also understand that these are not optional commands. Repeat all the exercises in the yard using the long line to compel the behavior you want if you need to.

If you have a safe, enclosed area where you can work with him, go through all the exercises there off leash. Your own securely fenced yard, a friend's or neighbor's if you don't have one, possibly a tennis court if nothing else. If he blows you off - in other words, if you call him and he ignores you - then you blow him off. For example, call him, he runs the other way - don't chase him, don't call him again, don't beg for his attention. Say "I don't want you anyway!" and keep that attitude in mind - mean it! Walk briskly or even run if the space is large enough AWAY from him. For him, the thrill is in the chase and it doesn't really matter if you are chasing him or he is chasing you. When he gets close to you, turn AWAY from him and keep ignoring him. It helps immensely if you have a spotter who can tell you when to turn to get away because these guys are damn fast! Usually after about 3 turns away he will be right by your side, looking at you hopefully, wondering what is going on. Then turn to him and start talking and praising. If you can, grab his collar, lots of petting and praise, probably not a treat - treats only come when he comes when you call - and then - *this is key here* - let him go again. You want him to learn that coming when called does not end the fun. Throw a toy for him or something else that he likes. Call him again. If he comes this time have a huge party. If he doesn't come, don't repeat the above. And if he doesn't come the second time, don't try it a third time. The last thing you need is him practicing this bad behavior. Once you have control of him again (and this may mean ignoring him until he gets bored and comes to see why you won't play or it may mean walking determinedly toward him with your hand out and a deep conviction in your soul that you WILL be putting your hand on his collar - whatever works for you, but it should not be particularly fun for him. Not painful or scary for him, but not fun either) but anyway, once you have him again, the training session is over. He needs several more days of the foundation recalls before you try this one again.

Once you are successful with the recall in the fenced area and it comes time to leave this enclosed area and go home, give yourself enough time for a leash walk. In other words, call him to you to put his leash on. Don't go directly to the car or the house, but take him for a little walk, do something fun for him before it ends. Don't make the recall and the leash the signal for the end of fun. My daughter even uses the leash as a tug toy for her dogs, so not only do they get to play tug, but the leash itself becomes intrinsically rewarding because they never know when she's going to fold it up and play tug with them.

I hope you understand the difference between the two endings above. If the dog is not successful after two attempts, he is not yet ready for this work. He doesn't get anything fun, because he didn't do what you asked. It's not his fault, he's just not ready, but you also cannot reward the inappropriate behavior. So you go home, work on the foundation behaviors some more, and try again. When he IS successful you IMMEDIATELY make him understand that coming to you, even when he has all that freedom, does not signal the end of the fun. You can call him to you, give him a treat or play tug or throw a toy or whatever floats his boat, and then send him off again. Repeat several times. And then, when you leave the area, DO NOT go directly home. Always make coming to you a rewarding experience for your dog.

I also have a couple of other commands I use when on walks or working in the yard. "C'mere" means "get close, you're too far away". "C'mon" means "you're lagging and I'm leaving, you better catch up." They aren't "come close enough so I can grab you" commands. Rather they are attention reminders. If the dog does come in close enough for touching this is rewarded with a treat or a pat, but it is not a requirement of the command. Sometimes they just do a sort of drive-by and I yell "good dog" as they flash past.

## Relaxation

Some trainers like a manic, ramped up dog to work with. They feel that an animal like that has more drive and will be a better performance dog for them. But those dogs often are hard to live with as family pets. And quite honestly, I'm too old to want to live with that kind of intensity. I want a calm, thinking adult companion – a rational dog, if you will. That's why I try to emphasize skills that will help the dogs learn to manage their own behavior, specifically self-control, attention and respect. Once you have a good start on these skills, you will be able to easily move into the other exercises like heeling, stays, recalls, etc. But maintaining these skills, especially attention, is a life-long activity. And something I feel is equally important – you are requesting self-control, attention and respect from the dog, your dog deserves the same from you.

One of the reasons, the main one actually, that we do the massage/relaxation at the beginning of class is because many dogs are easily excited, and when they are excited they react rather than think. It is very difficult to train a dog who left his brain somewhere else! When a dog can learn to relax or “be easy”, then he has the beginnings of a way to manage his own behavior – self-control. And self-control and the ability to listen and think in situations that otherwise can be very stressful, like the vet's office or when meeting strange dogs or acting as the host when you have guests, are a big part of what makes a pleasant, safe companion.

The easiest way to teach your dog what relaxation feels like is through massage. The neck is a good place to start, then working into the shoulders and back, and then to the hips and the large muscles of the thighs. It may take only a few minutes to get the dog relaxed. It may take many weeks to be completely successful. Each dog is different. Knead rhythmically like bread, longways, from the base of the skull to the top of the shoulders. When I am working on the shoulders and along the back I often use what I think of as a bicycle massage. My hands are on each side of the dog, working alternately but in synchrony, like the movement of your legs when you pedal a bicycle. The massage should be a deep muscle massage, not just moving the skin around. You will feel the neck muscles relax. When you do, name it. You can also massage the base of the ear and below the ear along the hinge of the jaw. Many dogs really like this. In doing this massage, you have to keep in mind the type of animal you are working with. Larger dogs might require a firm massage. Smaller dogs might require a gentle fingertip massage. One of my dogs is difficult to get easy, but she melts with a foot massage.

Once you feel muscles relax, try different types of massage—gentle scruff pulling and sometimes hair pulling can work well. As you move to other parts of the body, name the part and name its relaxed state. Watch for signs of relaxation – lip-licking, yawning, sighing, soft eyes or lips, lying down or, if already lying down, stretching out – and mark them. You don't need to give a treat when you mark this behavior. In fact, using treats with the massage is counter-productive because few dogs can relax when trying to figure out how to get the treat.

If possible get your dog totally limp. And then name that feeling for her - I use "easy". When she is completely relaxed and you have named it for her, then wake her up a little (not a lot) and name that for her - I use "alert". Keep working on this until she can begin to relax herself when you ask her to. "That's alert, can you show me easy?" It helps if you can also define easy in several positions, lying down, sitting, walking. (With one of my dogs, Tristan, I taught him "easy" at home lying down. One evening we were at a class and he was sitting beside me when something at the far end of the pavilion upset him. I said "Tristan, it's not your business, get easy." He looked at me slightly perplexed, then I swear he shrugged, and laid down! So after that we started working on sitting easy too. You never know how they're going to interpret things!)

This conditioned relaxation technique is part of a training system known as SATS (SynAlia Training System) and can be very effective in helping dogs learn to control themselves. If you are interested in learning more about it, the website is [www.synalia.com](http://www.synalia.com)

When you are starting massage with a dog that is already aroused, your strokes should at first match the energy in his body. Try to move your hands in rhythm with the tempo of his breathing. Once you have matched him, you can begin to slow your rhythm gradually and his breathing should slow with your slowing movements. At the same time, you can try matching your breathing to his and then slowing. Similarly, if you can figure out his rate of eye blinking you can match it with yours and then slow it. These are biofeedback techniques and they can be very powerful – but they are hard to do effectively in a class situation. They are better practiced at home at first.

You can also look for signs that the dog is getting calmer. You might see a lip lick, or a yawn, or the muscles around the eyes softening. If you see any of these, mark them and name them. "Good yawn!" or "Good licking!". You can also mirror these for your dog. These are sometimes known as calming signals (Turid Rugaas - <http://en.turid-rugaas.no/calming-signals---the-art-of-survival.html>). Dogs not only exhibit these behaviors themselves when trying to relieve their own stress, they will also use them on other dogs when trying to encourage the other dog to be calmer. If you yawn at your dog, he is likely to recognize it as a signal that things are okay.

I volunteer at my local shelter, and at times I have encountered dogs that I cannot touch. Sometimes the dog does not associate being touched with pleasant experiences; sometimes the dog is so out of control that being touched by a stranger just increases the arousal; sometimes the reason is not apparent. But whatever the reason, I have had to find a way to encourage these dogs to relax without massage. Luckily, I have found a couple of techniques that have worked. I really encourage you to work with the massage until you and your dog are successful but if it just isn't working for you no matter what you do you can try one or both of these techniques.

The first is Dr. Karen Overall's protocol for relaxation. She uses this as the basis for all the behavioral modification techniques she suggests for her client dogs. You can find an excellent description of it here –

[https://dogscouts.org/base/tonto-site/uploads/2015/03/7002\\_Protocol\\_for\\_Relaxation.pdf](https://dogscouts.org/base/tonto-site/uploads/2015/03/7002_Protocol_for_Relaxation.pdf) There are a variety of tasks increasing in complexity over 15 days. This is not a strict exercise. If your dog is not ready for Day 2, feel free to repeat the Day 1 exercises. If you work quickly through the first week and get stuck on Day 8, go back to Day 7 and stay there for a while. It is not a race.

If you do decide to try this, remember – it is not intended as an obedience exercise. The goal is for the dog to relax as you work through the steps, not become more anxious because he might fail. As you are working through the steps, watch your dog closely. If you see him beginning to show signs of relaxation – mark them and name them for him. Again, this is a substitute for the massage; it will not work as efficiently as the massage, and; the goal is for the dog to understand and recognize feelings of calm and relaxation and be able to reproduce them himself when asked.

The second technique I have found is Margot Woods “Sit on the Dog” exercise which you can find here – <http://sanityshome.blogspot.com/2010/01/sit-on-dog-aka-long-down.html> and here – <http://sanityshome.blogspot.com/2010/01/sit-on-dog-pictorial.html> with pictures. You don’t actually sit ON the dog. What you do is put the dog on a comfortable collar with a 6 foot leash. You find yourself something calm and quiet to do – I recommend reading a book. You sit in a firm chair (non-rolling is VERY important) – sitting ON the leash. The dog has only enough leash to allow him to lie quietly at your side. You don’t say anything – you ignore the dog and start to read. The only time you interact with the dog is if he is being a jerk – climbing on you, mouthing you, etc. – and then the interaction is only to stop that behavior. Ultimately the dog will give up and lie quietly at your side. You do this for a minimum of 30 minutes, twice a day, every day.

This is also known as the 30 minute long down. Instructors in the club I teach with have suggested one variation or another of this exercise for years and I have never used it in my classes because I never saw the value in it. But I was working with a dog at my local shelter at the beginning of this year who came very close to losing his life because he was completely out of control. Touching him just escalated his behavior, so massage was out of the question. He had NO skills for interacting with people so the Relaxation Protocol was out of the question. In desperation I tried this (which, by the way, is how I know that you do not do this exercise in a chair that rolls – especially not with an 85 pound dog!) and it worked like a charm. It didn’t turn him into a solid citizen overnight, but it did turn him into a dog that could be worked with and maintained until a suitable placement was found for him. I would have to say this exercise went a long way toward saving his life. The only change I make to this exercise is to mark and name the signs of relaxation for the dog. But I don’t do that until a couple of days in. You need to name the relaxed state so that the dog can begin to learn to relax when you ask him.

So there you are – three techniques for essentially forcing your dog to relax. The first one, massage, is probably pleasant for both of you. The other two pretty much act by boring your dog to death. But the important point is that the dog must relax. Once the dog has done that, you can name it for her. And once you name it you can put it on cue, so that the dog can begin

to understand how to control her reactions and remain calm when you ask, even in a stressful situation.

There is one other thing you should be doing – paying attention to how your dog tries to use this skill. Let's say, for example, that your dog goes ballistic every time the mailman comes to the house. You have been working all week, starting before the mailman arrives, with massage to get your dog into a relaxed state, keeping him under control and continuing to ask for relaxation when the mailman is actually on the porch, and telling him what a good dog he has been as the mailman leaves. There is no mail delivery on Sunday and Monday you kind of forget about it until you hear the footstep on the porch. You look at your dog and he is taking a deep breath and trying to keep himself under control. Mark that!! Tell him what a good dog he is for being easy! Take him to the kitchen and give him a hot dog.

It probably won't happen like that, but be aware of your dog's learning and experience and be prepared to support and reward her efforts.

## Training the Stay

I wanted to talk a little about stays.

In addition to the actual not moving part, there are two other components to stays that initially should be trained separately - distance and duration. In other words, you want the dog to stay for increasing lengths of time, ultimately up to about 10 minutes, and you want the dog to stay with you further and further away, ultimately up to 40 or more feet. **DO NOT WORK ON THESE TWO COMPONENTS AT THE SAME TIME!**

Work first on duration. When you are toe to toe, work on increasing the length of time up to about 15 seconds or more. You do this in variable intervals. I suggest counting for the dog, so that the dog will know what to expect. Say something along the lines of "Now you are going to stay for 2. 1 --2. That's 2. Now I am going to leave and you are going to stay for 2. Are you ready?" Then pivot around to the front of the dog, wait a beat and say "1" wait another beat and say "2". Give your marker in a very calm, non-exciting manner, good, yes, X, or whatever you use, give him a treat, but do not let him move. Then return to heel position, give him another very calm marker. You do not need to give a treat unless you have been having trouble with him moving as you return. Wait a beat and then release him.

When you are training stays, both the marker and the release should be very low key. You are looking for calm behavior, so your reward and your release should also be calm.

Repeat, but this time say "Now you are going to stay for 4. 1--2--3--4. That's 4." Continue on as above. If she is able to do a count of 4 easily, then double it again on the next repetition to 8. If she begins to get antsy, you can give the stay command again to remind her of what she is doing, although the counting for her really does help to anchor her.

I don't know if dogs understand the concept of counting (although I do know they understand quantities up to about 6 or 8) but they do understand cadence and rhythm. If you do it like this for a couple of days you can drop the counting. Just tell them how long they will stay for and they can usually correlate that to a cadence in their head. Terry Pratchett says that trolls can count - 1, 2, many, lots - I think dogs can do better than that. The counting in your head will also help you - this is a difficult exercise for all parties involved!

Once you are reliably (dog is correct at least 80% of the time - actually at this level closer to 90%) up to 16 while toe to toe with your dog, repeat the whole procedure from 2 feet away. Once the dog is reliable from 2 feet away, repeat again at 4 feet. And at 4 feet, begin to move around a little as a distraction for the dog. Stay 4 feet away, but move in an arc. This will also help with training the return.

Pay close attention to the dog. If it looks like he is going to break, feel free to repeat the stay command. Do not nag, but remind the dog of what he is doing. You don't need to say "Stay, stay, staaaaaay." A simple "stay" in a low, calm voice is much more effective. If the dog does break, put him back **IN THE SAME SPOT**. This is very important. If he wants to move and he gets away with it, even with just a slight change in position - then he has rewarded himself for

moving. Also, if he breaks, put him back in the same position AND DO NOT TREAT. If you treat, then he is again being rewarded for moving.

Depending on dog, handler, and the amount of time you have, this may take you 2 days or 2 weeks. If you are done with this before the next class, you can move up to a count of 32 (you see how we double it?). But if you are moving up to a count of 32, move back to 2 feet away. Count in your head. When you get to about 18 or 20, give the stay command again in a calm voice to remind the dog what he is doing. If you can't get to 32, then start from 16 in successive approximations. In other words, a count of 20, then 24, then 32. If the dog is reliable at 2 feet away for a count of 32, move to 4 feet and repeat.

Also, once you are up to a count of 32, don't forget to vary the duration. In other words, on your next trial only do the stay for a count of 4 (for example), then 32 again, then 16, etc.

Oh, and don't assume that if the dog can do this sitting, he can also do it lying down or vice versa. Use the same procedure for both positions. And if you ask for a sit and the dog lies down during the stay - put him back in the sit. Or again, vice versa.

In case anyone is interested, the conditioned relaxation that we have been working on since the first week, the explaining to the dog what is happening that I tell you to do on the sit for exam, and other things like the counting for them, all come from the training techniques of Kayce Cover . Her website is [www.synalia.com](http://www.synalia.com) and she has lots of articles and free directions and also runs a couple of yahoo lists for both experienced trainers and beginners. She also has a couple of books available and she has quite a bit of video demonstrating some of the techniques up on her website. Some of the other techniques like the back-away that we are using as an attention reminder come from a trainer called Brenda Aloff. Her website is [www.brendaaloff.com](http://www.brendaaloff.com) and she also has books and videos available. Hers are for sale at [dogwise.com](http://dogwise.com), but check Amazon – they might be cheaper there.