

HOUSEBREAKING AND OTHER FUN

Once you've arrived home with your puppy from the breeder or the pound, your first lessons will commence almost immediately if this is to be a house dog. Of course, I'm talking about housebreaking or getting your dog to use the great outdoors for his bathroom rather than your brand new carpet.

Repetition with no mistakes is the key to teaching your dog.

But first, a few things to keep in mind. One is that a seven-week-old puppy already has established behavior patterns, and as far as the puppy is concerned, nothing is "wrong" in his eyes. Another is that it is easier to get a puppy or dog to "do" something than to "stop doing" or "not do" something. And the longer you are unsuccessful at trying to stop a particular behavior, the more likely it is that you will have to resort to more severe methods of discipline.

So from the very start, while dog training consists of both positive and negative (reward the good and reprimand the bad) aspects, it is to everyone's benefit to stress the positive side.

When your puppy first arrives at his new home and needs to relieve himself, convenience is going to be his only concern. If it is easier for him to relieve himself inside the house when he feels the urge, then he will take the easy way out.



I like to think that most situations and solutions in dog training have three elements - philosophy, method, and technique. Let's apply this to housebreaking. Your "philosophy" is to have a (relatively) clean house despite the arrival of an exuberant, messy puppy. The "method", therefore, is to know the signs of when your puppy is about to eliminate - crouching and straining after play, after eating and drinking, or upon waking. "Technique" comes into play here by getting him outside at the right time by walking him, kenneling him or even quickly carrying him.

Our training is only limited by two things - how faithful we are at carrying out our part of this dynamic, and realizing that the puppy part of the team really doesn't care about the outcome! Remember, the dog cares only about convenience at this point, so getting him to relieve himself to your satisfaction depends on how good you are at being in the right place at the right time.

However, when you verbally praise him for a job well done or even give him a tiny treat, you increase his desire to cooperate. Repetition with no mistakes is the key to teaching your dog.

Now, for the flip side of the coin. From the dog's perspective, relieving himself in the house is not a "wrong" behavior. So to avoid these frustrating accidents (that is, only from your perspective!), then make sure he is contained when you are unable to observe him. A "crate," which we have discussed earlier, is wonderful since dogs hesitate to soil the place where they sleep, and even if they have an accident, then the mess is confined to a smaller area.

Another possibility is to attach your puppy to a six or eight foot leash and keep him with you as you go about your daily chores. If, despite your best intentions, he makes a mistake (remember, by your standards and not his!), then a firm shake on the nape of the neck coupled with a forceful "No!" and immediate removal outside should work.

All things considered, this is very basic training. If it goes badly at this early stage, you may not be destined for great things with your dog!

Common complaints by dog owners often run along the lines that the new puppy barks too much, doesn't come when called, pulls on the leash, and bites. All of these behaviors, of course, are things a puppy more or less does naturally, depending on his temperament. We know that some breeds are more vocal than others, more aggressive, more exuberant, more high strung. There are variations in temperament and noise, too, even among pups in the same litter.

Ideally, if you wanted a quiet house, you should have picked a quiet dog. Be that as it may, to train a pup to stop unwanted barking, start as soon as you get him by making a forceful correction when he barks, every time he barks. Give him a sharp shake or a flat-handed slap under the jaw with a verbal correction of "quiet," "no" or "out" Once your dog has reached six or seven months, if his barking is still out of control and creates a serious problem, it may be necessary to escalate to the use of an electronic "bark collar."

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