

Prep your dog for working

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Whenever you begin a training session, help your dog transition from a mindset where they are 100% engaged with their environment to where they are 100% engaged with you.

Here are the steps that you have to train your dog to anticipate by doing this every single time you get ready to practice or compete. Your goal is to teach your dog how to move through this transition quickly so that you can blur the difference between mindless play and mindful teamwork. The more you do this, the faster your dog accelerates through this process, because they anticipate what comes next, which in turn makes your training very efficient and fun.

IF you fast forward to step 5) and your dog isn't mentally ready, you will get less keen, less accurate, less thoughtful behaviors which will in turn create errors, a poor rate of reinforcement, discouragement, frustration and inefficient learning. Here are your steps:

1) Self control behavior earns them release from crate, down stay or restraint.

No self control? Then no freedom to make other poor choices, play games where the dog's choice to exhibit self control is rewarded lavishly. This is a foundation skill that you will want to build and then take advantage of in training other behaviors.

2) Reward the release with play, play, play or whatever you intend to use as a reinforcer during your training session. This is a question you are asking your dog. Do I have something that you will work for? You need to know the answer to this question before you go on.

Positive response to the reward you intend to offer means you can move to the next step. Lack luster response means you need to stay at step 2) until dog is keen to your reward or you have to rethink what you are reinforcing your dog with.

3) Steal the reward away or pause in giving cookies and wait - what does your dog offer to do in order to restart the game or earn cookies?

If your dog offers any acceptable behavior (usually a sit, down or the latest thing you've been training) - then reward and repeat step 3) again. If your dog is consistently choosing to offer to work with you, go on to step 4)

If your dog, when given a choice, goes off sniffing, visiting or otherwise disengages with you, go back to step 1) and try again in a few minutes, perhaps revisiting your choice of reward.

4) Steal the reward away and now ASK for a behavior that you know your dog knows very well, (sit, down, nose touch, come to heel etc.).

If your dog gives a nice snappy response, reward and go onto step 5). If your dog is a bit slow or distracted, repeat or even go back to step 3) (or farther if necessary) but don't go onto step 5) without your dog showing you that they can execute what they already know well.

5) Quickly transition to your training exercise.

For example in step 4) you might ask for a sit - tug - give - tug to the start line - sit/ stay - and lead out to start step 5).

Remember that not all exercises have to start with a stay behavior. Hand-in-collar / ready, steady is a great way to transition between step 4 and 5. Ie: ask your dog to put their collar in your hand, you restrain them and let them rip...