7 Skills Every Dog Should Have

Why bother to train:

When you train using positive, playful methods you create an amazing bond between you and your dog. Having a trained dog allows you to share experiences because you have established a way of communicating with each other. You understand each other and have created a relationship based on mutual affection and respect. Most of all, you both have fun!

Anyone can train a dog. It just takes patience, persistence, consistency and repetition.

7 behaviors:

There are 7 basic behaviors or commands that every dog should learn. These behaviors form the foundation for anything else you might want to do with your dog. They are:

1. Interactive Play
2. Sit
3. Down
4. Stay
5. Walk on a loose lead
6. Come
7. Retrieve

Interactive Play:

It may seem silly to teach your dog to relax and play with you, but it's critical for training. I use the word "OK" to tell my dog that the pressure is off and that it's time to play with me. Training all 6 other commands requires that the dog pay attention and develop some level of self control. That's hard work. "OK" means that the pressure is off and we can play together and then get ready for the next lesson. You'll need to learn what motivates your dog during this play time. Sometimes it's a toy or a treat, but it always involves hands-on interaction with you. My favorite way to release a dog is by playing tug with a special toy that he only gets when he's with me. Sometimes your play time between sessions will be longer than your actual training time. Good!

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Sit:

Teaching your dog to sit is the most basic behavior every owner wants. There are several methods to teach a dog to sit, but none of them involve pushing down on a dog's rear. Your dog will resist sitting and forcing usually doesn't accomplish anything close to a sit. The best way I know is to use a treat. Put it right on the tip of his nose. As he reaches up to get the treat, move the treat upwards and towards his tail, keeping it just above his nose at all times.

Down:

Starting with your dog in a "sit," put a treat right up to his nose. Slowly lure him to the floor by moving the treat straight down and then slightly in front of him. Make sure he's all the way down with elbows on the floor before you give him the treat.

Stay:

This is a life and death command and can be started from either the "sit" or "down" position. You must start slowly by having your dog "stay" for very short periods of time. When he makes a mistake and moves, gently put him back into position and remind him that he's supposed to "stay." Gradually extend the amount of time he has to "stay" before you release him and play.

Walk on a loose lead:

A dog who pulls, tugs or lunges when he's on a leash usually has to stay home. Learning to walk on a loose lead is often tough for many dogs, but it's an important skill to have. There are commercial products available to stop a dog from pulling, but they only control the problem while the product is being used. I prefer to train using a couple of techniques that take more time and effort, but are much more effective in the long run. You either need to try using the "become-a-tree" or "U-Turn" methods before you resort to anything other than a buckle or martingale collar.

Come:

Always train your dog to "come" when you have him on a lead so he can't ignore you or stop and think about it. This is another command, like "stay" that could make the difference between life and death. He can't think that he has any options. When you call him, he HAS to "come." Only call him to you for good things, never for punishment.

Retrieve:

Retrieving is both mentally and physically stimulating and, most of all, fun! Retrieving comes easily and naturally for many dogs. However, it's actually a complex set of skills. Each of those skills requires some education. The first step is getting your dog to focus on and "take" an object, like a ball. The next step is getting him to "fetch" the ball. Then he has to "bring" the ball back to you. Finally, he has to "give" or "drop" the ball so that you can throw it again.