



## Ten Steps to a Perfect Pet

Congratulations on taking the first important step to having a Perfect Pet dog by signing up for this free help sheet and video. Here are the ten key steps to train your dog to be your perfect pet. You'll find out:

- the secret formula to get your dog wanting to do what you want
- the five important things to teach your dog
- the key change that will transform your training
- and how to fit it all easily into your everyday life

Make sure you watch the video. It gives more information and training ideas for each step. Let's get started.

### STEP 1) KNOW WHAT YOUR DOG LIKES

Dogs are basically very simple creatures. They do the things that get them what they want and the stuff they like - rewards.

Rewards may be things that makes the dog feel good, or happy, or satisfied, such as eating, or lying in front of a roaring fire in winter, or chasing a ball.

Other rewards are something the dog gets that he likes, such as a treat, or a fuss, or the opportunity to play with a toy with you.

The important things about rewards is that each dog will have different things they see as the most important rewards.

Gus, my collie, isn't too fussed about most food treats, but he adores cheese and chicken. He doesn't really like hard plastic toys, but he loves a soft tug toy. Gareth's dog, Tippi, loves food – any food. She also likes tug toys, but food trumps everything else for her. Every dog is different.

Step 1 is: Do a REWARD REVIEW for your dog.

As a minimum, find at least one thing from each group below:

- a favourite food
- a favourite toy (remember a toy can be anything – a plastic bottle, or cardboard tube are often favourites)
- a favourite way of being touched (many dogs hate being patted on the head, for example)
- a favourite place to go to visit – such as a beach, or park, or woodland, or your mum's house
- and a favourite person to meet (this may not be you!).

If you have time, do a thorough review by finding out at least 5 things he loves in each category, in order of preference.

Then use this information to give your dog the rewards he loves for doing what you want, when you ask – that's the key to successful training!

Remember: Always use rewards wisely.

It's best not to reward a calm sit with a tug game, for example.

And one piece of kibble (dog food) for coming back from chasing that squirrel will not be seen as a great reward by any dog.



For example:

- if your dog sits politely to be petted - use his favourite type of touch
- if he brings you a favourite toy - play with it!
- when he's lying down quietly - give him a favourite treat
- when he stands nicely to have a lead on - take him out to a favourite place

Finally, never forget your voice. PRAISE is a great reward for many dogs. You can use a specific reward word if you want, such as "Good" or "Yesss!" to tell him when he's got it right.

Your dog's response will tell you when you give him a great reward!

## STEP 2) TIMING

Dogs learn by association - they learn what happens when they do something. If they put their bottom on the floor and you say "sit" they'll learn to associate the act of sitting with the word "sit" – and bingo, you've taught your dog to sit.

The key thing about timing is that your dog makes an association with what happens within 1-2 seconds of him doing something.

So you need to try to get your reward in within 1-2 seconds – that's why a reward word is so helpful - it can buy you a bit of time while you ferk in your treat bag for that piece of cheese.

This timing issue also explains why it's no good telling your dog off for making a mess in the house when you get home from work. He'll have completely forgotten about it - and all he'll learn is that sometimes you get angry when you come home.

But he looks guilty, you say, he must know what he's done.

No. He doesn't look guilty, he's actually trying to placate you and avoid you getting cross. He has no idea you're angry because he made a mess an hour ago.

Practice your timing with simple things – giving a treat when your dog sits on cue, or praising with your voice when your dog lies down quietly, for example.

Our dogs can train us, too, using great timing. My assistants laughed at me recently. I couldn't work out why. Until they pointed out that whenever Gus placed his paw on my foot I gave him a treat. He's trained me well.

Focusing on using great timing is the second key to successful training.

## STEP 3) PLAY

The more you play with your dog, the better. Play alleviates boredom and helps you build a great bond with your dog. And it's fun!

Different breeds tend to prefer different toy and games:

- **Terriers** often prefer something like a cloth knotted at both ends. You can also add something the dog can shake off, such as fine sand
- **Sight hounds** love things like flirt poles or feathers. Try flicking feathers away from your sight hound and see them pounce
- **Pointers/setters** often prefer toys on ropes. Try flicking it upwards as your dog approaches, so that the toy appears to leap off the ground



- **Herding breeds** often like balls, or they may prefer Frisbees or toys with an unpredictable bounce thrown along the ground
- **Gundogs** like soft toy, such as bean bags or cylinders thrown high in the air to land still on the ground
- **Guarding breeds** will often tug - hard. Try using a cylindrical toy weighted at one end so that when the toy is released it falls out of their mouth. Non weighted toys can encourage gripping and pulling and can increase possessiveness in these breeds.

As well as toys, consider different types of activities. For example:

- Some dogs enjoy swimming
- Many dogs love jumping to catch a toy
- Some dogs love digging and burying toys – build a sand pit for these types
- Others love playing hide and seek with toys

Whatever toy you play with, or whatever activity you do with your dog, there are some play rules you should follow:

- Use an excited voice to raise your dog's excitement, or run with your dog on lead in different directions to raise their enthusiasm. For most dogs, just encouraging them using your hands and voice while sitting on a chair works just fine.
- Think about how you use the toy:
  - o Throw the toy up high in air to land still for a gundog. Use a bean bag, soft toy or weighted soft cylinder (dummy), rather than a ball
  - o Terriers love toys that roll or bounce, and can be dragged along the ground
  - o For a border collie, throw the toy low along the ground. Restrain your puppy from chasing immediately, but release him before the toy stops moving
- Think about the type of toy you're using – some toys may over-arouse some dogs, such as a ball on rope for a border collie, or a squeaky toy for terriers, or a rope tug for a bull breed
- If your dog gets too excited when he plays with you, you could change the toy or type of game you play, or play more calmly yourself, or break up your play frequently to allow your dog to calm down.

Tug toys are great toys. We believe all dogs should be encouraged to tug. A good tug toy should be fairly short – if it's too long it encourages grabbing and shaking rather than a nice tug.

Tug is a great reward, can be a useful distraction technique, and, most importantly, it keeps your dog focused on you. It's the first key to successful training.

## STEP 4) CALMNESS

This is the opposite of the last step!

We tend to ignore our dogs when they're being quiet and good. Try to watch for, notice and reward all calm behaviour, especially if you've got a Terrible Terrier, or a Loopy Labrador, or a Feisty Fido.

Try these calmness promoting ideas:

- Throw a treat when they lie on their bed, or lie quietly in a corner or on a mat
- Reward nothing – that is, reward them with a treat or a pat when they're just doing nothing much, just hanging round with you
- Praise them gently when they're quiet and calm

This is something I do a lot with my Crazy Collie, Gus.



Remember that dogs do more of the things they get a reward for. So train yourself to notice and reward any and all the things your dog does that you like. It's much more effective than yelling at your dog for doing things you don't like!

Just make sure you don't use any reward that arouses your dog too much. Tug toys and ball throws don't help encourage calmness...but food puzzle toys and chews do.

## **STEP 5) HANDLING – COLLAR GRAB**

It's vital that all dogs can be touched all over and, preferably, enjoy it.

Then your dog will be happy at the vets and at the groomers and with all the things you need to do – bath him when he's dirty, towel him dry after a wet walk, trim his nails, brush him, or pull grass seeds or thorns out of his pads.

You want your dog to think that being touched is good. Use his dinner to practice handling exercises up to 3 times a day. The important thing to remember is the three Ts: Touch THEN Treat.

Here's some things to practice. Do each exercise on both sides, swapping which hand you use:

1. Start with his body and head, checking he is fine with you stroking and patting him on the sides and back of his body and around his head.
2. Grab his collar and hold it while you give a treat
3. Touch his shoulder then feel down his leg to his paw. Remember to check each toe and between the toes. Do this with both front legs.
4. Then do the same thing with both back legs.
5. Lift up each leg, gradually increase the time until you can hold it up to 3-5 seconds.

If your dog moves away or looks uncomfortable in ANY way, stop, wait for him to come back to you again and/or relax again.

Never allow him to become really uncomfortable but take things at his pace. This will give him the confidence to trust you more and eventually to enjoy handling.

Handling training may take some time. It doesn't matter. Take it slowly.

Teaching your dog to be comfortable being grabbed by the collar is an essential part of training. If he ever escapes, the natural reaction of a person trying to catch him is to grab his collar. And being grabbed by the collar causes around 20% of all dog bites.

So get training!

## **STEP 6) A CALMING (CONTROL) POSITION**

It's really useful to be able to stop your dog when you need – to put his lead back on, to calm him down if he's been charging around, or just to help with control when visitors come.

So step 6 is to teach your dog to sit, or lie down or, for some breeds, to stand still. Teach whichever position your dog finds easiest and is their "go to" option.

There are breed differences in this – whippets and bull breeds often hate lying down, but collies drop into a down at the drop of a hat; short haired, small breeds may not like sitting; large dogs (Irish wolfhounds, swiss mountain dogs) may prefer to stand.

Watch your dog to see what positions he choose to use – does he sit, or lie down, or stand most often?



The key thing is to teach your dog to do it ON CUE, that is, he does it whenever and wherever you ask.

Start training your chosen position in your house. Using a treat to guide him may help at first. – lift above his head to help him sit, or take it down to the ground to teach lie down.

Then once he's starting to understand what you want, take the training into the garden and other outside places – practice anywhere and everywhere.

Reward him every time until he “gets it”. How do you know when this is? Well, a useful test is the 19 out of 20 rule. If your dog does what you ask quickly, at the first time of asking, at least 19 times out of every 20, then you can be fairly sure he understands.

Once he “gets it”, move to rewarding him randomly (just sometimes, whenever you want, but still frequently).

Practice anywhere and everywhere until your dog has an almost automatic response and does what you ask every time.

Practise on walks – if you ask your dog to do something for you several times on each walk, you'll be able to do a lot of practice!

Practice makes perfect with this one.

## STEP 7) COME WHEN CALLED

Getting your dog to come back when called is one of the three key things every dog needs to do.

A good recall can save your dog's life.

Make sure that every time your dog comes to you when you call him, something great happens – a favourite treat, or toy play with a favourite toy, or a cuddle, or going for a walk – use the rewards you identified in step 1.

Equally, NEVER call your dog if something unpleasant might happen. For example, if you're going to leave your dog behind when you go out, if you want to give him a bath, when you want to put him in his crate. In these situations you should always go and fetch your dog instead .

A great way to teach and practice recall is to play the “to and fro” game using your dog's dinner.

To play the game: Put your dog's lead on. Split his meal between however many human “players” there are\*. Move apart around 6-10 feet. In turn, call his name ONCE (in a light, happy voice). Praise him well AS HE COMES to you, then fuss and give 2-3 bits of kibble. Then the next person calls, and so on. If he does not respond to your call, go to him, pick up the lead, encourage him to follow you, praise and fuss (but no food) then take him back to where he was and call again. Repeat the game until the “meal” is eaten.

*(\*To play on your own, call him as above, but instead of giving him the food, put it on the ground so you can move away while he eats it, then you will be ready to call him again.)*

Start playing the game inside the house, then, as he understands the game, take it out in the garden. Add the cue “come”(or “here”) after his name once he understands the game.

Gradually increase the distance you call him from. You can add hiding round corners or behind furniture (or trees and bushes outside), or call him from room to room, or from outside to inside, to make it more difficult as he gets the hang of the game.

(This is one of the games we teach on our signature Perfect Pet course, by the way.)



Then start to take the game out and about. At first, make sure the places you choose for practice are quiet. Gradually add more distractions.

Recall is all about practice, practice, and more practice. Then even more practice.

Have fun while you work on this vital step.

## **STEP 8) HOME ALONE**

It's SO important that your dog can happily settle on his own when you go out. It's another of those three key things your dog needs to learn.

You need to practice this right from the first days you get your puppy or dog. You'll find our dog wants to follow you everywhere, even to the toilet. But he needs to learn to cope on his own.

Start by simply going out of the room then straight back in. Gradually stay out for longer and longer.

Make sure he's full with food, tired and sleepy and leave him with a chew or filled Kong.

Perhaps start with just a couple of minutes, or even just a few seconds if your dog's struggling to cope.

Do these short separations a few times each day. Vary the length of time you leave him for.

You must build this in tiny steps, making sure your dog is happy and content each time.

If you want your dog to be happy left in a crate, check out the free help sheets on our website (<https://downdog.co.uk/freebies>).

## **STEP 9) BANISH THE BOWL**

Don't feed your dog in a bowl. WHAAAT? I hear you say – "What are you talking about? Surely you need to feed your dog in a bowl?"

No, you don't. Bowls are for water.

BOREDOM is a big problem for our dogs. We're all super busy with our work, hobbies, children, studying, reading, watching TV and surfing the net.

But your dog gets perhaps an hour or so walk each day, they sleep for perhaps another 10 hours, perhaps play for half an hour with us – but that still leaves around 11 hours when they have nothing to do.

If you feed in a bowl, your dog will probably Hoover it up within a few seconds. If you ditch the bowl, you can feed your dog in lots of different ways – ways that will make him think, work hard for his food and end up tired and happy.

Some ideas:

- Use the food for training, especially in the house;
- Throw bits of food for Fido to chase. A great game for this is round and round - your dog runs around you then you throw a piece of food:
- Fill a food toy such as a Kong, or buy or make a food puzzle toy. Get a plastic bottle and cut around 6 holes in it just bigger than your dog's pieces of food. Fill the bottle with his dinner and let your dog push it round until food falls out;
- Hide small piles of food around the house for your dog to sniff out, such as burying a Bonio behind the cushions, for example;



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- Lay a trail of food round the house for your dog to follow;
- Scatter your dog's food on the patio or garden for him to find and snaffle;
- Or get a snuffle mat for him to work at finding all the bits of kibble scattered in it.

Use your imagination! Your dog will thank you.

## **STEP 10) PRACTICE – THE RULE OF 3s**

The final step is to practice. Because practice makes perfect.

You may be feeling overwhelmed and think you haven't time for all this.

But you have – using the rule of threes, which is to practice:

- For 3 minutes,
- Doing 3 rehearsals,
- 3 times a day.

It really is quite easy to find three minutes here and there – while the kettle boils; during advert or programme breaks on the TV; while waiting for a bath to fill; while waiting for your tea to cook; there are lots of opportunities for three minute training stints.

You can also practice on walks. You'll get through even more practice but it takes no extra time from your busy life. Try practising something every 30 paces – you'll be amazed at how much training you'll be doing.

## **WHAT NEXT?**

If you'd like to know more, I've written two (soon to be three) books.

You can buy them from Amazon in paperback or on Kindle:

*Pesky Puppy to Perfect Pet* – is not just for puppies, but it's useful for more mature mutts too. It's been called a puppy "bible" by customers and has several five star reviews on Amazon.

*Chaos to Calmish: Diary of a Pesky Puppy's First Year* - is the story of my first year with Gus. I describe the highs and lows, the successes and the failures and I've included tips on how and where I could have done better.

More about my third book soon....

You can find detailed information about us and our services on our website, along with more free help and advice (<https://downdog.co.uk>).

We also have an exciting new venture, of online help, for people who can't come to our physical classes or who live too far away for us to visit them.

All the details of our training courses, personalised 1-2-1 help packages and online training options are on the website. Have a browse!

Finally, if you're struggling with an aspect of your dog's behaviour, think about getting specialised help. Online and in-person help is available from Carol, The Doggy Doctor via the Behaviour tab on the website.

Good luck with your Potentially Perfect Pet.

Let us know how you get on.