



The ABCs of Training Your Puppy

By Nancy Frensley, CAP2, CPDT
Behavior & Training Manager
Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society

I. How to use and deliver food for training

- A. Purchase or devise a “bait bag” so you have a handy place to store your treats.
- B. When training, remove several pieces of the food and hold them in your hand, concealed. They can be in the same hand as your clicker if you are using a clicker.
- C. Use food that is soft and quickly consumed. Cut treats into small pieces. We recommend the various food rolls (they look like sausages) available in the pet supply stores. These are actual dog food and are healthy for your puppy. Be sure to monitor how your puppy tolerates any new food.

2. Training Sessions

- A. Start each session by feeding your dog several pieces of food, then take another handful and conceal the food in your hand. It can be behind your back.
- B. Start the session with something very simple and fast that your puppy knows. The two-finger target is a good starting point to get your puppy to focus. Process to new material, then back to familiar material. Your sessions should be very short, only a minute or two with young puppies.
- C. You can “free-shape” the behavior by waiting for it to happen spontaneously, marking it, and rewarding it, or you can “prompt” the behavior by moving your body, showing direction with your hand. Try to avoid pushing or pulling on your puppy to get the behavior started. Don’t forget to have your treats in your hand. When you run out of the treats in your hand, turn your back on your puppy to grab some more.

Helpful Hints

- Do not add the cue (the word and/or hand signal you'll use, such as “sit” or “down”) until the behavior is occurring regularly. Then attach the cue as the puppy does the behavior. Occasionally test to see if the puppy recognizes the cue. After the puppy recognizes the cue, then you can put the cue in front of the behavior.
- Once you add the cue, do not mark and reward for un-cued responses. In other words, if your puppy offers you a behavior for which you have not just asked, s/he doesn't get a click or treat.
- Most behaviors take a minimum of two hundred successful repetitions to establish. It takes more for the puppy or dog to respond reliably to a cue.

- The good news is that, if you do the math, you'll find you are spending a very short amount of time to teach a behavior. Two hundred repetitions usually takes about twenty to thirty minutes. If ten repetitions take a minute, then you can teach your puppy a behavior in about twenty sessions.