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3 Ways to Teach A Dog

How do you begin to teach a dog a new behavior? The first step to teaching your dog any new behavior, is to get your dog to perform the behavior. Exactly how do you get your dog to do something brand new? Through luring, capturing, and shaping. These are the most ethical and effective ways to train.

Luring

Where the nose goes, the rest of the dog follows. You can use this to your advantage using food, toys, or anything else your dog finds motivating, to move them from one place to another, or into desired positions. For example, get your dog to sit by holding a treat up to your dog's nose and slowly tracing the treat overhead, toward your dog's back end. Release the treat to reward the sit position, and your dog will learn to love sits! Training tip: Think of the lure as a magnet. Focus on keeping the treat in contact with your dog's face. Go very slow when moving the treat. If it gets too far away, the magnet drops off.

Capturing

Most dogs naturally do a lot of praiseworthy behaviors, like sitting, lying down or giving eye contact. Take advantage of your dog's natural behaviors by "capturing" them in the moment with your marker word or click. Reward each instance of the behavior with food or praise! The more rewards, the more frequently your dog will offer it. Pay attention to your dog's patterns so that you can predict when they are about to perform the behavior. Teach your dog the cue word by saying it just before the behavior occurs.

Shaping

Shaping is the process of teaching a behavior by breaking it down into smaller, achievable steps. Everything from attention to retrieving an item from the fridge can be taught reliably through shaping. Shaping may use luring, capturing, or both. For example, the act of your dog making eye contact with you is actually made up of many small steps. Eye contact requires that your dog look toward your body (and away from whatever currently has their attention), then looking up past your legs and chest to meet your gaze. Each of those small steps can be rewarded, with increasing criteria, until your dog reliably looks you in the eye.

What to Avoid

It might be tempting to physically manipulate your dog into desired positions. However this method is less effective, because it turns your dog into a passive learner. Additionally,

something as simple as pushing your dog into a sit can cause pain or orthopedic damage.
Avoid these types of approaches at all costs, so that you preserve your dog's love for learning!