

# Association of pet Dog Trainers New Zealand Inc

Issue 5 – July/Aug/Sept 2010

## President's Message

Dear Member,

First I would like to say that my thoughts have been with our members in Christchurch and their families. We have had reports via e-mail that they are all coping well. For those of you that have family in Christchurch, I hope they are all safe. It makes you realize how vulnerable we all are to the powers of this planet.

This time I am going to ask all of you to get active in telling others that want to listen about the APDTNZ. We want those that are not members of the organization to know that we are inclusive and would like everyone to join regardless of training 'style'. The associate membership level allows for this as the Code of Ethics does not need to be signed.

The Library is now up and running and we encourage you to borrow! A list of books available, and borrowing rules are on the website.

The next local event will be Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November in Auckland, please check the website for more details.

That's all from me, happy reading,

Susie Londer,  
APDTNZ President.

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## Editorial:

Spring is finally here, although at my place there is still no reduction in the quantity of mud! New puppies have started to arrive at the local SPCA where I volunteer, most recently, abandoned four week old puppies. A look on trade me shows a depressing number of dogs needing new homes. As trainers what can we do to help reduce the number of unwanted dogs, many of whom have short lives? The AVSAB position statement gives some ideas. Being well socialised as a puppy is a crucial first step to a dog having a chance at a reasonable life. Even before this, I believe trainers have a role in helping people to make the right decisions about what sort of dog matches their lifestyle. So often dogs are surrendered to shelters or councils because people have made a bad choice of dog in the first place, or have unrealistic expectations of what dog ownership is about. Promoting the de-sexing of family dogs is important. Actively dispelling the myths that the dog is missing something by not becoming a mum or dad, or that the children will lose a crucial experience if they don't have puppies chewing their shoes is something trainers should be doing.

Effective and accessible training plays a part in helping a dog stay in the family home. It is important that people form relationships with their trainers so they seek help when they need it, and learn the skills to deal with issues as they arise. A one off set of classes is unlikely to cover all eventualities, especially once the dog enters adolescence. If classes are fun and productive people are more likely to continue.

The promotion of responsible and sensible dog ownership should be integral to communication with pet owners. Irresponsible and unthinking owners continue to jeopardise the opportunities of good dog owners.

As trainers we can make a very big difference to the lives of the dogs and people we provide services to. Sometimes this difference is a life saving one. As puppy season and Christmas approach please don't underestimate the importance of this advocacy role.

Tracy Wilde,

Editor.

### APDT NZ Mission statement:

*To promote human-dog relationships of understanding and trust by offering education in canine behaviour and effective, up to date, dog friendly training methods and skills.*

## Learning Theory Article 5 The Stages of Learning

A concept that is particularly useful for trainers is what we call the stages of learning: *acquisition*, *fluency*, *generalization* and *maintenance*. Familiarity with these stages of learning will help you be a more efficient trainer because you will have a deeper understanding of the learning process.

**Acquisition** is a term for the change that takes place when learning happens. This is a little tricky, because you can certainly argue that change (and consequently learning) is taking place during all of the stages of learning. However, when trainers refer to acquisition, they are talking about the beginning stages of an animal learning a new behavior – the time during which the animal begins to understand that certain antecedents predict certain consequences for a particular behavior.

Chance (Learning & Behavior, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., pg 36-37) prefers the word “change” to acquisition because he feels that learning doesn’t always require the acquisition of something. Chance uses the example of the pecking order in a flock of chickens. He asserts that by pecking at the other chickens in the flock you establish your position within the flock; once you’ve established your position, you *give up* pecking at the higher ranking chickens. Perhaps one could argue that the chicken has *acquired* the knowledge that pecking at higher ranking chickens is futile and possibly dangerous.

Regardless, in training, acquisition is a very commonly used term and one we should understand.

The next stage of learning is **fluency**. “*Fluency is a combination of errors and rate; it is the number correct per minute.*” (Chance, Learning & Behavior 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., pg 46)

Fluency tells you how well the animal can perform the behavior under given circumstances. For trainers, this is where record keeping comes in very handy, as you can always determine the fluency of a behavior by taking a rate-per-minute measurement. The work of Breland and Bailey informs us that the optimum time to raise criteria is when you have an 80% fluency rate.

So let’s do a “case study.” Your dog, Fido, has been acquiring the “rollover” behavior under the following circumstances:

- trained by you
- hot dogs for reinforcement
- trained 7 days in a row
- trained in your living room
- trained every morning between 8:30 and 8:45
- trained with low-to-no distraction (i.e., no people, no other pets, etc. in the room)
- current criteria = trainer in upright position, stimulus is a circling motion with the index finger pointing out, compliance within 2 seconds of stimulus

One evening you go to dinner at your in-law’s house and decide to take Fido so you can show off the new trick. Just before leaving, you do a few practice rollovers with Fido, while your wife waits patiently. Below is a chart showing Fido’s fluency under the various circumstances.

Scenario #1 Rate Per Minute Your Living Room 8:30am	Scenario #2 Rate Per Minute Your Living Room 5:00pm	Scenario #3 Rate Per Minute Father-in-Law’s Living Room 6:00pm
8	4	0

What this tells you is that your dog is fairly fluent in “rollover” at your house in the morning, somewhat fluent in the evening, and not fluent at your father-in-law’s house.

“**Generalization** is the tendency for a learned behavior to occur in the presence of stimuli that were not present during training.” (Chance, Learning & Behavior 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., pg 451)

Fluency is closely related to generalization. Fluency will tell you how well generalized the behavior is. From the above example with Fido, we know that Fido is fluent in the behavior at 8:30am in your living room, somewhat fluent at 5:00pm in your living room, and not fluent at 6:00pm in your father-in-law’s living room.

What’s different about each of these situations? Well, let’s analyze it:

	Scenario #1	Scenario #2	Scenario #3
Trainer	You	You	You
Stimulus	Circle motion with pointed finger	Circle motion with pointed finger	Circle motion with pointed finger
Reinforcer	Hot Dog	Hot Dog	Hot Dog
Time	8:30am	5:00pm	6:00pm
Location	Your Living Room	Your Living Room	Father-In-Law's Living Room
Outside Stimuli	None	Wife	Wife Father-in-Law Mother-in-Law

- Out of six variables, three are constant – you as the trainer, the stimulus for the behavior and the reinforcement for the behavior.
- One variable – location – is the same in Scenario #1 and Scenario #2.
- Two variables are different in every scenario – time and outside stimuli. We could probably come up with a lot more outside stimuli, but these are the obvious ones, so we'll stop with them to keep it simple.

Fido performed best in Scenario #1, which is the scenario under which the acquisition stage and most of his training took place, and under which he is most familiar with the behavior. He does reasonably well in Scenario #2, where the only differences are the presence of the wife and the time of day. In Scenario #3, he pretty much falls apart – different location, different time of day and lots of distraction.

By measuring Fido's fluency in each scenario, we can determine how well generalized he is in the rollover behavior. Ideally, you will "re-train" Fido under each new scenario; as he learns the behavior under new circumstances, it will begin to generalize, and he'll learn to perform the behavior on cue regardless of circumstances. Once he's generalized the behavior, he should be reliable under a variety of circumstances – familiar and new.

This does not mean that he will be reliable under *all* circumstances – there will always be situations that are too distracting. However, we can train for many circumstances, and certainly for the circumstances to which our dogs are most often exposed.

Last, but not least, the behavior must be maintained. "**Maintenance** is the continuation of the conditions that

generated a performance. The analysis of maintained performance, as a subject matter, is different from but not incompatible with that of acquisition (e.g., many experiments concerned with effects of schedule parameters on performance do not really begin until acquisition has been completed)." (University of South Florida Behavior Analysis Glossary, <http://www.coedu.usf.edu/abaglossary/glossarymain.asp?AID=5&ID=2238>)

All behavior must be maintained. Remember – behavior has function. We behave for a reason, and if there is no consequence to our behavior, it's going to extinguish. If, after the debacle at your in-law's house, you don't ask Fido to rollover for six months, chances are, when you do ask him to rollover (even under Scenario #1), he won't perform. His behavior has not been maintained. It shouldn't be as hard to elicit the behavior as it was originally, because he has already learned it, but it will still take some of practice to get it to fluency.

*Susan Smith's business, Raising Canine ([www.raisingcanine.com](http://www.raisingcanine.com)), provides remote education opportunities for animal behavior consultants, as well as business and marketing products to help their businesses, including an intensive course for beginning dog trainers. Sue is the co-author of the book "Positive Gun Dogs: Clicker Training for Sporting Breeds." Sue is certified through CCPDT, IAABC and the San Francisco SPCA. She is an ex-Board member for the CCPDT, an active, professional member of the APDT, former Chair of the APDT Member Relations & Communications Committee, moderates the APDT list discussion group and was named APDT Member of the Year in 2004.*

### APDT NZ Vision statement:

*All dogs are effectively trained through dog-friendly techniques and therefore are lifelong companions in a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.*

### APDTA Annual Conference, Sydney

29-30-31 October

Keynote Speakers:

Ken Ramirez

Steve White

Peta Clarke

For more info:

[www.apdt.com.au](http://www.apdt.com.au)

*I am often amazed at the things people are doing or have done. Clare Browne approached the dog club I am a member of to do some observational studies for her PhD. I asked her to do a short piece about her dogs and her study.*

## **Clare Browne. PhD student, School of Psychology, University of Waikato.**

I currently have two dogs: Apple, a border collie, German short-haired pointer cross; and Kimchi, a Papillion crossed with who knows what. Apple is now retired, but as a young dog I trained her to find tuatara. I worked with her on a couple of offshore islands and wildlife reserves. My partner and I lived in South Korea for a couple of years, and we rescued Kimchi from some pretty rough owners over there and brought her back to NZ with us. (Not something I recommend doing on a budget.) I really enjoyed training Apple for scent detection work and hope to have another detection dog in the future.

I have always liked animals and had all sorts of pets and farm animals as a child, but didn't get my first dog until I was age 14, when I became really interested in dog behaviour. I completed a BSc in zoology at Massey University, and then continued on to do a MSc as well. I managed to combine my interests in both conservation and dog behaviour for my MSc research topic, and examined if dogs could be used to detect NZ reptile scents for conservation purposes. I had volunteers from dog clubs in Palmerston North and Fielding participate in my research with their dogs. Using the standard dog obedience scent exercise procedure, I tested the dogs' ability to detect a range of tuatara and gecko scents. Results showed that they could find all of the scents very easily. It was during this time that I trained Apple to be a tuatara detection dog. I also started teaching basic dog obedience classes at the Tararua Allbreeds Club, which I enjoyed doing for a couple of years.

I am now doing my PhD in psychology at the University of Waikato. I'm very interested in how dog-human communication effects dog training, and my PhD is focusing on the timing of reinforcement during training. Literature on species other than dogs has showed that delayed reinforcement can result in animals taking relatively longer to learn tasks and responding at lower rates than when reinforcement is not delayed. However, to my knowledge, the effect these delays have on dogs is yet to be examined. I have started my research by observing volunteers while they were training their dogs at three dog clubs in the Waikato, and examining the owners' timing of reinforcement. My preliminary analysis of results has found that owners'

timing was quite variable, and some took over five seconds to deliver reinforcement to their dogs. My next step will be to set up a training situation in a room where we can use computers and audiovisual equipment to control when dogs receive their owners' reinforcement – and hopefully this will show us how important timing actually is. Another thing that I discovered during the observational study is that almost 40% of commands given by owners elicited absolutely no response from their dogs! The ultimate aim of my PhD is to produce results that may help improve the efficacy of dog training – and perhaps reduce the percentage of time that dogs ignore their owners!

### **APDT NZ Vision statement:**

*All dogs are effectively trained through dog-friendly techniques and therefore are lifelong companions in a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.*

## **APDTNZ Advertising Policy**

- APDTA will not advertise training services or courses.
- All material in the newsletter must be in line with the APDTNZ Vision and Mission Statements and the Code of Ethics
- Placement of material in the newsletter is at the discretion of the Editor and the Committee
- No paid advertising is accepted
- Members may place merchandise ads free of charge in the newsletter, but must include a discount for members
- Events may be advertised in a maximum of 5 lines
- Positioning of ads is at the discretion of the Editor and Committee
- The publication of any advertising material does not constitute the endorsement of the APDTA for the event of merchandise.

**Deadline for contributions to be included in**

**Issue 6, Oct/Nov/Dec 2010**

**1<sup>st</sup> November 2010**

## Developing a 'RIGHT RELATIONSHIP' with your dog

### By Karin Larsen Bridge

### Get S.M.A.R.T dogs

The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'relationship' as "the way things or people are connected". The way you connect to your dog will play a large role in how effective you will be in training and motivating your dog to work with you.

When training a dog you need to provide two things –

- *what* you want the dog to do
- and *why* he should do it

What most people think of as 'training' – teaching, sit, stand, down etc. focuses on *what* we want the dog to do. It connects a behaviour such as 'sit' with our signal to perform the exercise. This provides understanding to the dog of *what* we want.

However dogs are not robots, they will not necessarily perform a behaviour just because they understand what it means. You must also provide motivation for performing the behaviour – the *why*? Food, toys and praise are tools we can use to provide motivation and reinforce desired behaviour however ultimately it is a right relationship that will provide enduring motivation and ensure reliable compliance to your requests.

A classic example was my dog Jack who competed in the highest levels of obedience yet if my son's friends asked him to 'sit' – he'd just stand and stare as if to say "your nobody special .. why should I do it for you?" This is a large part of 'who dogs are' and is reflected in the old cowboy saying: "if a cowboy gets too big for his boots, let him try working someone else's dog". The implication is that a dog will only work well for the person with whom he has a 'right' relationship.

#### Developing a 'right' relationship with your dog.

##### Step 1: Trust in me

Your dog must have confidence that you will provide for him the things he needs to have a good quality of life. This includes:

- The essentials - food, water, shelter.
- Health care both preventative and emergency.
- Security – both on and off property. This includes being aware of and keeping your dog safe from things that may cause it to react. For example, stepping in if a dog plays too rough at the dog park *before* your dog feels a need to protect itself OR supervising play with excitable children.
- Exercise – both for physical and mental stimulation.
- Socialisation – to people.

- Socialisation – to other dogs and animals.
- Companionship – at least 4 hours a day of close contact with you.
- Education – dogs are perfect at being dogs. To live in a modern, human dominated world they need to learn human etiquette in a positive and nurturing way. Humans expect dogs not to pee in the house, not to pull on a lead, to leave good smells and come running when called, not to jump on visitors, not to dig holes even when bored, not to chase the neighbour's cat, not to bark at invited guests but *to* bark at strangers at the door – and lots of other confusing stuff! Dogs aren't born with this knowledge – they are born with the knowledge of how to be a DOG.

*Dog's are rarely disobedient they are frequently however, untrained.*

##### Step 2: 'Good things come from me!'

You may already be providing many of these things to your dog but does he know that? Frustrated owners who love their dogs often tell me "I buy the best quality dog food, he has a fantastic futon to sleep on, he wears a designer collar and goes to the dog park every day – why won't he be good?"

It would be great if I could say to the dog "hey mate, this is a great home don't be stupid and throw it away!" – but of course dog's don't think like that. Dogs only understand 'This' for 'That'. A better way to go is to make a list of all the things your dog wants and a list of all the things you want . For example:

<u>YOU DESIRE – 'THIS'</u>	<u>DOG DESIRES – 'THAT'</u>
Sit x 100 (the doggy equivalent of saying 'please')	Food x 100 (mostly a proportion of the dog's dinner NOT lots of special 'treats')
Attention	Go for walk (lead on)
Come	Your attention
Settle	Play tug
Down	Run free (lead off)
Fetch	Chase ball
Quiet	Come inside
Walk nicely	Walk toward park

Now, it's a simple matter of continually swapping one of your desires for one of your dog's - 'this' for 'that'. Assuming you have properly trained part A - *what* you want your dog to do – distributing rewards contingent upon the behaviour you want should ensure Part B - *why* he should do it for you. You are using rewards that you already provide to your dog anyway, to build a framework for life that says – You will ALWAYS be better off doing as I suggest.

### Step 3 – Making It Work

#### Understanding comes first.

'This for that' assumes you have properly trained part A - *what* you want your dog to do. This means pairing a cue such as a hand signal and/or the word 'sit' with the behaviour you want (bottom on the ground) followed by a reward many, many times until your dog understands the connection between the cue and the behaviour. This is the 'education' part of your responsibility and in most cases will be made much easier for you and the dog if you are able to attend a good reward based training school.

#### Have a plan.

Many people complain about their dog's behaviour but when I ask what they would like their dog to do they simply say "be good!" Well, no one can train 'good'. Be specific, plan exactly what you would like your dog to do in every routine situation. For example when visitors arrive I would like my dog to run to his mat and lie down. Now you have chosen a specific behaviour you can begin to train it. What you want is clear in your mind and can be transferred into a positive action to teach your dog rather than simply shouting at him for jumping up when visitors arrive. This is thoughtful, proactive training and reinforces the idea that you are quietly 'in control' of the household and can be depended upon to teach your dog what is expected of him in every day situations.

#### Take away rewards

'This' for 'that' will only work if there is no choice of 'or the other'. For example, you may offer your dog a treat for coming in the park but if he can choose to play with another dog instead, he has chosen 'the other' reward – that the environment has provided. Again proactive training is required. Attaching a long line on your dog before he is allowed to 'go play' gives you the opportunity to remove the reward of playing with other dogs when you desire. Your dog will learn that if I don't respond to 'come' – play ends (you bring the dog in on the long line) and I don't get a treat. If I do come however, I get a treat, a pat *and* I get to go play again. It is vital that you ensure your game is always the best game in town.

#### Don't get mad – get even.

Dogs are really impressed by people who are cool, calm and in control. Imagine this scenario and see which owner you would be more likely to accept direction from:

You are a dog out in the yard barking because the kids next door are spraying the hose at each other and screaming.

Owner A: opens the door, steps outside waving his arms around and shouts something very

loudly – almost as loud as the kids. You stop and stare briefly then continue barking.

Owner B: Quietly steps out of the house with lead in hand. He attaches the lead asks you to 'sit' and gives you a small treat. You are led into the house and asked to settle on your mat for a while.

Owner A has probably achieved nothing. From the dog's perspective, he joined in the noise making for a while then went inside. If Owner A has ever caught and punished the dog, it is unlikely he would even be able to quickly attach the lead as the dog would have learned to avoid him when he 'looks and sounds like that!'

Owner B's dog knew he was under no physical or emotional threat because his training has been based on rewards and positive, instructive interactions. The dog was therefore easily caught and brought inside. Never get mad, just get even by applying sensible management techniques to make it easy for your dog to learn what you want.

#### Enduring Motivation

A 'right relationship' is built not through fear or intimidation but through trust and mutual respect. By applying the 'this' for 'that' principle consistently throughout your dog's life, you are providing access to everything he wants through co-operation with you – a win-win situation for all.

© Karin Larsen Bridge Get S.M.A.R.T. dogs. First appeared in Dog's Life Magazine March/April 2008

## Book Reviews

### ***Coaching People to Train their Dogs by Terry Ryan. 2005/2008***

I first saw this book at a seminar presented by Jan Voss. Almost as soon as the seminar had finished I bought went out and bought it. This fantastic book of nearly four hundred large pages is specifically aimed at those running classes for pet dog owners. It has some great introductory chapters on learning and ethology, followed by common sense information and guidance on delivering great training classes. It contains a huge amount of information, including class lesson plans and handouts, problem solving for common issues and how to organize and deliver an effective class. I would highly recommend this book to anyone involved in running training classes.

## **Visiting the Dog Park by Cheryl S. Smith**

**Dogwise Publishing 2007.**

This is a small easy to read book aimed at dog owners. Its primary focus is the do's and don'ts of the dog park. Importantly it addresses who shouldn't be at a dog park and that not all dogs benefit from off lead park experiences. Included are sections on what your dog should know before going to an off lead park and how to keep you and your dog safe when you get there. It also examines what a well-planned dog park should offer. I used some of the information in this book when I was writing and presenting a submission to council on changes to one of our local off lead parks, as it has some brief but practical information on dog park design. As the weather improves and more people are out and about with their dogs in parks, this is a good book to recommend to owners, especially those who yell out "it's OK my dog's friendly", as their dog races uncontrolled up to any and every other dog in the park!

## **A Modern Dog's Life by**

**Paul McGreevy**

**Published by New South**

Imagine, if you will, our world from a dog's point of view. Let's not forget that they have only recently begun to adapt to life in this foreign world filled with man-made design and technology. Try to understand how baffling it must be to experience the effects of moving vehicles, fire, electricity and chemistry with no knowledge of the relationship between cause and effect. And what about the strange and unnatural smells that assault their hypersensitive nostrils: our cleaners, colognes, cigarettes? This is a world far removed from the natural one dogs evolved to inhabit.

We expect dogs to be friendly and sociable, yet we disappear for most of the working day leaving them at home, frustrated and alone. They are confined behind windows – barriers that they can see through but cannot smell through. Dogs never built boundaries to keep pups close to the den while the pack went off hunting.

Hazards, such as polished floors, electric fences and escalators can also take a bit of getting used to. Stairs, especially those with open spaces between the steps, must seem very scary, and lifts must feel like earth tremors as they come to rest. And how weird must it be for a dog to go into a room (a lift) and exit through the same door into a totally different place? Or to ride in a

metal box (your car) with the scenery flashing past at a great rate and then arrive, ideally, in dog heaven (the park or the beach), but sometimes at the vet's, where maybe there's a jab with a needle in store for him?

A strange world indeed.

Dr Paul McGreevy has spent a lifetime with dogs as an owner and as a veterinary behaviourist, and has observed that dogs thrive on three key things: fun, exercise and training. His mission is to improve our understanding of the lives dogs now lead and to demonstrate a new approach to owning a dog in the 21st century.

Adult dogs value fun and play far more than adults of any other species, including their ancestor, the wolf. 'Why not channel this energy by using fun as a highly valued reward?' asks Dr McGreevy. Think about all the events and activities your dog seems to regard as fun and think about how they command his total focus – and then think how you might use that undivided attention in your training. If you think that such an approach to a human–animal bond is too calculating and dismiss this strategy, you are tossing out some extremely valuable training tools and running the risk of becoming your dog's devoted servant instead of his trainer and life-coach. (In which case, maybe you should just consider getting a cat instead of a dog.)

For the thoughtful dog owner it is very important to understand what motivates dogs and why. Your observations will help you assess your own dog's behavioural needs. Dogs obviously like food, but what is it about food that makes them work for it and fight for it? We marvel at a sniffer dog's approach to detective work, but why is its tail wagging so excitedly? Most dogs enjoy exercise, but what does an exciting walk offer and why does a bland walk or, worse still, no exercise at all frustrate them?

Your dog loves to have your attention, too. The good motivational stuff might include the smell of cheese in the kitchen or a glimpse of the park through the car window. It might be the sound of the lead being picked up or the rattle of the car keys. It could be the sound of the front door opening or of a ball being thrown. How dogs rank these resources and how they work to access and defend them gives us a fascinating insight into what it means to be canine. The key for dog-watchers and handlers is to use these resources as bargaining chips in shaping the behaviours they want. By adopting an impartial, scientific approach to the dog as a consumer of resources, you can review your dog's value system.

Dogs are opportunists, so you'd better become an opportunist, too. They rapidly become very good at problem-solving, which is, essentially, what training is all about. Dr McGreevy explains how to gradually increase the degree of difficulty of the training tasks

you set your dog. When rewards are on offer, the problems are about *How can he get what he wants?* and *How can he get it as soon as possible?* Where pressure is being applied (for example, on the neck via the collar and leash), it is to do with *How can he get rid of the pressure as swiftly as possible?*

Well-trained dogs get the most out of life. The best owners 'pay' their dogs for acceptable behaviour with rewards the dogs value. It's a win/win deal for both parties. And dogs thrive on learning because it helps to make their world more predictable and so, to some extent, more controllable. When your dog can connect two events (such as the sound of the car keys and a trip to the park), he has learned to predict the imminent appearance of a park-flavoured opportunity. If you train him to sit, always, before leaving the house, he will eventually sit to signal you that he's impatient for the door to open. And in this way he has gained a little more control over his world. The more control an animal has over its world, the better is the quality of its life. (Just as it is with human lives.)

Taking a scientific approach to the modern dog can help you become a better dog-watcher, team-player, care-giver, companion and life-coach to your dog by identifying when and how to intervene. It will help you to get that tail wagging by making the training tasks you set your dog the most fantastic fun. Not only will you understand what your dog is looking for in life, but you will understand how to optimise his environment. As his adored life-coach, you can become the source of his very best opportunities. And that can't be a bad thing for you, either.

## THE SIT TEST by Ian Dunbar

The purpose of the "Sit Test" is to provide an objective assessment of performance-reliability for basic obedience commands. Why? So that instead of reprimanding the dog for "misbehaving", the trainer steps back and reflects on the real reasons for the dog's "disobedience", i.e., lack of basic training, proofing and reliability-testing. Many trainers have an inflated view of their dogs' reliability because during practice, performance reliability is assessed by subjective means and the trainer tends to remember the good and forget the bad. Moreover, following an objective assessment of reliability during obedience trials or any kind of standardized testing, failed exercises are frequently dismissed as bad luck. In reality, no dog is perfect. Each dog fails a certain percentage of the time. For example, to estimate your dog's percentage reliability, have your dog come and Sit-Down-Sit-Stand-Down-Stand 20 times in a row and then calculate your dog's Command:

Response Ratio and Percentage Reliability for each of the six position changes. If your dog requires a second command for any of the 20 repetitions, percentage reliability is now 95% or less.

The original Sit Test was designed to magnify problems that occur during competition obedience training. Invariably dogs are pattern trained and often performance reliability breaks down with minor variations in procedure, or distractions in the environment. Even minor changes in routine can produce dramatic decreases in reliability. For example, it is easy to demonstrate that an Obedience Trial Champion dog doesn't *really* even understand what "Sit" means. Dogs are extremely fine discriminators. If the dog has been taught to "Sit" for supper in the kitchen, or to heel-sit and front and finish in obedience class, that's precisely what the dog learns — to sit in the kitchen and during specific exercises in class. The same dog may occasionally not sit in the obedience ring, while playing in the park, or while greeting visitors at the front door. The dog must be trained in an infinite number of situations in order to generalize that "Sit" always means sit.

To illustrate what dogs understand and what they don't understand, I devised a number of simple tests. The first was a Sit Test — nothing fancy, no bizarre or frightening distractions — just minor variations in what the dog expects. I chose "Sit" because it is the easiest command to teach, probably the first command that many dogs learn, and the command that everyone is convinced that their dog "knows".

### Sit Test 101

The Sit Test is simple — on a signal from the judge, the dog is instructed to sit in eight different exercises. To obtain a perfect score in each exercise, the handler must say the dog's name followed by a single command (or signal) to sit, and the dog must sit within two seconds, within one dog length, and remain in sitting position for at least three seconds. Each exercise scores a maximum of 25 points (total = 200) and the dog is judged only on his responsiveness to the handler's "Sit" commands. Scoring is similarly simple. A single point is deducted for a) each additional command (or signal) given by the handler, b) each additional second required for the dog to sit, and c) for each additional dog-length moved before the dog sits. In each exercise, scoring does not begin until the handler has given the dog's name followed by the instruction to sit.



**1. Sit on Heel** — While heeling the dog at normal speed, on cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit". Before, during and after giving the command, the handler must keep moving at the same pace. There shall be substantial deductions for slowing down (-5) or stopping (-10).

**2. Signal Sit** — While heeling the dog at normal speed, on cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Stand". The handler may halt while standing the dog and further instruct the dog to "Stay" before walking ten yards away and turning to face the dog. On cue from the judge, the handler shall signal (or request) the dog to "Sit".

**3. Sit for Examination** — The handler shall instruct the dog to "Stand" and "Stay" and when ready, shall walk six feet away and turn to face the dog. On cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit".

**4. Sit on Recall** — The handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit" and "Stay" and when ready, shall walk away about ten yards and turn to face the dog. On cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Come" and when he reaches the halfway point, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit".

**5. Sit-Stay Sit** — The handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit" and "Stay" and when ready, walk ten yards away and turn to face the dog. On cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit".

**6. Out of Sight Sit** — The handler shall stand with eyes closed and back turned to the dog. The judge holds the dog on a loose leash. On cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit". When the dog sits, the judge shall praise the dog, "Good dog, Rover".

**7. Down-Stay Sit** — The handler shall instruct the dog to "Down" and "Stay". When ready, the handler shall walk about six feet in front of the dog and lie down with arms crossed over the chest. Thus, both dog and handler lie down in a straight line, with the dog prone and the handler supine and with just two inches between the handler's head and the dog's muzzle. On cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit".

**8. Sit on Hand** — The handler shall instruct the dog to "Stand" and "Stay". The handler shall walk about eight feet behind the dog, and lie down in a supine position with one arm extended and the hand lying palm upwards between the dog's hind legs. On cue from the judge, the handler shall instruct the dog to "Sit".

The undisputed winner of the first Sit Test, (held in March 1988 at an Albany Obedience Club workshop in New York), was Labrador Retriever, Cassidy's Kid

Underfoot, CDX, owned and superbly handled by Sandy Miller. In subsequent tests, Lynda Barber's Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Ch. Eastern Water's Sanderling Op, CDX just beat Michele Heater's Malamute, Ch. Mai Tai Natashquan, CD in Anchorage, Alaska. And Bulldog, Chug-A-Bug De Bowag (owned by Dunning Idle III) blew away the competition at a Blue Springs N' Katydid workshop in Denver. One of the best responses I have ever seen was Suzi Bluford's Golden Retriever — during the Sit on Recall, when the "Sit" command was given, predictably, obedience-trained Streaker went down like a ton of bricks, but... before his elbows and sternum hit the deck, he sprung up into a solid "Sit-Stay". What does this illustrate? Like many competition dogs, Streaker had been pattern trained, but... he had also been taught to pay attention to the handler's instructions. And with a different instruction, he immediately modified the default pattern.

The humane objective of the Sit Test is to illustrate that unreliable responses usually stem from the dog simply not understanding familiar instructions in unusual (un-proofed) settings. Rather than punishing the dog for "disobedience", the intelligent and caring owner would go back and retrain. Bear this in mind when performing the Sit Test.

The Sit Test is meant to be a learning experience — to help demonstrate exactly how the dog interprets basic obedience commands. It is important not to get upset or exasperated with the dog's creative improvisations. For example, in *Exercise #7*, not only will many dogs not sit, but some dogs will get quite silly and lick and paw and jump on the supine owner. Just put yourself in your dog's paws and the explanation becomes clear. How many commands have you taught your dog from the supine position? Probably just two — "Sleepy-Time" and "Playtime". Accordingly, many dogs selectively attend to contextual cues (owner lying down) rather than the spoken instruction, and they respond by snoozing, or with play-solicitation.

The Sit Test is to make you reevaluate training and especially, to make you reconsider whether you should reprimand a dog for not complying. Is the dog's lack of response due to intentional disobedience, or because he simply does not understand the specific instruction in a slightly unusual setting — because you have not trained him? For example, in *Exercise #6*, if the dog does not respond when your back is turned and the dog is barely six feet away, what makes you think that he would respond when he is fifty yards away, with his back turned and running after a rabbit. How many times have you proofed his response without eye-contact, or at a distance?

To make the test a pleasant proofing *and learning* experience, if your dog does not respond appropriately, immediately stand up, face the dog and calmly ask and signal him to "Sit" once more. The dog will quickly learn by anticipation, "Ahh Ha! When they do that funny stuff, they always signal me to "Sit" afterwards. After just a few trials, your dog will now sit in the silly setting.

The Sit Test is not a single test but a concept. In addition to *Sit Test 101*, we have *Sit Tests 201, 301* and so forth, plus *Down Tests, Stand Tests, Recall Tests, Heel Tests, Retrieve Tests and Jump Tests* etc. For example, during *Exercise #8*, many dogs will break their "Stand-Stay" when you simply lie down behind your dog. And of course, if your dog breaks a stay when *you* lie down, obviously it would be unfair to get on his case if he breaks his stay around children, who spend a large amount of time rolling on the ground. It is vital to proof for reliability in all sorts of settings.

This article is based on Dr. Dunbar's *Behavior* column in the June 1990 issue of the *American Kennel Gazette*. Reprinted with the permission of the author and the American Kennel Club.

## **AVSAB Position Statement On Puppy Socialization**

The Primary and most important time for puppy socialization is the first three months of life.<sup>1, 2</sup> During this time puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing over-stimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior. For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated. Because the first three months are the period when sociability outweighs fear, this is the primary window of opportunity for puppies to adapt to new people, animals, and experiences. Incomplete or improper socialization during this important time can increase the risk of behavioral problems later in life including fear, avoidance, and/or aggression.

Behavioral problems are the greatest threat to the owner-dog bond. In fact, behavioral problems are the number one cause of relinquishment to shelters.<sup>3</sup> Behavioral issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age. While puppies' immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and

appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behavior problem. Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every safe opportunity to expose young puppies to the great variety of stimuli that they will experience in their lives. Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socializing puppies in an environment where risk of illness can be minimized.

In general, puppies can start puppy socialization classes as early as 7-8 weeks of age. Puppies should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days prior to the first class and a first de-worming. They should be kept up-to-date on vaccines throughout the class.

### The Process of Socialization:

Puppies should be handled from birth, learning to accept manipulation of all body parts. Every effort should be made to expose them to as many different people, well-socialized animals, situations, places, etc. as possible. Puppies should be encouraged to explore, investigate, and manipulate their environments. Interactive toys and games, a variety of surfaces, tunnels, steps, chutes, and other stimuli can enrich the puppy's environment. Puppies should accompany their breeders/owners on as many car trips as possible. These exposures should continue into adulthood to maintain an outgoing and sociable dog.

Puppy socialization classes can offer a safe and organized means of socializing puppies and more quickly improve their responsiveness to commands.<sup>4</sup> Each puppy should have up-to-date vaccinations and be disease and parasite free before entering the class. Where possible, classes should be held on surfaces that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. indoor environments). Visits to dog parks or other areas that are not sanitized and/or are highly trafficked by dogs of unknown vaccination or disease status should be avoided. Classes and at-home training should be based on positive reinforcement with frequent rewards praise, petting, play and/ or treats.

Positive and consistent training is associated with fewer behavioral problems and greater obedience than methods that involve punishment and/or encourage human dominance.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Time must be scheduled for puppies to play alone with their favorite toys (such as stuffed food toys) or take naps in safe places such as crates or puppy pens. This teaches puppies to amuse themselves, and may help to prevent problems of over attachment to the owners. Continuing to offer dogs a wide variety of experiences during their first year of life

is also helpful in preventing separation-related behavior.<sup>7</sup> Proper confinement training using pens or crates helps to ensure that puppies have safe and secure places for rest and confinement. Puppies that are used to being crated will be less stressed if they must be hospitalized or be confined for travel by plane or car. Crates should serve as comfort or play areas. Early and adequate socialization and programs of positive training can go a long way to preventing behavior problems and improving bonding between humans and dogs. While the first three months is the most important socialization period in a puppy's life, owners of puppies that have passed this milestone are strongly encouraged to continue to socialize their puppies to as many people, pets, and locations as is practical. However, owners of puppies displaying fear should seek veterinary guidance.

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## Rally-O by Linda Guinness

Rally-O is designed to be a fun and exciting team sport for dogs and their handlers; however, it can also be a non-competitive enjoyable activity for pet dogs and their families.

The dog and handler team navigate a course of 10 or more stations. Each station has a numbered sign which directs the team to perform an exercise such as Sit-Down-Sit, Straight Figure 8, Send Over Jump, Recall Over Jump, serpentines, spirals, changes of pace etc. The number and difficulty of the exercises depends on the level being worked at.

Current levels offered are Rally Novice, Advanced and Excellent although more variety will be introduced in future.

NZARO have an incentive award scheme in place where a dog and handler first work towards collecting qualifying certificates which in turn count towards a title certificate at each of the three levels. There is also a merit award scheme running which entails collecting multiples of 10 merit or qualifying certificates to earn a badge acknowledging the achievement.

Handlers get the opportunity to walk the course to familiarise themselves with the layout and exercises required. After the Judge gives them the start cue they must negotiate the course without direction from the judge or stewards. Teams are timed over the course and in the event of tied scores, the fastest time wins. This helps to encourage a brisk, happy pace.

Communication between handler and dog is encouraged. Whilst perfect heel position is not required, there should be a sense of teamwork between the dog and handler. Handlers are encouraged to talk to their dogs during the performance, however loud or harsh commands or intimidating signals are penalised.

Rally provides a link to obedience and the Canine Good Citizen (CGC) programme, as well as agility competition. Rally promotes fun and enjoyment in the training of dogs for all levels of competition. It provides interest and acquisition of a variety of skills for the young dog not yet ready to enter other competitions, and also provides something for the older dog that may be unable to pursue more active sports such as agility.

Rally helps to produce dogs that enjoy behaving well, and that have been trained to behave in the home, in public places, and in the presence of other dogs. Most importantly, Rally-O helps to produce a companion dog that enjoys working with their handler and behaves well in the home, in public places and in the presence of other dogs.

For more information go to [www.nzaro.webs.com](http://www.nzaro.webs.com) or, if you're a local, [www.feildingdogtrainingclub.webs.com](http://www.feildingdogtrainingclub.webs.com)

**Committee Members**

Jan Voss..... events@apdt.org.nz  
 Simon Goodall.....education @apdt.org.nz  
 Susie Londer..... president@apdt.org.nz  
 Helen Reynolds.....vicechair@apdt.org.nz  
 Diana McKay.....secretary@apdt.org.nz  
 Margarette Marshall..... treasurer@apdt.org.nz  
 Tracy Wilde ..... editor@apdt.org.nz  
 Kate Butler..... librarian@apdt.org.nz  
 Dennis Nuberg..... media@apdt.org.nz  
 Jo Thorne..... membership@apdt.org.nz

APDTNZ's Annual Conference Trade Show provides a great opportunity for businesses to promote their products and services to a network of influential dog trainers, club instructors, vet nurses, shelter workers and others in the pet care industry.

APDTNZ invites potential stallholders\* to be part of next year's Conference Trade Show. For further information how your business might be best represented at our conference, please contact Jan Voss, [events@apdt.org.nz](mailto:events@apdt.org.nz)

\*All products and services must comply with the Code of Ethics: <http://www.apdt.org.nz/ethics.html>

Mark this date in your diary now!

**APDTNZ Annual Conference**

Queen's Birthday Weekend

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2011

Brentwood Hotel

Wellington

Keynote speaker

**Peta Clarke**

**Peta Clarke biography**

Peta Clarke is a Nationally Accredited Trainer with almost fifteen years experience working as a professional animal trainer in a variety of areas both in Australia and America. While Peta's first love is working with dogs, her experiences in the field of animal training range from elephants to goldfish. As a trainer and presenter of animal shows in zoos on several continents, she has had the opportunity to work with many exotic animals, but centres her work in this area on working with free flighted birds and marine mammals. Whether it is a seal or a seagull, Peta has found that every interaction taught her more about being good dog trainer. She believes it was a real turning point in her understanding of the power of reinforcement training. "I thought I was using positive reinforcement well when I would work with dogs, but after I started training birds - animals that can just fly away if they are not interested in your 'game' and later seals - animals that could kill you if you didn't have their total trust, I realized that if I wanted to truly be the best trainer I could be, it was time to pull my socks up".

As well as a career as an exotic animal trainer, Peta also works extensively for Animal House Animal Talent Agency based in Sydney, Australia, training and working animals for the International Film Industry. Her credits include "Babe", "Superman Returns", "Wolverine" and many other local films and literally hundreds of television commercials. Some of her favorite memories working animals on set have come from working the cottonelle Labrador puppies for ad campaigns from around the world. Hard work, she says, but always amazing how quickly an 8-week-old puppy can learn!

In addition to these two roles, Peta also runs her own animal training and consultancy business, Animal Training Solutions, based out of Australia. Peta spends time consulting on both pet dog and parrot behaviour and training issues, advising wildlife parks and zoos on improved training practices and show development. She also is a sought after speaker in Australia, regularly teaching Certificate level animal training and behaviour courses for aspiring animal trainers and an invited lecturer for many dog obedience clubs and related associations. She has also served as Vice President for the Association of Pet Dog Trainers Australia for 3 years. She shares her home with two boxer dogs and a parrot.