



# ELEVATING YOUR TRAINING

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**A detailed, practical guide to refining your handling skills and overcoming common training blocks**

*Designed for dog owners training at home or attending classes who want clearer communication, better results, and more confidence.*

# GOOD INTENTIONS. SMALL GAPS. BIG IMPACT.

Most dog owners work incredibly hard with their dogs. They show up to classes, practice at home, watch tutorials, and genuinely want to do the right thing. When training still feels difficult, inconsistent, or frustrating, it is easy to assume something is wrong with the dog - or with yourself.

in reality, many training challenges come down to small, often invisible handling habits.

These habits aren't mistakes caused by carelessness. They develop naturally when people are concentrating, nervous, multitasking, or trying to remember instructions. Unfortunately, dogs learn from *what we actually do*, not what we intend to do.

This booklet is designed to help you:

- Identify subtle issues that commonly derail your training
- Understand why they matter to your dog
- Make practical, achievable adjustments

“You don’t need to train more, you need to train with more precision” -

Pure Dog Adventure Training



# REWARD TIMING



## THE FOUNDATION OF LEARNING

### Why Timing Is Everything

Dogs learn through immediate association. The behaviour that is happening at the exact moment of reinforcement is the behaviour that gets strengthened.

A delay of even one second can change what your dog believes they are being rewarded for.

For example;

- Marking after a sit turns into a stand reinforces standing, not sitting
- Delayed delivery can reinforce disengagement or anticipation.

Timing errors are one of the most common reasons behaviours appear unreliable.

### Common Timing Faults

- Marking once the dog has already moved
- Speaking before marking (“good...yes”)
- Reaching for food before marking
- Rewarding while the dog is breaking position

From the dogs perspective, the picture is unclear.

### How To Improve Your Timing

- Use a consistent marker (verbal or clicker)
- Mark the exact moment the behaviour meets criteria
- Separate the marker from reward delivery
- Practice marking without your dog to build fluency.

Clean timings create faster learning and reduce frustration.

# CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

## WHAT REINFORCEMENT REALLY MEANS

A reinforcer is not what you think should work, it is what the dogs find valuable enough to repeat the behaviour.

Reinforcement is contextual. What works in the living room may fail entirely outdoors.

### Types of Reinforcers

- **Food** - precise, controllable, ideal for skill-building
- **Toys** - excellent for motivation, arousal and engagement
- **Movement** - release to sniff, move or explore
- **Social** - praise or touch
- **Environmental** - access to something the dog wants

### Common Reinforcement Mistakes

- Using low-value food in high distraction environments
- Reinforcing without clear criteria
- Rewarding out of habit rather than intention
- Reinforcing behaviours you actually want less of

If behaviour isn't improving, reinforcement strategy should be the first thing reviewed.



# ASKING TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE

## THE TRAINING CRITERIA

Criteria defines what earns reinforcement. When criteria is unclear or inconsistent, learning stalls.

**Asking Too Much:** This often happens when multiple difficulties are added at once or expectations increase faster than the dog's learning. Generalisation is often assumed rather than taught which can lead to the dog being reluctant to work with you, becoming frustrated or over-aroused.

Signs include:

- Increased errors
- Avoidance or disengagement
- Frustration behaviours

This is feedback, not failure.

**Asking Too Little:** Under challenging can lead to flat engagement, slow progress and a loss of clarity. Dogs still need structured progression.

## Finding the Optimal Learning Zone

- Aim for frequent success
- Adjust the difficulties dynamically
- Let the dog's response guide you

Training should feel achievable, not overwhelming.



# CUE CONSISTENCY



## ONE BEHAVIOUR, ONE SIGNAL

### Why Cues Matter

A cue is a clear signal that reinforcement is available for a specific behaviour.

When cues change, overlap, or repeat, clarity disappears.

### Common Cue Problems:

- Multiple words for the same behaviour
- Repeating cues when the dog hesitates
- Giving cues when success is unlikely

Repeated cues teach the dog to wait.

## Improving Cue Reliability

- Choose one cue per behaviour
- Deliver it once
- Reinforce promptly
- Reset instead of repeating.

Try to avoid overloading your dog with multiple words when performing a behaviour. Remember your dog is responding based on the cues that you have reinforced over time, but they aren't robots.

### Example cue mistake that we see often and can make a huge difference;

**You are teaching your dog to sit at a distance. Your dog is a few feet away from you and you want to ask for a prompt sit.**

**Correct way** - wait for engagement, say your sit cue, *reinforce in position*.

**Incorrect way** - saying the dog's name (usually means recall), asking for sit, twice, saying yes as they begin to sit, dog gets up because you said yes, you say no, dog gets frustrated and barks or disengages.

# CUE STACKING AND VERBAL OVERLOAD

## WHEN TALKING BECOMES NOISE

Dogs do not filter language the way humans do.

Rapid strings such as:

“Name, sit, sit, good, no, yes”

Reduce clarity and increase hesitation.

Simplify your communication.

Say less.

Pause more.

Let behaviour lead the conversation.

Silence allows the dog to think.

You need to make sure that you have fully thought out what it is *exactly* that you would like the dog to do, and that you know how to perform each step and how you get to the final result. If you don't know what you are doing, your dog will become frustrated and lose interest in the game. If it means taking frequent breaks to allow your brain to reset, so be it.



# HAND PLACEMENT AND BODY LANGUAGE

## DOGS RESPOND TO MOVEMENT FIRST

Dogs are exceptional observers of movement. Long before they fully understand verbal cues, they learn to read posture, weight shifts, hand movements and breathing patterns. In many cases, what we believe is a verbal cue has quietly become a physical one.

This is why a dog may respond perfectly when your hand is in a certain position, but hesitate or fail when your hands are still.

Common Hand Placement and Body Language Errors:

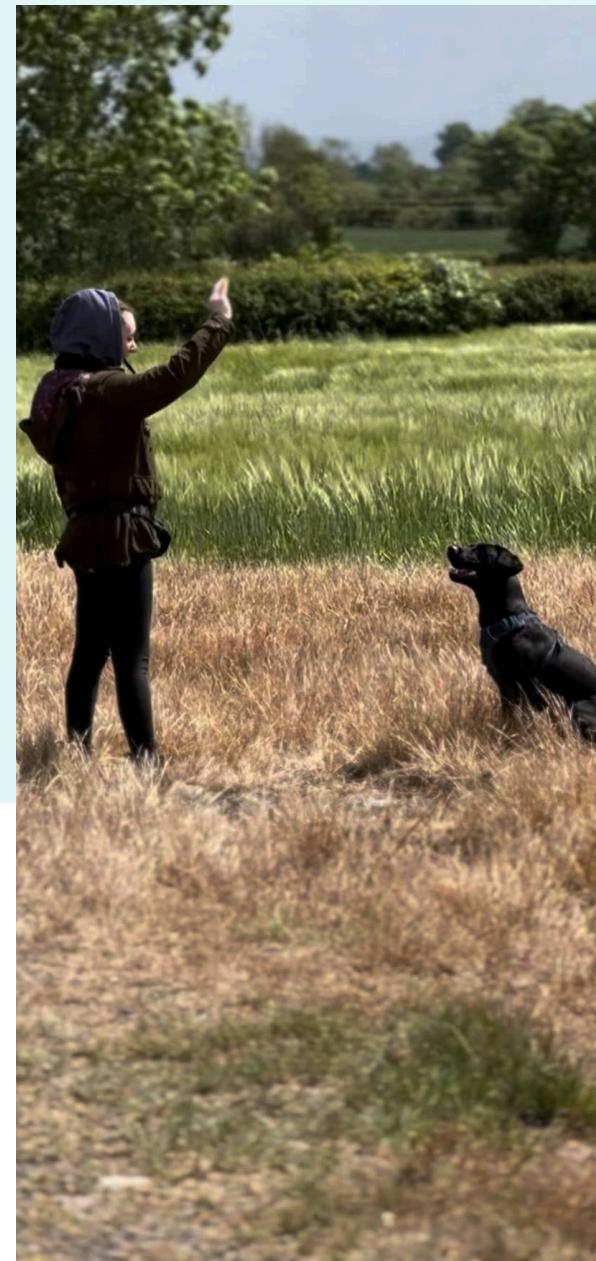
- **Hands moving before the cue:** the dog responds to the movement, not the word
- **Accidental luring:** treats or hands guiding the dog unintentionally
- **Inconsistent posture:** standing, bending, or leaning differently each repetition
- **Leaning over the dog:** can add pressure or reduce confidence
- **Facing the dog directly:** for some dogs, this feels confrontational.

Over time, these habits create fragile behaviours that fall apart when the picture changes.

**How This Shows Up in Training:**

- The dog only responds when you gesture
- Slower responses when hands are neutral
- Confusion when cues are given from a new position

This isn't stubbornness, it is information.



# EMOTIONAL RESPONSE



## THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL STATE IN LEARNING THROUGH ENVIRONMENT, AROUSAL AND SESSION DESIGN

A dog's ability to learn is directly affected by their emotional and physical state. Arousal that is too high or too low makes learning difficult, even if the dog understands the behaviour.

Many training issues are actually state issues, not skill issues.

### Common Mistakes

- Training in busy environments too soon
- Expecting focus when the dog is over-stimulated
- Training after long walks or intense play
- Attempting new skills in distracting settings

## Session Length and Structure

Effective training sessions are:

- Short
- Intentional
- Planned

Long sessions often lead to mental fatigue, sloppy timing and reduced clarity.

Aim for:

- 3-5 minute sessions
- Clear goals per session
- Planned reinforcement

## Reading Arousal Levels

Signs arousal may be too high:

- Inability to take food
- Vocalising or frantic movement
- Snatching rewards

Signs arousal may be too low:

- Slow responses
- Disengagement
- Lack of interest

Adjust the environment before adjusting the dog.

# TRAINING IN CLASSES VS TRAINING AT HOME

## WHY DOGS BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT PLACES

Dogs do not automatically generalise learning. A behaviour learned in class is a context-specific learning unless it is deliberately practiced elsewhere.

Classes add:

- other dogs
- human movement
- new smells
- heightened arousal

Home training removes many of these factors

### Common Owner Frustrations

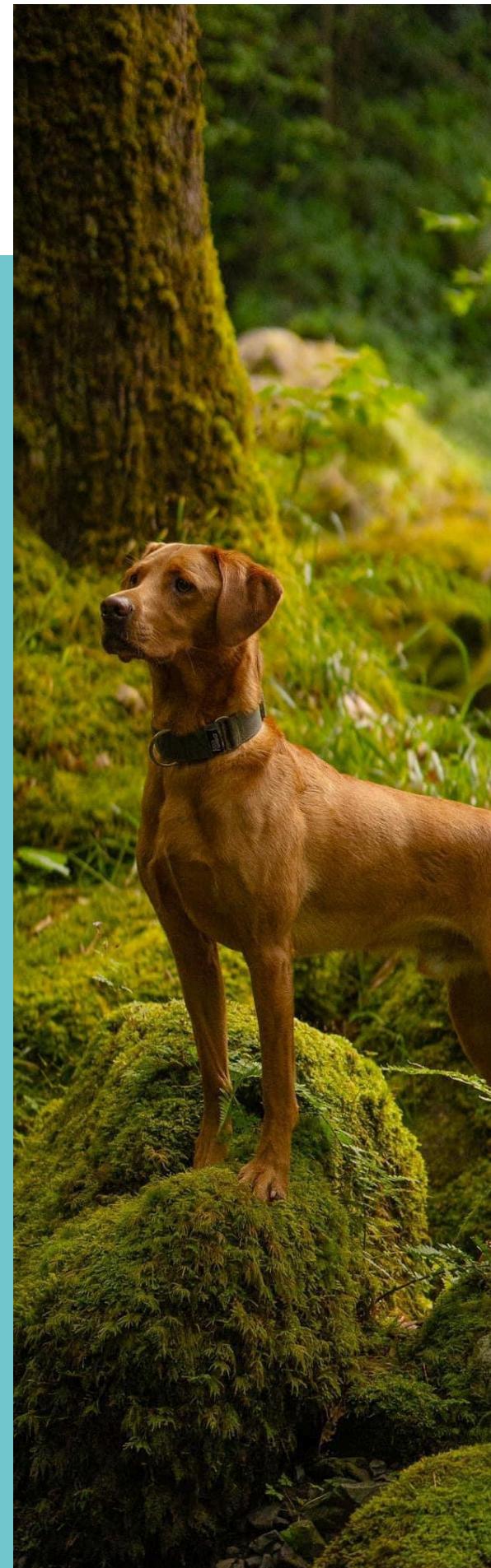
- “They can do it perfectly in class but not at home”
- “They listen at home but not in class”

Both scenarios are normal and expected.

### Bridging the Gap Between Environments

- Practice class exercises at home
- Reduce criteria when changing environments
- Expect temporary drops in performance
- Reinforce generously in new settings

Consistency across environments builds reliability.



# TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON TRAINING CHALLENGES

## **“THEY KNOW IT - THEY’RE JUST NOT DOING IT”**

This belief often appears when expectations have outpaced learning.

Common causes include:

- Unclear criteria
- Reinforcement that no longer matches difficulty
- Environmental changes

The solution is clarity not pressure.

## **“They’ll Only Work for Food”**

This usually indicates:

- Reinforcement hasn’t been varied
- The behaviour isn’t yet strong
- The environment is too challenging

Food is a tool, not a problem.

## **“Training Feels Messy and Inconsistent”**

Learning is rarely linear. Messy training often means that the dog is problem solving or new understanding is forming. Refine the skills, don’t restart.

## **Final Thoughts: Elevation Comes From Precision**

Elevated training is not louder, stricter or more repetitive. It is clear, thoughtful and intentional. Small refinements in handling create significant change.

*This booklet is designed to support kind, ethical, real-world dog training. Professional guidance can help refine skills further and address individual challenges.*

