
Introduction to the Dog Training Profession

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF DOG TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

Introduction

Welcome! You're beginning a journey toward an exciting and rewarding career as a dog obedience trainer and instructor. Perhaps you've trained one or several dogs already. Perhaps you love dogs and are fascinated by obedience competition. Whatever your reasons for enrolling in this program, you should bring with you a love of dogs and a desire to work with people.

Take a moment to consider that being a dog obedience instructor entails more than loving *your* dog and getting along with *your* friends. Each and every day of your career will be filled with different breeds of dogs, each with its own personality. And each of those dogs will have a person on the other end of the leash! Some days will be a dream, when every dog and its owner follow directions superbly. Other days will be filled with cranky dogs and crankier handlers.

Most instructors quip that training dogs is fairly simple—it's training people that's tough. You might develop a wonderful rapport with Sparky, but Sparky's owner might be more of a challenge. But, as a good dog obedience instructor, you won't be training Sparky, you'll be instructing Sparky's owner on how to best train Sparky to *perform* certain *behaviors*.



The *American Kennel Club* is the largest purebred registry in the United States. Often referred to as the *AKC*, it sponsors breed championships and working titles. Its counterpart in Canada is the *Canadian Kennel Club (CKC)*, and in the United Kingdom, it's *The Kennel Club*, often referred to as the *UKKC*.

The second oldest and largest American dog organization is the *United Kennel Club (UKC)*, which sponsors an all-breed registry, as well as many competition venues.

The number of reasons to train dogs is almost as plentiful as the number of breeds—and according to the American Kennel Club that's more than 400! Whatever the training goals are, obedience training is only part of a dog obedience instructor's profession. You'll spend a good part of your time acting as an advisor, lecturer, canine behaviorist, canine nutritionist, dog psychologist, and business manager (Figure 1).

To be best prepared for this profession, you need a strong background in nonverbal communication, learning theory, breed traits, and basic veterinary issues. You'll need to be able to answer questions about testing and selecting the right dog for an individual or family, as well as about bringing a new puppy home. You'll need to understand and be able to use several training methods and be able to determine what method is the most effective for each individual dog and/or handler and/or situation. Your Dog Obedience Trainer/Instructor program will cover these topics.

In this program, you'll also learn about competition obedience and such popular dog sports as agility, flyball, herding, and tracking. You'll also be introduced to the important and demanding area of dog training that includes guide, hearing, mobility, and other forms of assistance work (Figure 2). You'll also learn about canine search and rescue, scent work (that is, customs inspection, narcotics detection, and so on), and other forms of work and performance events.

FIGURE 1—A dog obedience instructor handles many tasks besides training during a typical workday, including advising clients and scheduling appointments.

(Photo courtesy of Paul and Karen Price, K-9 Korner Training Facility)





FIGURE 2—Although you may never become involved in specialized fields such as service dog work, you should have a good understanding about what's involved in their training. It's also helpful to know the major organizations responsible for training and placing these dogs, such as the San Francisco SPCA Hearing Dog Program shown here. (Photo courtesy of Martha Hoffman)

You need the time and commitment to dedicate yourself to studying the material in this program. And, of course, you'll need to have a dog to work with. You don't necessarily need to own your own dog, however. You can use this opportunity to teach your sister's, grandmother's, or neighbor's dog some wonderfully useful stuff—like sitting politely when company comes and eliminating in an appropriate place. You might even contact your local animal shelter to borrow a dog. Training a shelter dog is a worthwhile endeavor, since it helps make the dog more adoptable.

The first several study units of your program cover topics such as learning theory and dog psychology. Some students love this type of material; others impatiently wonder when they'll get to teach Buster to sit. Understanding the sensory abilities of dogs, the basic concepts of learning, and how animals, particularly dogs, communicate is extremely important. You need to have a firm grasp of these concepts before undertaking the hands-on work of dog training.

Commit yourself to regular study times, working through the material at a steady pace. It's difficult to catch back up if you let too much time elapse between study periods. Refer to the study tips in Figure 3 for helpful practical advice on how to make the most of your learning experience.

Study Tips

- ✓ Commit yourself to completing this program. It takes effort and determination to succeed. Get a clear vision of yourself doing what you love to do: training dogs and working with people. Envision yourself taking pride in a job well done. Perhaps you can picture yourself owning your own training facility. Stay focused on working toward your goal. Every time you're faced with a decision, ask yourself if your actions will move you toward or away from your goal of completing this program and becoming a professional dog obedience trainer/instructor.
- ✓ Develop a realistic plan of action. (If you don't work full-time and have significant time to devote to your studies, you might plan on completing more work than if you have a full-time job.) The point here is to realistically assess the time you have to spend on this material.
- ✓ Write down your weekly schedule and see where you have blocks of time to devote to your studies. Schedule study times and make them as important as any other appointment or commitment in your day.
- ✓ Organize your study materials. It's not productive to spend 15 minutes out of your hour of study time hunting down paper, pencils, and study units.
- ✓ Study in an area that's free of distractions. You probably won't study as effectively in front of the TV or in a room full of noisy children or friends.
- ✓ If you have young children, study while they're napping or playing quietly, or before they wake up or after they're in bed.
- ✓ If necessary, delegate some of your other responsibilities. Children and other household members can fold laundry, set the table, and feed and water the dog.
- ✓ Set benchmark goals and reward yourself for reaching them. For instance, you might set a goal to complete a study unit by the end of the week and submit the exam by Sunday. When you do, reward yourself by going to the movies on Sunday night.
- ✓ If you get off-track, don't get down on yourself. Simply make a commitment to pick up where you left off. Once you make the effort to get started again, you'll find yourself right back in the swing of things.

FIGURE 3—Review these study tips periodically to keep yourself on track.

Begin each study unit by reading the Preview and objectives carefully. By doing so, you'll have a good idea of the material covered in the study unit, as well as the major points you should understand when you've completed the work. Next, skim the Table of Contents to get a feel for what's ahead.

Each study unit is divided into major sections, and each section has a self-test at the end for you to complete. You'll see Active Learning activities throughout your units; they contain suggested activities, such as Internet research, exercises to do with your dog, or attending special dog-related events in your area. Active Learning activities are optional.

While you read, highlight any important information you want to refer to later. Keep in mind that many of the terms used might be unfamiliar to you. Many of these terms are defined in the margins or in the glossary at the end of the study unit. However, you should always read with a dictionary at hand. If you don't understand a word, stop to look it up. Jot down the definition in the margin of the study unit. The concepts and theories presented will be difficult to grasp if you don't understand the terms that are used.



In your program, the *objectives* are the bulleted items that follow the Preview in each study unit. They point out what you should be able to do after completing each unit.



ALERT!

Pay close attention to material presented in boxed items such as this *Alert!* box.

This material is vital to the health and safety of both you and your dog, and it's important material that you'll want to share with your clients.

Not only that, there's a good chance that you'll find exam questions based on the information found in these boxes.

When you've worked through an entire section, take the self-check to test yourself on the material you've just covered. Try to complete it without looking back through the material. Check your answers with those in the back of the study unit. If you answered any questions incorrectly, go back through

the section to learn the correct answer. Don't send your self-check answers to the school for grading. They're included as an aid to show you how well you've learned the topics presented in each section.

When you've completed the entire study unit, including the self-checks, and feel confident that you understand the material, take the examination at the end of the study unit. The exams in your study units are multiple-choice, open-book tests. If you know the answer as soon as you read the question, great! If you're unsure of the correct answer, go back through the study unit to find the related information in the text. By rereading carefully, you should be able to determine the correct answer.

At certain points in your program, you'll be asked to complete a graded project. You must complete each graded project and submit your answers to the school for grading. Each graded project counts as an examination grade. Be sure to do them in the order they're presented in your program.

You're on your way toward a rewarding career in dog obedience training and instruction. When you complete this program, you'll have a broad, comprehensive background to build your career upon. This knowledge, coupled with practical, hands-on training experience, will give you the confidence to begin a career that could last a lifetime.

Structure of the Dog

You might have owned a dog all your life, but still don't know his whiskers from his withers. This section takes a quick look at the basic parts of a dog. We're not concerned here with detailed anatomy and physiology, but just want you to become acquainted with the terms you'll see and hear throughout your training. Refer to Figure 4 as you read the following definitions.

Brisket The sternum, or breastbone; in some breeds, the entire chest.

Carpus, carpal joint The bones of the wrist.

Chest The part of the body or trunk that's enclosed by the ribs.

Elbow The joint in the front leg where the upper arm meets the forearm.

Flews The pendulous lateral part of the upper lip, particularly at the inner corners.

Forearm The portion of the forelimb between the upper arm and the carpus, including the radius and the ulna.

Hip The joint where the femur (thigh bone) fits into the pelvic girdle.

Hock The collection of bones of the hind leg forming the joint equivalent to a human's ankle.

Lips The fleshy portions of the upper and lower jaws covering the teeth.

Loin The area of the body behind the ribs and before the hip.

Muzzle The head in front of the eyes, including nasal bones, nostrils, and jaws.

Occiput The dorsal, posterior point of the skull.

Pastern The metacarpal bones of the front leg between the carpus and the foot and the metatarsal bones and the hind leg between the hock and the foot.

Shoulder The joint in the forequarters formed where the shoulder blade and arm meet.

Stifle The joint of the hind leg equivalent of the human knee.

Stop Area from the muzzle to the back skull; the indentation between the eyes where the nasal bones meet.

Thigh The hindquarters from hip to stifle.

Topline A dog's outline from just behind the withers to the tail set.

Tuck up A noticeably shallow loin depth; equivalent to being small-waisted in a human.

Withers The area along the spine between the uppermost portion of the shoulder blades.

It would be helpful to make a copy of Figure 4 to keep in your study notes for easy reference. When you feel that you're familiar with the body parts in the figure, take *Self-Check 1*.

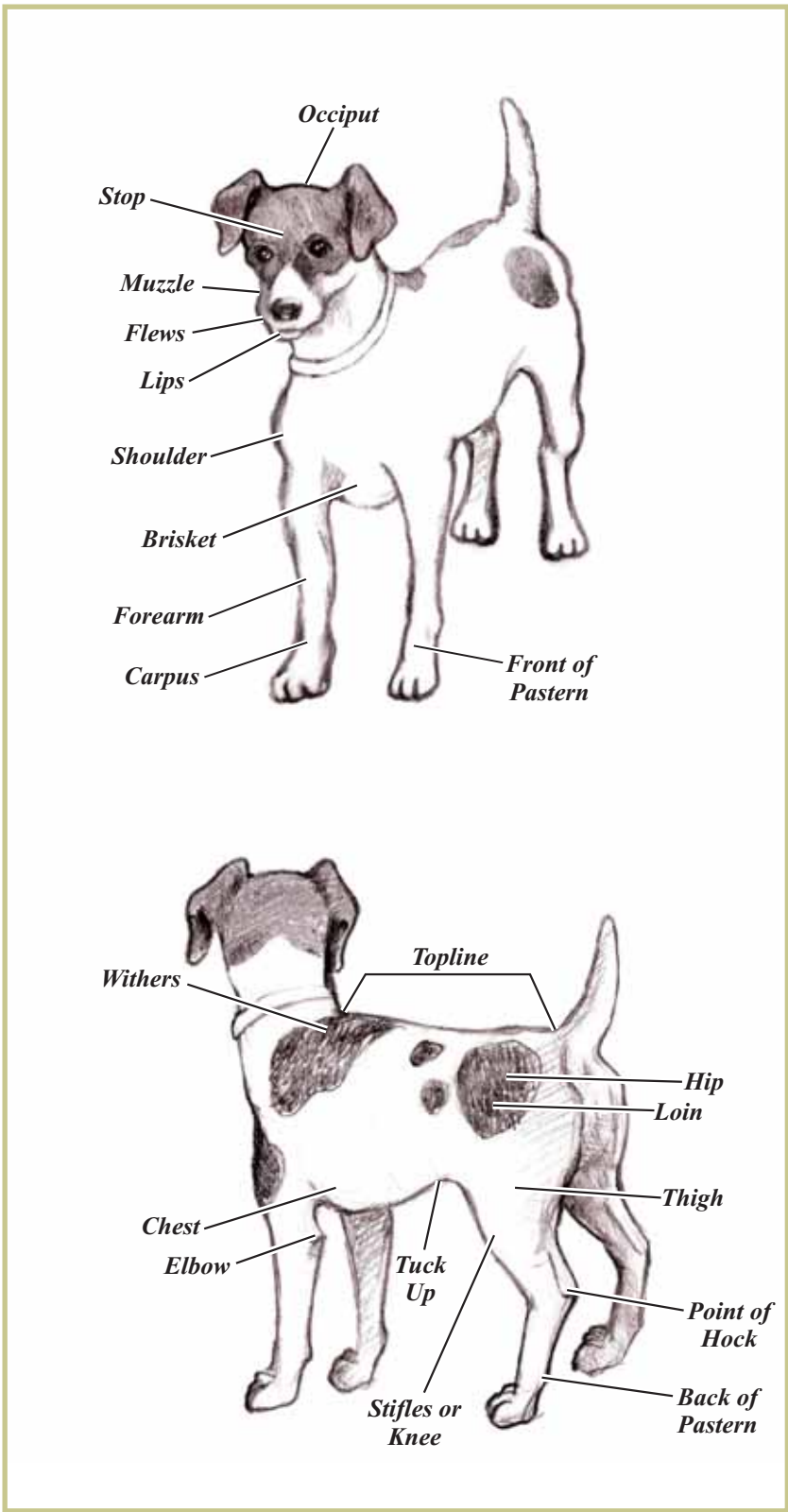


FIGURE 4—The Structure of a Dog



Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *Introduction to the Dog Training Profession*, you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you have just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

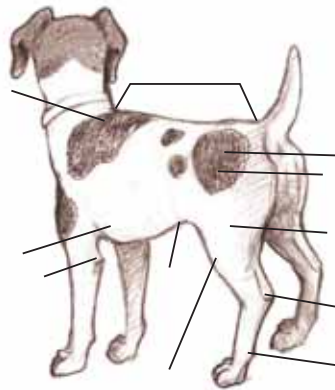
- _____ 1. If you love playing with your dog, but don't care for most other dogs, you can still make a good dog trainer and dog obedience instructor.
- _____ 2. In general, it's typically easier to train a dog than to teach the dog's owner.
- _____ 3. Active Learning activities are to be turned in to the school for grading.

Continued



Self-Check 1

Correctly label the parts of the dog in the figures below.



Check your answers with those on page 67.
