



Structured Dog Training

When working to improve any skill, having a structured program can help ensure that you are able to continue to make progress and still enjoy the activity. Dog training is no different!

The Alpha K9 Structured Training Program can be used when teaching your dog new skills, refreshing learned behaviors, addressing behavior problems, or anything you want to work on with your dog!

This program is aimed at making sure your training sessions are effective, efficient, and enjoyable!

Starting Out

The first thing we like to do with dogs, especially dogs who have never had any formal training before, is to teach the dog to enjoy training! Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you first start working with a new dog, or a dog who has never trained before:

- Keep training sessions short, really short!
- Take lots of breaks
- Include play and games in training
- Use TONS of rewards
- Give your dog plenty of water breaks
- Don't use any corrections, (exceptions for unacceptable behaviors, but keep them

Canine Learning Schedules

Dogs have relatively short attention spans compared to their human counterparts, but they are similar in many ways. Just like with humans, different dogs have different learning requirements, and we are going to help you develop your dog's own unique training regiment.

Puppies vs Adult Dogs: Puppies and adolescent dogs will have much shorter attention spans for any individual activity compared to adult dogs. Adult dogs may be able to focus on learning a specific task for a longer period of time than puppies. Now, an adult dog with no training history may also have a shorter attention span or training tolerance because they have never participated in training before.

Once you've been working with your dog regularly for a few weeks, you'll be able to judge your dog's attention span and determine how long you should run each session. Remember that you want your dog to enjoy the entire training session, and you should never train past the point where your dog no longer is having fun.

Keep Training Sessions Short

A dog who has never done any training before should not be expected to train for long periods of time. Imagine a person who has never gone running before, how long would you expect to be able to sustain a jogging pace? Probably not very long at all.

Dog training is a very exhausting and tiring activity for dogs even if the behaviors are not physically demanding. You can condition your dog to training for longer sessions, but when you first start keep your training sessions short.

How will I know when to end the training session? When your dog looks like he is really enjoying the training session.

You'll notice that when you start training a new behavior, your dog may be a bit confused and become a little frustrated at first. There is a point when your dog starts to "get it", and you'll notice that they start to become more enthusiastic about training at that time. Your dog may start offering the behavior in anticipation of receiving the reward. When your dog is like "I get it now!" That is the perfect time to end the session.

Always End on a Good Note!

You may be wondering why to end the session when your dog is really enjoying it. The way your dog feels when you conclude your training session will be the primary way she will remember the training session.

If you train until your dog is exhausted, tired, and just doesn't want to participate anymore, when you begin the next session, your dog may start their next training session in the same mindset. If the last thing your dog remembers about the training session is wanting to do more training, then your dog is likely to be much more excited about training as soon as you start your next session!

Even if your dog doesn't seem to really get into the training session, even once he starts to really pick up the task, there is still a way to build in a great "lasting memory" of the training session. Finish each training session with a fun and interactive play session with lots of running, jumping, tugging, and playing!

Especially if you are working on long duration stationary tasks like place or sit-stays, ending with an exuberant play session will create all of the good hormones like dopamine and serotonin to be released in the brain. And if you end every session this way, your dog will begin to be conditioned to associate the training session with the play session, and will likely begin to produce those happy hormones during the training session in anticipation of play time!

Even if your dog is just having an off day, or the training session was particularly rough, always ensure that your dog completes at least one good repetition of whatever you are working on. If you are working on sit-stays and your dog just does not want to remain in the sit position, or is continuously sliding into the down position, you can practice short, momentary sits, and after a good momentary sit, reward your dog, free, and then start playing.

Work, Play, and Rest

Rest is a very important part of the training program that will help you and your dogs get the most out of your training sessions. We like to use the kennel as a safe and calm place where our dogs can rest between training sessions.

Resting can serve more than one purpose in the training program. Allowing your dog to rest means allowing your dog to regenerate enough energy for the next training session. Rest time also gives your dog time to think about the training session and the play session. Also, while your dog is in the kennel, he may become bored and will be more excited about working as soon as he comes out. He will likely just be happy to be doing anything that's not sitting around in the kennel.

How long should my dog rest for?

Depending on your training activities and your dog's level of tiredness, your dog may need differing amounts of rest. If we have been working on something physically demanding, or out in the hot sun, my dog may need more time to cool down and calm down before he begin actually resting. If my dog drank a large amount of water just before going into the kennel, I would recommend taking the dog out within an hour to potty at least. You can always bring your dog back into the kennel to rest some more after if needed.

The Schedule

On average, especially when working with multiple dogs, or especially with very young dogs, an hourly training schedule is ideal. Here is a general breakdown of hour each training hour goes. For 1 Trainer, training 3 dogs for 6 hours a day is ideal. This schedule can absolutely be adjusted to address each dog's learning requirements.

00:00 Take Dog #1 out to potty
00:05 Begin Training Dog #1
00:15 End training Dog #1 with a 5 minute play session
00:20 Kennel Dog #1, take out Dog #2 to potty
00:25 Begin Training Dog #2
00:35 End training Dog #2 with a 5 minute play session
00:40 Kennel Dog #2, Take out Dog #3 to potty
00:45 Begin Training Dog #3
00:55 End Training Dog #3 with a 5 minute play session
01:00 Kennel Dog #3, Take out Dog #1 to potty
Repeat as needed

Potty Your Dog Before Training!

You'll notice in the above schedule that each dog is taken to go potty before each training session. Nothing will be more distracting to your dog than a need to go potty during training. This routine is also a great way to teach your dog to potty on command and on a regular schedule.

Important: Creating a predictable potty schedule will help you to teach your dog when and where to potty, but it will also create anticipation. This means that if you take your dog out of the kennel, they will likely have a sense of urgency to go potty. If you forget to potty your dog as soon as they come out of the kennel, they may have an accident.

Pay Attention to Your Dog's Body Language

If you're working with your dog, and every time you give your dog the release command they bee-line for the door, they may need to potty. If your dog is consistently making the same mistake over and over again, you may need to take a few steps back in the training.

Our dogs tell us things through their body language and through their performance and progression. We just need to learn how to listen. Even dogs occasionally have "Off-Days" where things just don't seem to feel right.

If you notice that your dog just isn't their usual self, or that they are making tons of mistakes on something that they did well during their last session, try practicing something they are really good at, or work on something fun like tricks.

Working on tricks during a bad training day can help ensure that every training session is still enjoyable. If your dog doesn't perform a trick properly, there shouldn't be a correction or punishment. This means that there isn't as much pressure on you or the dog for the trick to be perfect, and you can focus more on just reward for any positive results.