

Choosing the Right Dog Training Method

Many people find it tough to pick the right dog training method from the various options out there. Online, there's a sea of techniques and philosophies to wade through. While I haven't tried every single technique firsthand, I have explored a multitude of them extensively, sharing my insights and experiences, to empower readers with the knowledge to make the most informed decisions possible. Here are the main styles: Pure positive, Balanced training, Traditional, and Alpha or dominance theory. Some others, like Clicker or Science-based training, fall under these categories.

Understanding Common Techniques

When training dogs, numerous techniques are based on similar principles. Below is a list of common techniques. If I overlooked one, kindly mention it in the comments. Alongside each technique, you'll notice signs like +R, -R, +P, or -P. These denote which quadrant of operant conditioning applies. However, remember the quadrant a technique falls into can change based on the dog's perception and the trainer's execution.

Operant Conditioning Explained

Operant conditioning is crucial in dog training, it signifies dogs learning that their behaviors produce certain results, both good and bad. They understand they can influence their surroundings based on their behavior. Here's a breakdown:

Positive Reinforcement (+R): Increases behavior by adding something pleasant.

Negative Reinforcement (-R): Increases behavior by removing something unpleasant.

Positive Punishment (+P): Decreases behavior by adding something unpleasant.

Negative Punishment (-P): Decreases behavior by removing something pleasant.

Remember, "Positive" and "negative" aren't synonyms for "good" and "bad." "Positive" implies addition, while "negative" implies subtraction. It's essential to know that many techniques often involve holding back a reward until the dog acts as desired. This component isn't mentioned repeatedly but is common in most methods.

Keep in mind that the below techniques are but a brief introduction to each one. The intent is to give you an introductory understanding of each one, so you can make an educated decision on what techniques you would like to implement or avoid when training your own dog. I do plan on writing detailed articles on many of the techniques in the near future.

An Overview of Some of the Most Common Techniques

I've organized the following techniques in alphabetical order for your convenience. We start with techniques primarily focused on training dogs or teaching new behaviors and then we gradually transition to correction techniques that are designed to stop or prevent undesired behaviors. This structure is intended to provide a clear and navigable flow, enabling you to discern and comprehend the core principles and applications of each method seamlessly.

Assisted Shaping +R: Assisted shaping involves the trainer giving clear guidance to help the dog achieve the desired behavior. Methods can range from using treats as a lure, physically guiding the dog, or employing tools like targets for direction.

Assisted shaping stands as a cornerstone in my repertoire of dog training techniques. What makes it indispensable is its ability to foster rapid and clear communication with the dog. This facilitates the teaching of not just basic tasks but also intricate behaviors. Rewarding minor progressions or efforts toward the final behavior plays a pivotal role in augmenting the dog's tenacity and perseverance.

Perseverance is an invaluable trait in the realm of dog training. Many seasoned trainers, when scouting for potential puppies for rigorous training or specialized roles like working dogs, prioritize this trait. A dog that showcases resilience, even in the face of challenges or initial failures, is a gem in training, standing in stark contrast to one that is easily discouraged.

This is where the magic of assisted shaping shines. For instance, in teaching a spin, it's common to encounter dogs that don't nail the complete spin initially. But rather than waiting for perfection, rewarding incremental achievements, like just turning their head or taking a partial step, can gradually guide them to the full behavior.

This method is not just one of my personal favorites, but is also a tried-and-true technique championed by numerous trainers globally.

Back Chaining +R: Back chaining involves teaching a sequence of behaviors in the reverse of their final order. The beauty of this technique lies in starting with the final expected behavior. After this is proficient, each preceding step is introduced sequentially. This method, by building upon a foundation the dog already recognizes, often leads to quicker mastery and comprehension. For example, imagine you're aiming to train your dog to execute a series of tasks: pick up a toy, transport it to a specific mat, and finally drop it. With back chaining, you'd initiate training with the 'drop' action on the mat. Once this becomes routine for your dog, you'd progress to instructing them to carry the toy to the mat before the drop. The final step involves teaching the initial action – picking up the toy – ultimately leading to a seamlessly executed sequence of actions.

I frequently advocate for and teach this technique to many of my students, especially when dealing with intricate tasks like the competitive retrieve, a flip finish, or the example mentioned above. Back chaining's prowess in simplifying complex behaviors into digestible segments, each building on previously acquired skills, is why numerous professional trainers, including myself, vouch for it.

Behavior Adjustment Training +R, -R: Known in professional circles as BAT, this innovative technique was pioneered by Grisha Stewart. It was designed as a targeted response to address some of the more challenging behaviors in dogs, notably fear-driven and aggressive reactions. The genius of BAT lies in its emphasis on constructing a conducive environment. Within this setting, dogs are not only exposed to but are also equipped to handle their past triggers. The goal is clear: guiding dogs to make healthier, more positive decisions even when faced with situations or stimuli that once overwhelmed them.

This method, while potentially time-consuming, often proves its worth through its positive outcomes and the reduced stress compared to many other techniques. It resonates closely with the principles of counter conditioning and desensitization, albeit with some variations. Given the efficacy of these

strategies in addressing fear-based behaviors, it's no wonder many trainers adopt this approach. For a firsthand glimpse into this technique, watch Grisha Stewart, the creator of BAT, demonstrate it [here](#).

Capturing +R: Capturing is a passive yet effective technique. It requires patience from the trainer, as it involves waiting for the dog to naturally exhibit a desired behavior. Instead of guiding or prompting the canine, the trainer stays observant and "captures" the behavior by providing an immediate reward when it happens. This positive reinforcement, over time, encourages the dog to repeat the behavior more frequently.

I often like to implement this with all dogs that I train due to its ability to create what is commonly referred to as the proactive dog. When we first start training a new dog, that dog, like all dogs, will perform behaviors when they can see the reward. As Michael Ellis, a leading figure in dog training, so eloquently puts it, the behavior is being driven by the reward. However, when we create a proactive dog through the concept of capturing or free shaping (which I'll delve into in more detail later in this article), we teach the dog that their behavior can drive the production of the reward.

I often convey to my students that this approach makes the dog perceive us as treat dispensers. This perception makes it more likely for the dog to perform commanded behaviors in the future without the need for a treat to be visually presented, since they believe we always possess the means to reward them. This strategy is anchored in the principles of operant conditioning. Here, dogs grasp the notion that their behaviors influence their environment. This comprehension not only empowers them but also frequently boosts their confidence.

Chain Training +R: Chain training is systematic and progressive. Here, the dog is taught to exhibit multiple behaviors, with one action seamlessly leading to the next in a predetermined sequence. This forms a coherent 'chain' of actions, with each behavior serving as a trigger or cue for the following action. Upon completion of the entire sequence, the dog typically receives a reward, reinforcing the behavior chain.

Many behaviors can be effectively taught through chain training. I frequently employ this method for various tasks when I'm not utilizing back chaining. For instance, in dog agility training, we start by teaching the dog each individual obstacle they'll encounter. Subsequently, we instruct them on following our lead to navigate each obstacle in the correct sequence. This chaining principle can also be applied to intricate tasks, such as competitive obedience routines or fetching a drink from the refrigerator. Often, trainers alternate between back chaining and chain training, tailoring their choice to the specific dog or task at hand.

Counterconditioning +R: Counterconditioning is a behavioral modification technique in which an undesired response to a stimulus is replaced by a new, more desirable response. This change is brought about by associating the stimulus with positive or pleasant experiences.

Counterconditioning is a valuable technique I often recommend, especially for dogs grappling with fear, usually alongside desensitization. It's pivotal to elevate a dog's confidence when addressing fear-based issues, as these can't be rectified with positive punishment; such approaches only escalate the problem. Counterconditioning is a reliable and tested strategy that I incorporate for many of the fearful dogs I train.

For instance, consider a dog fearful of other dogs. A common method I employ involves visiting a local dog park—yet remaining outside of it. The goal is to be close enough for the dog to observe its fellow canines but at a sufficient distance to avoid any adverse reactions. The initial step is allowing the dog to watch the others; if the dog engages with me, we indulge in enjoyable obedience training or tug play, establishing strong, positive associations. Subsequently, we approach the park gradually, diminishing the distance daily until we can be adjacent to the park without any negative reactions from the dog in training. Often, anticipation and excitement replace fear as the dog learns to associate the park with fun and learning. This method is a clear demonstration of how altering a dog's predictions can assist in conquering their fears.

Crate Training +R, -R, and -P (contextual): Crate training, when approached with patience and positive reinforcement, can be a transformative experience for dogs. By teaching them to perceive the crate as a sanctuary of comfort and safety, owners can simplify processes like house training and potty training. Moreover, in situations of heightened stress or stimulation, the crate can serve as a reliable haven where the dog can find solace and relaxation.

Crate training is a practice I incorporate with every dog I train and raise, and it's a practice I earnestly recommend to others. I understand that some may boast about never needing a crate and having a dog that was impeccable from the start. While commendable, I'd still advocate for crate training for several reasons. Firstly, it's recommended to crate dogs during transport for the safety of both the canine and the human occupants. Having an unrestrained dog in a vehicle can be perilous, posing a threat in the event of a collision. Therefore, it's crucial to restrain a dog's movement in the car using a seatbelt, a barrier, or a secure crate.

Secondly, if a dog requires veterinary care due to illness or surgery, the clinic often houses them in crates. Without prior crate training, such situations can heighten stress levels in dogs. Also, the crate becomes essential when the family goes on a vacation, and the dog needs confinement. And, as previously noted, a crate can serve as a safe refuge for the dog—a place of comfort they can retreat to voluntarily. It also helps in managing a dog's energy, allowing us to optimize training time in the initial stages of the training process.

Desensitization (paired with +R): Desensitization is a process in which a dog is gradually exposed to a stimulus that causes an undesired response. The exposure begins at a level that doesn't elicit a negative reaction, usually through modifications like reducing volume, distance, or size of the stimulus, and over time, the intensity or proximity is slowly increased. While volume, distance, and size are common dimensions for modifying stimulus intensity, other variations exist depending on the specific nature of the stimulus and the individual dog's reaction to it. The goal is to reduce or eliminate the dog's adverse reaction to the stimulus, allowing the dog to gradually acclimate to previously distressing stimuli in a controlled and manageable way.

Building on the previous example from the counterconditioning section, this process would involve allowing the dog to observe other dogs from a distance, gradually reducing this distance as the dog becomes more comfortable. This technique is instrumental in restructuring a dog's fear responses and is incredibly impactful when executed correctly. It allows the transformation of the behavioral and neurological landscape of a dog dealing with fear issues. This slow and steady approach is pivotal in allowing the dog to replace fear and anxiety with confidence and calmness.

Another example involves a dog that is fearful of loud noises, such as thunderstorms or fireworks. In this scenario, desensitization would involve playing the sounds of thunder or fireworks at a very low volume—low enough that the dog doesn't show signs of fear or anxiety. As the dog becomes accustomed to the noise level, the volume is gradually increased, allowing the dog to become more comfortable with louder noises over time. Concurrently, positive reinforcement, like treats or affection, is administered to encourage relaxed behavior at each step of increased volume.

The aim of desensitization in this instance is to enable the dog to comprehend that these noises are not threatening, allowing it to experience loud noises without fear or stress. This is particularly beneficial during instances when the loud noises are unavoidable, such as during a thunderstorm or festive celebrations with fireworks, thus making the experience less stressful for both the dog and the owner. However, a neat little trick that I have used with success is acclimating dogs to brown noise, starting low and gradually increasing the volume over time. Then, during fireworks or thunderstorms, I play the brown noise, effectively reducing the intensity of the external noise, making the process even smoother for the dog in training.

In conclusion, both counterconditioning and desensitization are powerful, humane methods of modifying behavior, often used in conjunction, to aid dogs in overcoming their fears and anxieties by replacing negative associations and responses with positive ones. Additionally, it's vital to note that while these examples are illustrative, the application of these techniques may vary based on individual circumstances and the specific fears and anxieties exhibited by each dog.

Differential Reinforcement +R: Differential Reinforcement is a strategic behavioral approach in dog training. It involves deliberately choosing which behaviors to reinforce with positive feedback, such as treats or praise, and which to let go unacknowledged. This method allows trainers to guide dogs towards desired actions while ignoring unwanted ones, essentially communicating to the dog which behaviors earn rewards and which don't.

This method is favored by trainers who exclusively use positive reinforcement techniques. However, its efficacy is significantly contingent on the individual dog undergoing training. It is also employed in situations where maintaining peak levels of a dog's motivation is crucial, for example, in the early stages of protection training. When initiating a new dog into protection work, the focus is primarily on enhancing the dog's biting techniques to the fullest while building a strong, positive association with the tug work. More obedience is incorporated only once the dog is proficient and has developed a clear understanding and desire for bite work.

Take a scenario where a dog tends to bark and leap in enthusiasm: if the trainer rewards the dog when it opts to sit calmly, yet offers no reaction to its jumping and barking, they're employing differential reinforcement. Another instance is a dog seeking attention through jumping. If attention is withdrawn when the dog jumps, but the dog finds the action of jumping intrinsically rewarding, overlooking this behavior won't yield results, and the dog persists in this behavior.

Hence, I generally advise exercising caution with this strategy. While it's crucial to reward behaviors we wish to see replicated, it's equally vital to address undesirable actions promptly instead of merely ignoring them, as often, ignoring isn't a resolution. This is when what I like to call "teachable moments" come into play. They enable us to illustrate our preferences clearly to the dog at that specific time, preventing the recurrence of unwanted behavior.

Environmental Enrichment +R: Environmental Enrichment is a proactive strategy in dog training. Recognizing that dogs have innate cognitive and physical needs, trainers incorporate toys, puzzles, and an array of stimulating challenges into their environment. By doing so, they not only keep the dog mentally engaged but also provide healthy outlets for energy, thereby mitigating or redirecting potential behavioral issues.

Environmental Enrichment is an ideal option, particularly when time constraints limit daily interaction or after the completion of initial training—by which I mean the establishment of communication channels and basic obedience. This stage also encompasses building a dog's toy drive, a crucial element when using toys as a motivational tool. We initiate this by incorporating drive-building exercises and by enforcing obedience as a prerequisite to playing with the toys.

Granting full access to toys prematurely risks diminishing the dog's drive. However, once fully established, such limitations can be relaxed. If a reduction in drive due to excess access is observed, it's imperative to revert to making the dog work for the toys.

Training is a continuous journey, and most caretakers tend to relax the regimen once a solid foundation is achieved. This is the juncture where incorporating puzzles and various stimulating challenges into the dog's daily routine can be highly beneficial. Achieving a well-balanced dog necessitates a daily blend of mental and physical stimulation and affection. Given the busy schedules of most caretakers, environmental enrichment can offer essential mental stimulation when alternatives are unfeasible. In essence, the application of this technique, like many others, is situational.

Flooding +R, -R, P+ (contextual): Flooding in dog training involves exposing the dog to an anxiety-inducing stimulus at a high intensity and continuously until the dog ceases to react. The underlying theory is that a dog's natural response to stress can't persist indefinitely, leading to a decrease in anxiety over time. For instance, a dog fearful of other dogs might be placed with a large group of friendly dogs until its fear dissipates. Although sometimes effective, this method is controversial due to the risk of increased stress and potential trauma to the dog. Many professionals treat this technique with caution, weighing its ethical implications and inherent risks.

Flooding is not my usual go-to technique due to the existence of more humane and effective alternatives, such as counterconditioning and desensitization, but there have been instances, under very controlled circumstances, where I've found it to be effective. A particular case involving a German Shepherd pup stands out. The owners misinterpreted the 7-month-old's reactive behavior as protective instincts, but it was evident that the dog harbored fear and caution towards new dogs and people. Given that I had a set of fifteen friendly, well-mannered dogs and a very controlled setup, I decided to employ a carefully modified version of flooding.

The process began with me walking the German Shepherd individually with each dog, ensuring that the pup was on my left and the other dog on my right. Subsequently, the dogs were gradually introduced into the play area, starting with the GSD. Initially, the apprehensive German Shepherd ran to one of the corners to observe the others. This observational phase was crucial; as the Shepherd watched the other dogs interact playfully, his apprehensions diminished, leading to interactions and eventually, full integration into the playful group.

An observer, unaware of the initial fear, would never have guessed the transformation that occurred in those few hours. This transformation, while significant, must be understood within the context of the controlled environment and professional oversight. This method poses substantial risks, and its execution should be reserved for trained professionals, who should consider its ethical ramifications thoroughly before opting for such an approach.

Free Shaping +R: Free shaping also relies on the principles of positive reinforcement but is characterized by less intervention and guidance from the trainer. This allows the dog to explore and offer behaviors more independently. The dog is “free” to offer any behavior without deliberate prompts or environmental arrangements, and the trainer rewards approximations of the desired behavior, sculpting new behavior step by step.

For example, in free shaping training, a trainer might want to teach a dog to interact with a new object. The trainer would reward any interest or interaction the dog offers toward the object, letting the dog explore different behaviors without a clear end goal in mind.

It’s crucial to understand that the terms “free shaping” and “shaping” are often used interchangeably, leading to potential confusion due to mixed information online. However, some trainers differentiate “free shaping” as a more unstructured form of shaping, where there isn’t a specific predetermined goal, focusing instead on allowing the dog to explore different behaviors spontaneously.

Similar to capturing, free shaping can be pivotal in nurturing proactiveness and confidence in a dog. It motivates the dog to experiment with different behaviors to attain rewards, fostering a sense of achievement and reinforcing the learning of new behaviors. This method is valuable when my aim is to enhance a dog’s problem-solving skills and boost their eagerness to participate in the learning process.

In dog training, both “capturing” and “free shaping” are positive reinforcement methods that rely on the dog offering behaviors on its own, without being lured or prompted. The key differences lie in what behaviors are being reinforced and the process of reinforcement. Capturing focuses on already-existing behaviors, and free shaping guides the dog towards a new behavior by rewarding steps or approximations of that behavior.

Admittedly, I’ve mixed up these concepts in the past. An easy way to remember the difference is that “capturing” is like taking a snapshot of a behavior the dog already offers, while “free shaping” is like sculpting a new behavior step by step.

Habituation as a technique: Habituation is the process by which a dog, over time, diminishes its response to a repeated stimulus. Trainers or behaviorists may strategically employ this method to reduce a dog’s undesirable reaction to a particular stimulus. However, it’s imperative to ensure the stimulus remains non-threatening and perceived as neutral. Using a harmful or negatively perceived stimulus could inadvertently cause sensitization, increasing the dog’s reaction rather than dampening it. So, while habituation is a natural adaptive mechanism, it’s also a valuable tool in a trainer’s arsenal for behavior modification.

I know this sounds similar to desensitization; however, their methodologies, contexts, and underlying principles differ. Habituation is the reduction of a dog’s response to a neutral stimulus through repeated exposure, leading the dog to ignore it. Desensitization involves systematically and gradually exposing the dog to a negative or fear-inducing stimulus at low intensities, aiming to reduce the dog’s negative

reactions over time. While habituation deals with non-threatening stimuli that become "background noise," desensitization addresses stimuli that initially provoke strong negative responses. Desensitization is often paired with positive experiences to reshape the dog's emotional response.

Leash Pressure -R: In dog training, the "leash pressure" method, alternatively known as "pressure and release," involves using the leash's tension to guide a dog's behavior. Over time, as the dog masters this technique, the actual need for applying pressure reduces. Ideally, a dog will begin to act on minimal leash cues or slight changes in its movement direction, indicating a strong connection and communication channel with the handler.

This technique is imperative and is included in my teaching repertoire for all my students. Initially, it hinges on negative reinforcement, but the incorporation of positive reinforcement, especially in the early stages, is crucial. Thus, it blends positive and negative reinforcements, enhancing its efficacy as a communicative tool.

For every dog I train, the introduction to the concept of leash pressure follows the understanding of lure-following. Utilizing the lure is essential as it conveys the concept of pressure training clearly. The principle is straightforward; once the pressure is applied, it should remain until the dog complies, and the moment the dog complies, the pressure is instantly released.

Originally, the method posed a problem to the dog, asking them to figure out the action that releases the pressure. However, modern methods, utilizing luring, have made this process stress-free by providing the dog with the answer. For instance, in teaching 'sit,' a gentle upward pull on the leash signals the dog to sit. Initially, the dog doesn't recognize this as a cue. Thus, a slight pressure is applied, enough for the dog to feel, followed by luring the dog into a sitting position. Once the dog sits, the pressure is immediately released, and the dog is rewarded.

This approach is applicable in teaching various commands and more intricate behaviors, including walking forward and backward in response to leash pressure, spinning, flipping into the heel position, and assuming a front sit position. The beauty of this technique is its removal of choice for the dog; if rewards are the sole motivator, the success depends on the dog's desire for the reward. With leash training, compliance is not optional, establishing reliability in training, enabling the teaching of stays, boundaries, and rendering some behaviors clearer to the dog.

My primary goal, both for the dogs I train and the students I instruct, is to evolve this method into a leash cue, minimizing the necessity of applied pressure, making the interaction more about communication and less about force.

Luring +R: This is when a trainer uses food to guide the dog into specific positions. Techniques can range from basic maneuvers, like guiding a dog into a sit, to more intricate actions such as a flip finish. A flip finish entails the dog flipping into the heel position from the sit front position. Luring is among the most common techniques trainers use because of its clear communication and effectiveness with the dogs in training.

I ardently employ this technique with every dog I train, and it is a foundational skill I ensure all my students master due to the clear and effective communication it offers between trainer and dog. Each student is guided to gain proficiency in this technique, starting with the basics: using a lure to encourage a dog to walk forward, sit, and lay down. This foundational knowledge is crucial as it directly aids in

teaching leash pressure, a critical component of our primary communication triad: markers, luring, and leash pressure training.

The integration of classical conditioning to respond to markers, the understanding of following a lure, and the responsiveness to leash guidance, collectively, allow us to convey our desired behaviors to dogs seamlessly in a plethora of situations.

Now, it's common to encounter the perception that some dogs are not food-motivated. However, after over a decade of professional experience, I can assertively say that all dogs are indeed food motivated. The apparent lack of food motivation often stems from overfeeding, free feeding, or the lack of development of food drive. By requiring a dog to work for every morsel of food, we can effectively nurture and enhance their food drive.

Once the fundamentals of luring are firmly established, it becomes an invaluable tool to instruct various intricate behaviors and transitions between positions relative to the handler, such as flipping from the sit-front position to the heel position and shifting to the center position. Essentially, luring paves the way for executing the majority of behaviors we desire from our dogs.

This technique is a universal approach, widely embraced by both pure positive and balanced trainers. While it might be sporadically used by traditional and alpha-style trainers, it doesn't form the core of their training methodology, making it a less common practice within those realms.

Management -P: Not all behavioral solutions revolve around altering a dog's behavior directly. Often, the more immediate and effective strategy is to adjust the environment to prevent unwanted actions from occurring. Practical solutions, such as strategically placing puppy gates to restrict entry into specific areas or proactively removing potential temptations, are prime examples of this approach. This is especially helpful during the early stages of training.

Management is a strategic approach I frequently adopt and advocate, especially during the initial phases of training and integrating a new dog or puppy into the family. I often favor this methodology over tethering, a subject I'll delve into later in this article. Given the paramount importance of constant supervision during the house and potty training phases, employing management to navigate a dog's movement throughout the house and deter them from accessing furniture is crucial. This proactive strategy not only sets the dog up for success but also thwarts the practice of undesired behaviors until they are adequately house trained and acquainted with the house rules. It's an approach that is fundamentally proactive rather than reactive.

Marker Training +R, -R, +P and -P (contextual): is commonly referred to as "clicker training" when a clicker is used. This training technique involves marking a desired behavior with a unique and consistent sound or word the instant it occurs, followed immediately by a reward. The marker serves as a bridge, pinpointing for the dog the precise behavior that earned the treat. However, it's essential to understand that, by definition, a marker can predict any of the four quadrants of operant conditioning. Thus, a marker might also signal an upcoming correction, either as positive or negative punishment. Furthermore, it can predict negative reinforcement, often using techniques like leash pressure. Nevertheless, when most people hear "marker training," they typically associate it with markers used exclusively for positive reinforcement.

I fervently advocate for marker training as it fosters clear and precise communication between trainer and dog, highlighting when the dog's actions are either correct or incorrect. It is an essential skill I instill in all my students, noticing that those who grasp and accurately incorporate markers tend to exhibit advanced training proficiency compared to those who do not.

Markers, as established, are multifaceted and can predict the consequences within all four quadrants of operant conditioning. My utilization of markers spans +R, -R, and +P; however, I abstain from using them for -P. For -P, a non-reinforcement marker can be employed, which is commonly used to signal errors. For instance, if a dog is commanded to sit but lies down instead, a non-reinforcement marker can indicate the error, with no treat being administered, followed by a re-command to allow the dog another attempt. My approach is slightly different—I prefer a brief pause before re-issuing the command, permitting the dog another opportunity. Repeating the command is acceptable in instances where the dog makes an active attempt to comply but not when the command is outrightly ignored.

The innate power of markers is their ability to capture precise moments, fostering a closer and stronger linkage between a behavior and its ensuing reward or consequence. The widely accepted principle is that this connection needs to be established within about a one-second window. The crucial aspect here is not the actual receipt of the reward or consequence within this second but the dog's anticipation of it. For instance, a delay in reward delivery doesn't diminish the connection, as the marker has already signified the impending reward, allowing me to approach and reward the dog with a maintained connection.

It is critical, however, to maintain the dog's attention from the moment the marker is issued until the primary reinforcement or consequence is delivered. Any distraction during this interim can disrupt the connection and compromise the efficacy of the training. When meticulously applied, markers become an indispensable tool, enabling precise and immediate reinforcement or correction, thereby fostering optimal learning and behavioral modification in dogs.

Modeling +R (when followed by a reward): Modeling is a technique in dog training that incorporates both direct and observational learning. It can involve a dog mirroring the behavior of a human trainer or another well-mannered dog. While this isn't a strategy I often employ, it holds substantial merit in specific situations, proving valuable in exemplifying appropriate behaviors and mitigating apprehensions.

The essence of modeling lies in social learning, where an experienced, seasoned mentor—be it human or dog—demonstrates the desired behaviors to a less-trained counterpart. This technique underscores the idea that dogs, much like humans, acquire knowledge and adapt behaviors by example.

In circumstances where a dog is cautious or hesitant, modeling can serve as a pivotal strategy, demystifying perceived threats and enabling engagement. For instance, when introducing commands like "go to bed" or delving into advanced training such as scent detection, using a climb platform can be beneficial. However, a dog might initially exhibit reluctance to interact with it. In situations like this, I might illustrate its safety by personally walking on it. Alternatively, I could employ other dogs, having them jump on and off and rewarding them, thereby conveying to the dog in training that there's nothing to fear. This approach often yields favorable results.

Allowing novice dogs to observe seasoned dogs in training sessions capitalizes on observational learning, enabling the newcomers to assimilate and replicate demonstrated behaviors. The responses vary—some

dogs observe with keen interest, some display disinterest, and others express frustration and eagerness to partake in the training and receive treats. Depending on the level of frustration, I may discontinue this method with specific dogs. The barking, stemming from frustration, can not only distract the dog currently undergoing training but also deplete the barking dog's energy, potentially impacting their performance when it's their turn to train, not to mention the nuisance created by continuous barking.

Modeling, coupled with rewarding, emerges as an instrumental technique in reinforcing positive behaviors, dispelling fears, and elucidating the benefits of specific actions. The efficacy of this method is inherently dependent on the individual dog's response, making it a versatile tool for a variety of behaviors. Whether it involves direct interaction or observational imitation, the mixture of demonstration and positive reinforcement renders modeling a useful addition in dog training, especially in specialized scenarios.

Premack Principle +R: The Premack Principle, often called "Grandma's Rule," was formulated by psychologist David Premack. It suggests that more probable behaviors will reinforce less probable behaviors. In essence, this means that allowing a dog to engage in a favored activity as a reward can motivate it to perform a less preferred task. For example, trainers might ask a dog to execute a basic command like "sit" or "stay." Introducing a game of fetch or tug as a reward, instead of just offering a treat, can serve as a substantial motivator. This method creates a clear correlation between obeying a command and enjoying a favored activity, fostering a willingness in the dog to repeat the desired behavior.

Using the Premack Principle involves utilizing engaging activities like fetch or tug as reinforcers rather than just singular treats. I frequently employ and advocate for this principle, particularly for dogs that are highly motivated by toys. This approach can significantly enhance their willingness to participate in training sessions, making the learning process more enjoyable and productive.

However, I typically introduce the Premack Principle only after a dog has acquired a solid understanding of the basic commands. While some behaviors can be introduced and ingrained using toys as rewards, many foundational commands are better taught initially with food rewards. Food allows for immediate reinforcement, facilitating a quick return to training and aiding in maintaining the dog's focus and engagement during the learning of new commands.

Before integrating activities like fetch or tug into a dog's training regimen, I ensure the dog has become proficient in the "drop it" command, exhibits a degree of impulse control, and reliably returns the toy to me. Meeting these prerequisites ensures a smooth and productive incorporation of toys in reinforcing and enhancing already learned behaviors."

"Set-up" or "Proofing" +R, -R, +P, and -P (contextual): Set-up or proofing are methodological approaches in dog training where trainers deliberately engineer situations to challenge and assess the dog's behavior and obedience levels. These are especially vital in environments filled with potential distractions. By doing so, trainers aim to ensure the dog's consistent performance under various circumstances and solidify their adherence to desired commands.

Depending on the trainer's philosophy and the dog's response, these setups can involve correction for undesirable behaviors or focus predominantly on rewarding and reinforcing positive actions. For many,

these setups are also diagnostic tools, highlighting specific areas where the dog might need further training.

One common oversight made by many dog owners and trainers is advancing their dog's training progression too rapidly. By thrusting dogs into environments or situations they aren't equipped for and then setting high expectations, we unintentionally set them up for failure.

For instance, expecting a dog to thrive in what I term a 'level 5' environment—the most challenging—without first developing proficiency in all the preceding levels, starting with the 'level 1' environment—the least challenging—is akin to sending a white belt in martial arts to compete in a black belt championship. While the black belt can navigate the rigorous competition with competence, the white belt is likely to be overwhelmed. This is why there are separate competitions for each belt level, allowing them to gradually level up to the black belt standard.

In a similar vein with dogs, it's essential to understand their current proficiency and set our expectations accordingly. To draw another parallel: just as a white belt can be a spectator at a black belt competition, a level 1 dog can be exposed to a level 5 environment. However, the only expectations should be basic, like preventing them from exhibiting undesirable behaviors such as digging or leash lunging. It underscores the importance of tailoring our asks to what the dog is currently trained to handle.

Shaping +R: Shaping is akin to sculpting a behavior. It involves reinforcing successive approximations to a desired end behavior, just as an artist chips away at stone to reveal a statue. Every behavior that is a step closer to a predetermined goal is acknowledged and reinforced, guiding the dog towards the intended behavior. This meticulous process involves breaking down a complex behavior into smaller, more manageable steps and reinforcing the dog at each step as it progressively nears the final behavior.

For instance, if the goal is for the dog to ring a bell, the trainer might first reward the dog for looking at the bell, then for moving towards it, then for touching it, and so on, until the full behavior is achieved. I find this nuanced approach instrumental, for example, when teaching a dog to place their paws on a perch/place bowl. I closely watch for the initial interest, such as a look or a nose touch, mark, and reward that behavior, progressively leading to the dog placing both paws on the object.

However, employing shaping requires discernment. For instance, if I desire a dog to lie down in the precise sphinx position, I may opt for assisted shaping, especially pertinent when the end goal is specific, as in competitive dog training, where a relaxed hip off to the side during a down command could be problematic. Hence, aligning the shaping technique with the intricacy and specificity of the desired behavior is crucial, particularly when precision is non-negotiable.

Target Training +R: "Targeting" involves teaching a dog to deliberately touch an object or location with a specific body part, such as their nose or paw, upon a given prompt. By developing proficiency in this foundational skill, the dog lays the groundwork for an array of complex behaviors. Strengthened by positive reinforcement, targeting is simple to grasp yet incredibly adaptable. It serves as a precursor to more intricate tasks and stands as an essential and enjoyable step in the dog training journey.

In my work training service dogs, I've often employed a unique and effective strategy that hinges on the principle of targeting. One of the foundational behaviors I teach these dogs is to deliberately target a sticky pad, either with their nose or paw. Once this behavior is well-established, it becomes a versatile tool for more complex tasks. For instance, I can place a sheet from that same sticky pad onto a light

switch. The dog, already familiar with targeting the sticky pad, naturally attempts to touch it and, in doing so, learns to turn the light on and off.

This technique isn't limited to light switches, though. When I hosted a show on Animal Planet called 'Rescue Dog to Super Dog,' I demonstrated how this method could be expanded even further. One particularly memorable moment was when I used the sticky pad to teach a dog to press an elevator button. By leveraging the dog's prior knowledge of targeting the sticky pad, we were able to train this more intricate behavior quickly and efficiently.

What I love about this method is its simplicity and adaptability. With just one foundational skill—the targeting of a sticky pad—a dog can be guided to perform a range of helpful tasks, making it a valuable tool in dog training.

Tether Training -R, -P (contextual): In dog training, tether training is often considered a foundational step. By affixing the dog to a stationary point using a leash or tether, trainers can gain an initial degree of control. This approach, however, is ideally used sparingly and should be transitioned out of promptly, as relying on obedience training or using barriers to manage the dog's movements are generally preferable options. Extended tethering can have its pitfalls; it can impede a dog's self-regulation and can foster separation anxiety, particularly if the dog is frequently tethered to a person.

I, however, employ tethering strategically to attach a dog to a stationary object, such as a tree or pole, a technique often referred to as a back-tie, for very specific training scenarios. When raising puppies, I find it beneficial to use a back-tie for several key reasons. One principal reason to utilize a back-tie is for drive building. This technique involves using the back-tie to cultivate frustration and increase the dog's desire for a toy by teasing the puppy with it until a heightened level of excitement is observed. As the dog barks, bringing the toy closer can augment this behavior, which can subsequently be transferred to an exercise in protection sports known as a bark and hold.

This method is not only an excellent way to instruct the dog on proper biting—ensuring a full bite where the toy is entirely in the dog's mouth—but is also advantageous for proper targeting in protection work. Additionally, I've leveraged a back-tie when allowing a new dog to observe more advanced dogs in training, a topic touched upon earlier in this article.

Consequently, while tethering can be applied for precise and specialized training needs, its usage should predominantly be confined to specific training opportunities and not merely to keep the dog connected to the human. The potential consequences of improper tethering underline the importance of using this technique judiciously and transitioning to obedience training or using barriers to control the dog's movement whenever possible.

Corrections

When it comes to dog training, "corrections" play a pivotal role in guiding a dog's behavior. Essentially, a correction is the specific feedback or response that a trainer or handler provides when a dog demonstrates a behavior that's not wanted or expected. By giving this feedback, the trainer aims to communicate to the dog that such behavior is undesirable, with the overarching goal of diminishing the

frequency of its occurrence in subsequent situations. To understand this concept further, let's delve into the various types of corrections a trainer may use.

Alpha Roll +P, -P, and -R (contextual): The "alpha roll" is an antiquated dog training technique where a dog is forcibly turned onto its back and restrained there. Originating from an interpretation of wolf behavior, this method draws from the notion of an "alpha" wolf that supposedly pushes a lower-ranking wolf onto its back as an authoritative display. The underpinning belief is that, by putting a dog in this vulnerable position, a trainer or owner can firmly establish their leadership role.

The widespread adoption of the alpha roll stems from earlier observations of wolves held in captivity, where such forceful submission acts were noted. However, as research evolved and scientists observed wild wolf populations, they found a more intricate social dynamic. Forceful displays of dominance, it turns out, are more the exception than the rule. In natural settings, most wolf submissions are spontaneous gestures of respect or acknowledgment rather than actions forced by a dominant member.

In modern dog training, the alpha roll is viewed with skepticism and caution. A significant number of dog training experts and animal behaviorists warn against its usage. Their concerns hinge on the technique's propensity to spark aggressive reactions, instill fear, and deteriorate the bond between pet and owner. Compelling a dog into such an exposed position can also inadvertently provoke defensive behaviors, including biting.

On a personal note, regrettably, early in my journey with dogs, I dabbled with this outdated method, swayed by the prominence of television dog trainers who promoted it. I, like many, operated under the misguided belief that if a method was featured on major network shows, it must be validated and effective. Far from achieving any positive outcomes, my attempts strained my bond with my dog. Another time, a dog almost severely bit me when I tried it. Such experiences made it clear: this method was not only ineffective but risky. With my commitment to continuous learning, I soon embraced better, more compassionate, and science-supported techniques. Today, I've relegated the alpha roll to the annals of past mistakes, urging all dog lovers to steer clear of it.

Avoidance Training +P: This technique is grounded in teaching the dog a behavior to help it evade a potential negative event. For example, when a 'sit' command is consistently followed by a physical correction into the sit position—achieved by popping up on the leash while simultaneously pushing on the dog's back end—the dog learns an important lesson. If it sits upon hearing the command, it can avoid the correction entirely. As training continues, the dog quickly grasps that obeying the sit command is its means of avoiding discomfort, making it increasingly likely to comply when the command is given.

In my early days, dog training seemed like a puzzle. My initiation began with avoidance training, guided by a seasoned professional. I was, inadvertently, swept up by the authority principle, thinking, 'If an expert recommends it, it must be right.' But as time passed, I realized the potential pitfalls: it can diminish a dog's enthusiasm, unwarranted corrections, and in some cases, risk triggering aggression. Fortunately, my journey has since led me to more compassionate and balanced training techniques. These methods not only produce the obedience we desire but do so in a manner that nurtures a genuine passion for learning in dogs.

Bitter Sprays +P: Utilized primarily for curbing chewing tendencies, bitter sprays are applied directly to objects, ensuring their taste is unpalatable and dissuading dogs from biting or gnawing on them.

In the diverse landscape of dog training, bitter sprays are one of the many tools. Some dogs might be immediately put off, while others, determined, persist. My journey with this method has yielded inconsistent results. For issues like furniture chewing, which can be deemed destructive, a prompt correction with a training collar can often bring about swift resolution. I gravitate towards remote training collars for such challenges. It corrects without casting me in a punitive light. Right after a correction, I'm there, siding with the dog, remarking, 'Did the sofa bite you? Maybe best not to chew it.' It's a formula that not only stops the unwanted behavior but does so without the dog connecting the correction to the human.

Blocking -R, -P (contextual): With the aim of influencing a dog's movement, blocking is the method where a trainer positions their hand or body as a barrier, either ceasing the dog's motion or leading it in an alternate direction.

I frequently incorporate the 'Blocking' technique into my training approach. At its core, blocking employs negative reinforcement. The 'pressure' or 'block' is applied with our physical presence and is removed once the dog complies. It's particularly useful when teaching dogs about 'stays' and setting boundaries.

A crucial component when using this technique is identifying what I term "teachable moments." For example, if a dog breaks a 'stay' command or breaches an established boundary, I use a specific marker word, signaling the application of negative reinforcement. I then approach the dog, blocking their forward movement and guiding them back to their designated spot, usually with a leash cue, thereby reinforcing the importance of the 'stay' command or the boundary's significance.

Over time, the dog learns to adhere to the 'stay' or respect the boundary that has been established, even without my intervention. It's crucial to promptly release the 'block' or 'pressure' once the dog acts appropriately. While this method may seem to apply pressure, it serves as a communication tool rather than a dominance display.

"Blocking" in classical conditioning: It's important to note that there is another form of blocking. but it's a different concept from the one I initially described. This is known as "blocking" in the realm of classical conditioning, specifically associative learning. The term "blocking" in this context is used to describe a phenomenon where a stimulus fails to evoke a response because another stimulus has already been associated with the desired response.

Let's say you're training a dog to associate a bell ringing with feeding time. Each time you're about to feed your dog, you ring a bell, and very soon the dog begins to salivate and show excitement when hearing the bell even if no food is presented immediately. This is classical conditioning at work, similar to Pavlov's famous experiment with dogs, and it's the same process we use when conditioning a dog to a marker word or sound that predicts positive reinforcement.

Now, after the dog has firmly established this association between the bell and food, you introduce a new stimulus. This time, just before ringing the bell, you start playing a specific song. You play the song, ring the bell, and then feed the dog. After several repetitions, the sequence becomes predictable to the dog.

If the sequence remains consistent (song, then bell, then food), over time, the dog will start to react to the song alone, anticipating that the bell and food are about to come. But, if you were to introduce the song and the bell simultaneously, the dog might not form a strong association with the song. This is

because the bell, already having a history of predicting food, "blocks" the song from becoming a strong predictor.

In this example, the song's ability to become an effective cue on its own is "blocked" by the pre-established association between the bell and food. This demonstrates the blocking effect in associative learning.

Understanding this effect aids in teaching complex behaviors. For example, with hand signal commands. If I wish to teach a dog that raising my hand means "lay down" and the dog already recognizes the verbal command "down," then I need to give the physical signal before the verbal command. With enough repetitions, the dog will come to understand that raising my hand signals them to lay down because it predicts the command.

Body Pressure -R: Body Pressure refers to the strategic use of one's body to apply a light force, suggesting a specific movement for the dog. A classic application is a gentle lean towards the dog, prompting it to create distance by backing away.

While Body Pressure and Blocking may appear alike at first glance, they serve different purposes in communication via body language. Blocking focuses on halting and preventing movement, while Body Pressure seeks to guide or influence the dog's direction of movement. This distinction is highlighted when considering the blocking example provided earlier. After successfully blocking the dog's forward movement, the subsequent act of moving toward the dog, guiding it back to its desired position, embodies the concept of Body Pressure.

Citronella Collars +P: Citronella collars are anti-barking devices designed to fit around a dog's neck. Activated by the sound of barking, these collars release a citronella spray. The unexpected sensation, combined with the distinct citrus aroma, is intended to serve as a deterrent to reduce the dog's barking behavior.

While I've never personally employed Citronella Collars, a friend tried them with mixed results. Although the collar sporadically deterred his dog from barking, the dog's inclination to bark often overcame the deterrent effect. Beyond its inconsistent efficacy, the collar also proved expensive due to the need for regular refills. While this method wasn't successful for his dog, it might be for others. Nonetheless, I'll discuss more consistent and cost-effective alternatives in subsequent articles.

E-Collars, Remote Training Collars, or "Shock" Collars +R, -R, and +P (contextual): These are advanced electronic devices, occasionally referred to as muscle stimulators. Though they've been at the center of controversy due to potential misuse, advocates point out their benefits when employed judiciously. Most modern models are equipped with features like vibration or audible beeps.

In the realm of obedience training, it's crucial for a dog to recognize the stim from the collar as a directive from the handler, a concept often referred to as being "directional" in the dog training world. If the dog perceives the stimulation as a random external sensation, it misses the intent. However, for dangerous or destructive behaviors, the remote collar can be utilized to immediately cease the undesired act, allowing the dog to associate the correction with the problematic behavior. This distinction is critical.

Additionally, these collars have versatile applications. The vibration or beep settings can be effectively classically conditioned as positive reinforcement. By having the beep or vibrate predict a treat, dogs can be trained to associate these cues with rewards. In many instances, I've used the beep or vibration as a recall command with great success. This not only rewards the dog but also provides an additional layer of control in various situations.

I regularly incorporate these collars into my training approach, striving for enhanced obedience and the liberating experience of off-leash freedom for my dogs. But the effectiveness of these tools' hinges heavily on their proper implementation. During the formative stages, I pair the collars stim with a leash pop. This ensures the dog recognizes it as guidance from me. This approach not only aids in immediate behavior correction but also fosters proactive behavioral adaptations in dogs.

Witnessing dogs accompanied by individuals but devoid of any control tools—no leash, no collar—is unsettling. Such scenarios can lead to dangerous outcomes, like instigating confrontations with on-leash aggressive dogs or risking road accidents if the dog dashes onto a street. A remote collar, especially when off-leash, offers a much-needed safety net in these unpredictable situations.

Before granting your canine off-leash privileges, it's paramount to gain a comprehensive understanding of remote training collars. I plan to delve deeper into the intricacies of this tool in a forthcoming article. Importantly, when these collars are used appropriately, dogs often associate them with moments of freedom and joy.

Hand Poke or Tap +P: This is intended to be a tactile intervention, usually delivered to a dog's side or neck, intended to recapture the dog's attention or interrupt a specific behavior. Often used as a non-verbal cue, it serves to redirect the dog's focus without causing harm or significant discomfort. This technique emphasizes the importance of touch as a form of communication between the trainer and the dog.

When working with dogs or puppies that tend to drift off during training, I might give a gentle head tap to bring them back to the moment. Importantly, this tap isn't meant as a correction; it's merely a gentle reminder. However, I'm adamant about steering clear of taps or pokes on the dog's side or neck meant as a correction. There are several reasons for this: first, it isn't the most effective way to guide behavior; second, it feels too personal to the dog; third, there's a real risk they might bite your hand; and lastly, it risks diminishing the dog's trust in hands. Through all my sessions, one principle remains constant: hands should symbolize kindness, whether that's through affectionate petting, treats, or toys.

Hold-Down +P, -P, and -R (contextual): A "hold-down" is a physical restraint technique, reminiscent of the alpha roll, but with a distinction. Instead of forcing the dog on its back, the trainer might choose various positions, like holding the dog on its side. The overarching aim remains consistent: to retain the dog in the selected position until it halts its resistance, demonstrating a calmer demeanor signaling submission.

The underlying philosophy of the hold-down shares its roots with the alpha roll. Both are anchored in the age-old belief of marking dominance over canines. The physical dominance displayed in a hold-down is intended to cement the trainer's or owner's status as the pack's "alpha."

However, it's crucial to note that, akin to the alpha roll, hold-downs are fraught with potential pitfalls. This type of physical intervention can act as stress multipliers in dogs. This heightened stress and the

ensuing sensation of confinement can spur a defensive posture in dogs, amplifying aggressive traits. Overreliance on such methods risks souring the dog-owner bond, morphing it from one of mutual respect to one overshadowed by fear.

Leash Correction +P: The leash correction technique in dog training employs a quick "pop" on the leash to introduce positive punishment, reducing the likelihood of the dog exhibiting undesired behaviors again. Often, trainers use specialized correctional collars like the prong collar to amplify the sensation for the dog, making the correction more distinct. However, flat collars or martingale collars can also be used.

I frequently incorporate leash corrections in training various dogs. When employed correctly, it's a potent tool for enforcing obedience and promptly addressing dangerous or destructive behaviors. For obedience training to be both successful and to minimize the stress associated with positive punishment for the dog, a systematic approach is crucial. Here's the basics of the strategy I follow:

Before introducing corrections, it's essential to ensure the dog consistently shows at least 80% proficiency in commands across various settings. For instance, if a dog performs well indoors but struggles outside, corrections should be confined to the indoor environment until outdoor proficiency aligns.

After reaching this proficiency level, corrections can be applied compassionately. The "leash pop"—a brisk tug on the leash to engage the training collar—acts as the correction. This movement is usually preceded by a marker that signals positive punishment, such as the word 'no'.

After using the marker, we take a half-second pause to prevent overshadowing before delivering the correction. However, the process doesn't stop there. It's essential to guide the dog towards the correct behavior afterward. Once they exhibit the desired behavior, offer them verbal praise. Remember, post-correction, it's vital not to reward with toys or treats, as this might inadvertently foster a behavior-reward link.

Motion-Activated Sprays +P: Motion-activated sprays are devices equipped with sensors that detect the proximity of a dog. Once a dog comes within range, these gadgets emit a spray of air. The sudden burst serves as a deterrent, startling the dog and conditioning it to avoid certain areas, especially furniture.

For those who can't consistently monitor their dog's behavior and are hesitant about crating, motion-activated sprays might seem like a viable option. However, I've never personally adopted this tool.

With proper techniques, teaching a dog to respect household boundaries or to refrain from climbing onto furniture is quite simple. Moreover, these teachings often go hand-in-hand with housebreaking a new dog or a young puppy.

During house or potty training, crates serve as a safeguard, preventing dogs from developing bad habits when they're out of sight. A common mistake many novice dog owners make is giving their pets unrestricted access to the home before they are fully house trained.

This can lead to undesirable behaviors, such as chewing on furniture, getting into the trash, table-jumping, and relieving themselves in the house, to name a few. While a motion-activated spray might deter a dog from select areas, thorough training undeniably yields more consistent and superior results.

Muzzle Grabs +P: Dogs frequently engage in a behavior where they gently put their mouths around other dogs' snouts, faces, or necks. Drawing from this behavior, some dog trainers adopt a technique where they lightly and swiftly grab the dog's muzzle. This sudden action is meant to break the dog's focus and disrupt any unwanted behavior, bringing their attention back to the trainer.

However, I consistently avoid such tactics. My hesitations mirror the concerns I've previously expressed about hand pokes or taps. Employing methods that feel deeply personal to the dog, like the muzzle grab, can impair our bond. Such interventions heighten the risk of a bite and diminish the inherent value of our hands to our pets. As I've underscored before, hands should always be symbols of trust and affection, not apprehension.

Scat Mats -R, +P: Scat Mats are devices designed with the purpose of pet boundary training in mind. When a dog steps onto these mats, they experience a mild static pulse, which serves as an immediate deterrent. Over time, dogs associate the sensation with the mat's location, making them less inclined to venture onto restricted furniture or into off-limits areas.

Nevertheless, such tools may cater more to individuals short on time for comprehensive dog training. While some might find Scat Mats helpful, I personally haven't incorporated them into my training regimen. This is chiefly because, as I've emphasized previously, educating a dog about boundaries and respecting restricted zones is straightforward once equipped with the right knowledge. If you're curious about how boundary training is executed, check out this **video** for a hands-on demonstration.

Spray Bottles +P: These are used to deliver a swift spray of water as a means to disrupt undesirable behaviors such as barking.

Spray bottles are relatively simple tools that might effectively deter some unwanted behaviors. While I've employed them in the past to curb barking, the results have been inconsistent. The dog's perception of the water spray is pivotal. If the dog finds the spray enjoyable, it'll inadvertently reinforce the behavior. On the other hand, if the dog is indifferent to the spray, it tends to be ineffective. The tool seems most productive for the subset of dogs that dislike the sensation. Nevertheless, a better approach would be to teach the dog specific commands like "quiet" or divert them to a more appropriate behavior.

Another variation of this is using a water hose, which I always keep ready when facilitating group play amongst multiple dogs. This method often serves as a quick deterrent to unwanted behaviors that could escalate into bigger problems. A prime example is when some dogs engage in full-contact play, unintentionally causing issues with dogs that prefer gentler interaction. In such instances, a quick spray from the hose can prevent the continuation of such behavior. I've also successfully used this approach to diffuse dog fights, a scenario that can arise when large groups of dogs interact. The water hose is my first resort in halting a dog fight, as it poses fewer risks compared to physically intervening, which carries the added risk of being bitten. However, just as with the spray bottle, this method has varied effects; it serves as a correction for some dogs, while dogs that enjoy water might perceive it as a reward.

Startling Noises +P: To interrupt and deter unwanted behaviors, some trainers might utilize unexpected noises. A can filled with coins can produce a sharp, jarring rattle when shaken, while a dog air horn emits a piercing blast. Both sounds serve to momentarily distract and dissuade the dog from its current action, offering an immediate correction.

Though some might believe in the efficacy of using startling noises to deter unwanted behaviors, I strongly advocate against it. Resorting to scare tactics can induce fear in dogs, which often does more harm than good. This fear can not only hamper training but can also sow seeds of aggression. I've always emphasized on cultivating confidence in dogs; this approach simplifies training endeavors and minimizes aggressive propensities. Interestingly, I employ tools like a coin-filled can in a positive manner – using it during play sessions, thus familiarizing dogs with various sounds in a playful way. The goal should always be a confident, non-aggressive dog, rather than one that's been conditioned through fear.

That said, an airhorn can indeed serve as a valuable asset while walking your dog. It can act as a deterrent against other untrained, off-leash dogs that may approach your dog, possibly preventing dog fights. So, while it's not recommended to use such devices on your own dog due to the potential negative impacts, it can be a practical tool when an unknown dog invades your or your dog's personal space.

Time-out -P: A "time-out" serves as a negative punishment technique. It involves withdrawing something the dog values (like attention or the chance to play) immediately after an unwanted behavior. This method aims to reduce the chances of that behavior recurring. For instance, if a puppy becomes overly aggressive during play, one might implement a brief time-out by either stopping the play or exiting the room. This teaches the puppy that such behavior results in an undesired outcome (termination of play), and thus, it becomes less prone to exhibit that behavior.

"Time-out" as a strategy is nuanced, its effectiveness being largely contingent upon what truly motivates the dog. Consider the scenario where a dog excitedly leaps up during a petting session. If you immediately turn your back, depriving the dog of the sought-after attention, it might deter a dog driven by the desire for interaction. However, if the sheer act of jumping provides its own thrill for the dog, then this approach may prove ineffectual.

Some owners might lean towards using a crate as a means of time-out. It's imperative to remember that a crate should predominantly be a haven of comfort for the dog, not a punitive space. By intermittently placing a dog in its crate devoid of any behavioral context, we can ensure the crate's positive association remains intact.

One crucial aspect to underscore when implementing any form of correction, including time-outs, is the need to remain calm and impersonal. Dogs benefit most from a straightforward cause-and-effect understanding, rather than deciphering emotional reactions. Moreover, consistency is the foundation of successful dog training. When a behavior invariably leads to a particular outcome, such as a time-out, that outcome must be delivered unwaveringly. Such consistency in response helps the dog establish clear links between actions and consequences, making training more effective and the experience more enriching for both the trainer and the trainee.

Ultrasonic Devices +P: Ultrasonic devices produce a high-pitched sound that dogs find disagreeable, yet it often remains inaudible to humans. These devices serve to discourage behaviors such as barking or venturing into restricted areas.

Ultrasonic devices can indeed serve as a potential remedy for undesirable behaviors like incessant barking within the home. I can attest to their effectiveness, having utilized them myself when my

daughter was born to prevent any disturbances from my dogs' barking. However, the judicious application of these tools is pivotal to avoid unwarranted repercussions.

For instance, the devices I utilized allowed adjustments to the sound intensity, enabling a gradual increase in the level throughout the initial week, ultimately reaching an intensity sufficient to deter my dogs from barking—successfully achieving the desired silence. Typically, I'd employ a 'quiet' command; however, it's reactive, coming into play post-bark, which, in my situation, could have been problematic. Hence, the device was an optimal solution to preemptively curb barking.

In conclusion, your goals and specific conditions will dictate whether this tool can be beneficial in achieving your training objectives.

Verbal Corrections +P: "No" or "Ah-Ah": These are firm vocal interruptions used to halt undesirable behaviors. Growl or Low Tone: Some trainers employ a growling sound or a deeper vocal tone to mimic the corrective sound of another dog. It's essential to differentiate this from a marker. While a marker can foreshadow a reward or a correction, here, the sound itself is the correction.

Understanding the distinction between a verbal correction and a conditioned punisher/marker is paramount. A verbal correction is indeed the correction, whereas a marker predicts the correction (markers can also predict rewards). This differentiation is crucial. I always counsel my students to refrain from utilizing verbal corrections as they can escalate to yells or exhibit forms of dominance, which are counterproductive.

Rather than resorting to dominance tactics, it is advisable to cooperate with the dog, fostering a collaborative approach towards achieving shared objectives. Reacting with harsh words or yelling can significantly impair the trust between the owner and the dog, infusing an element of fear and rendering the environment unpredictable. This erratic scenario can, over time, deplete the dog's confidence and induce anxiety or skittishness. While yelling may cease an undesirable behavior momentarily, it is not conducive to training; it merely instills fear.

Instead, utilizing a word, like "no", as a marker for positive punishment coupled with a corrective action like a leash pop is more effective. It is the ensuing action post-word that should render it significant, not the manner it's spoken. The dog associates the word with its predictions. Employing a calm, low volume "no" marker followed by a calm implementation of the correction fosters a cause-and-effect relationship, allowing the dog to comprehend and avoid behaviors that trigger the correction-inducing marker. The word itself should not represent the correction.

Vibration Collars +R, -R, and +P (contextual): These collars are akin to E-Collars, but they employ only vibrations, devoid of any electric pulse, to capture a dog's attention.

Vibration collars can be an effective means to communicate certain commands like recall or to serve as markers and are especially helpful for deaf dogs. However, their efficacy is limited in instilling steadfast obedience. This limitation stems from the fact that dogs are largely driven by motivation, and the correction level in these collars is usually too mild to be considered a deterrent by many dogs, hence making them unreliable for maintaining off-leash control.

For instance, consider a scenario where a dog, while on a hike and wearing this collar, spots a rabbit and starts to chase it toward a busy road. The probability of the collar stopping the dog is minimal, as the

dog's desire to chase would likely supersede any deterrence the vibration might provide. Therefore, while these collars can be beneficial for basic communication, they may not ensure off-leash reliability. If achieving reliable off-leash obedience is your goal, utilizing a more effective tool, like a remote training collar, is advisable.

Withholding Rewards -P: The practice of withholding rewards is a foundational method in various dog training strategies. This method involves abstaining from giving a treat, toy, or affection until the dog displays the desired behavior.

For instance, if a dog is expected to hold a 'stay' position and breaks it to get the treat, rewarding them at this point would mean reinforcing the breaking of the stay, not the maintaining of it. Proper timing is critical in this technique to signal to the dog when they've erred or succeeded, ensuring that the reward reinforces the correct behavior.

Knowing where the dog is in the training process is pivotal. For a more experienced dog that understands the 'down' command, the reward should be withheld until both rear and elbows are grounded in the correct position. However, for a new dog in training, the approach needs to be different. Assisted shaping can be beneficial in such cases, rewarding the dog for attempting the 'down,' even if the full position isn't realized yet. This strategy helps build the dog's confidence and perseverance, preventing them from giving up because obtaining the reward seems too difficult.

The thoughtful and considerate application of the withholding rewards method, aligned with the dog's training level and combined with precise timing, is crucial for effectively teaching and reinforcing desired behaviors in dogs.

Methodologies and Philosophies: A Guide to Dog Training Approaches

Now that we have covered most of the techniques, let's discuss the different methods of dog training and the techniques they employ. This article provides a brief overview of each method, but I'll delve deeper into each one in future articles.

Pure Positive Training: An Overview

Introduction

Let's dive into "pure positive training." At its core, this method is defined by its unwavering reliance on positive reinforcement and negative punishment. Trainers who specialize in this approach often employ markers, facilitating effective communication with the dogs they train. The power of this approach is its ability to guide dogs toward desired behaviors.

Efficacy and Application

Certain dogs, particularly those with an intrinsic desire to please, excel under this training style. A wide range of trainers employ this method to instill new behaviors. Notably, even though I champion balanced training, I emphasize that my new students begin as "pure positive" trainers. This foundational strategy

ensures they refine their timing and communication skills with dogs. Errors within the pure positive paradigm tend to be less severe than the potential pitfalls of misapplied corrections.

Techniques and Implementation

Excluding methods rooted in positive punishment and negative reinforcement, pure positive trainers utilize nearly every technique we've discussed. For pet owners considering a "board and train" model, selecting a pure positive expert could be a wise choice. Their deliberate evasion of positive punishment reduces the possibility of issues from over-aggressive corrections or mistimed interventions.

Benefits and Considerations

Reward-based training, which is a hallmark of this style, is more of a marathon than a sprint, ensuring dogs have ample opportunities for learning. On the other hand, other styles of training might rush the process by prematurely or overly employing corrections, especially in time-bound programs like 3 or 5-week courses. It's worth noting that while it may seem these trainers refrain from corrections altogether, they deftly weave them in, favoring negative punishment and staying vigilant to prevent unwanted behaviors.

Balanced Training Insights

As a balanced trainer, I reserve corrections for client dogs specifically when desired for enhanced reliability and when the approach is meticulously strategized. This cautious stance is vital to avoid the pitfall of hastening training with premature corrections. Those with concerns can always ask trainers to describe more precisely their program, ensuring clarity on when corrections are introduced. If one isn't at ease with positive punishment, it's entirely feasible to request its omission from the training process. However, for those confident in a trainer's prowess and experience, integrating positive punishment can be instrumental in achieving full reliability in training. After all, our dogs' behaviors are driven by motivation: they're either seeking pleasure, avoiding discomfort, or simply enjoying a behavior that's inherently fun, known as self-reinforcing behavior.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the efficacy of training hinges predominantly on the trainer's competence and the method employed. Hiring a pure positive trainer to guide your dog in specific commands can be an optimal choice, especially if there's a lack of skilled balanced trainers nearby.

Balanced Dog Training: A Comprehensive Approach

Introduction to Balanced Training

Among the prevalent training styles is the balanced training approach. As its name suggests, balanced training harmoniously merges reward-based techniques, akin to those adopted by pure positive trainers, with corrections or aversive strategies. The objective is to strike a "balance" between positive reinforcements and corrective measures, producing a well-behaved, well-adjusted, and obedient canine companion.

Benefits and Philosophies

Proponents of this method, including myself, believe that such a blend offers a comprehensive toolkit to tackle a spectrum of dog behaviors. This becomes particularly pertinent in scenarios where sole reliance on positive reinforcement might not yield the desired outcomes. Drawing from my professional trajectory and insights, when executed meticulously, balanced training consistently delivers unparalleled results.

Implementation of Balanced Training

Central to the philosophy of balanced training is the application of all four quadrants of operant conditioning. It's crucial to emphasize that the initial stages of balanced training often mirror those of pure positive methodologies. Trainers prioritize forging a robust bond and instilling trust with the canine, subsequently enlightening them about the communication modalities through techniques like markers, luring, shaping, and leash pressure. This foundational phase paves the way for effective communication, facilitating the teaching of desired behaviors and deterrence of undesired ones via +R, -R, and -P.

Introducing Corrections

When a dog demonstrates profound comprehension of behaviors, trainers might incorporate +P, manifesting as corrections like a leash pop or a remote training collar. This addition is contingent upon the trainer's judgment of its necessity for bolstering reliability and ensuring safety. Moreover, in instances where a dog exhibits perilous or detrimental habits, immediate corrective measures might be deemed essential. For instance, instant corrections could be meted out for behaviors like digging, car chasing, furniture chewing, or scavenging trash.

Techniques Employed by Balanced Trainers

Balanced trainers employ a myriad of the aforementioned techniques; however, they often opt out of several. This selection is largely driven by the perceived efficacy of a technique or the availability of superior alternatives. While many balanced trainers abstain from certain methods, there are others who might still embrace them. Techniques less commonly employed by many balanced trainers include Alpha Rolling, Avoidance Training, Bitter Sprays, Citronella Collars, Hand Poke or Tap, Hold-Down, Motion-Activated Sprays, Muzzle Grabs, Scat Mats, Startling Noises, and Verbal Corrections. It's crucial to reiterate that the spectrum of tools and techniques is diverse, and what one balanced trainer might avoid, another might deem essential.

Diverse Philosophies Within Balanced Training

It's pivotal to understand that the domain of dog training isn't strictly binary. Even among those categorizing themselves as "balanced trainers," there exists a myriad of techniques, instruments, and ideologies. Every trainer, while adhering to the overarching principles, brings a unique touch to the balanced training approach.

Traditional Style Dog Training

Traditional style dog trainers offer a distinct perspective on canine instruction. Unlike the more contemporary pure positive and balanced methods, these trainers lean heavily on a corrective approach.

Core Philosophy of Traditional Training

At its core, traditional training is centered around enforcing obedience. A quintessential practice in this method is what is termed as "avoidance style training." Here, a dog is first given a command. Without prior understanding or exposure to the command, the dog is then promptly corrected into the position described by that command. For example: a command to "sit" would be followed by a pop upwards on the leash combined with a push on the dog's hindquarters, steering it into the sitting posture. Once the dog adheres to the command, many traditional trainers follow up with immediate praise and reward.

The Mechanics of Positive Punishment in Traditional Training

Now, this may be counterintuitive for many, especially considering that reinforcement tends to foster behaviors, while punishment generally discourages repetition. How, then, does positive punishment actually impart lessons in this methodology? It's anchored in the principle of rectifying non-compliance. Dogs, over time, learn the trick of sidestepping these corrections simply by adhering to commands. However, this approach can be controversial, chiefly because it can be deemed unjust to the dog. Essentially, dogs are reprimanded for errors without ever being shown the correct behavior, a process that can induce stress. Though they might swiftly grasp compliance, the training experience isn't necessarily a pleasant one for them.

Blending Corrections with Rewards

It's essential to note that while traditional trainers emphasize corrections, many do intertwine reward-based methods. For instance, after guiding a dog into a sit position through correction, they will often pair it with praise and perhaps a treat. This duality showcases their reliance on a broader spectrum of techniques. However, they tend to prioritize corrective methods at the outset, transitioning to rewards later.

Dangers of Introducing New Trainers to Traditional Training

Diving straight into traditional training can be particularly perilous for budding trainers. Inexperience often translates to inaccurate timing in training, which not only impedes a dog's learning pace but also exposes it to excessive corrections. A prevalent misstep in dog training is "overshadowing," where simultaneous stimuli result in a dog prioritizing one over the other based on relevance. In the context of avoidance style training, if a command and a correction are delivered at the same time, the dog often cannot differentiate or respond properly. This muddling intensifies the dog's stress, especially if the command doesn't precede the correction. Without this sequence, a dog can't preemptively comply to avoid the forthcoming correction.

Quadrants and Phrases

Traditional trainers aren't limited to a single quadrant of operant conditioning; they employ all four but kickstart the process with positive punishment. There are common sayings that epitomize the distinct philosophies: traditional trainers often go by "precision first, attitude later," while many balanced trainers advocate "attitude first, precision later."

Modern Perspectives on Traditional Training

The landscape of dog training is ever-evolving. Traditional dog training, with its stringent emphasis on obedience and a reduced focus on rewards, doesn't enjoy the universal appeal it once did. Contemporary training spheres sometimes critique it, pointing out potential detriments to dog well-

being and the crucial human-dog rapport. Nonetheless, there persists a cohort of trainers and dog aficionados who vouch for its efficacy, especially when tailored to specific contexts.

Alpha or Dominance Theory in Dog Training

Dominance theory in dog training has long been a focal point of discussion and debate among canine experts. Let's break down its history, principles, controversies, and the evolving viewpoints in modern dog training.

Historical Roots and Principles

The foundations of the Alpha or Dominance theory can be traced back to 20th-century wolf studies. In observing captive wolves, researchers discerned a hierarchical structure, leading to the widespread acceptance of the "Alpha" wolf concept. Advocates of this theory assert that within a wolf pack exists a structured hierarchy, crowned by a dominant "Alpha" wolf. Drawing parallels to the human-dog bond, the theory proposes that for a harmonious relationship, humans must assert their "Alpha" position to command respect and obedience from their canine companion. This concept gained traction, particularly through media portrayals and endorsements by some high-profile dog trainers.

Common Techniques Associated with the Theory

Trainers adhering to the Alpha or Dominance methodology employ a distinctive set of techniques, including:

Alpha Roll: Physically rolling the dog onto its back to simulate a submissive posture.

Staring: Engaging in prolonged eye contact to assert dominance.

Eating Priorities: The human eats before the dog meant to establish a pecking order.

Physical Corrections: Using hands or feet for quick pokes or heel kicks as corrective measures.

Resource Control: Regulating access to toys, food, or space.

Restricting Access: Denying the dog certain privileges or areas.

Ignoring: Withholding attention to manifest dominance.

Controversies and Modern Understanding

Several factors challenge the Alpha or Dominance paradigm:

Misconception of Wolf Behavior: Contemporary research on wild wolves challenges the dominance hierarchy narrative. Real-world wolf packs more closely resemble familial structures, with parent wolves guiding their offspring rather than a strict alpha-dominant dynamic.

Distinct Dog-Wolf Dynamics: Even if wolves adhered to strict dominance hierarchies, domesticated dogs, after co-evolving with humans over millennia, exhibit distinct social behaviors. Framing this relationship within the confines of a dominance hierarchy may not do justice to its complexities.

Potential Aggression Risk: Dominance-based tactics might intensify a dog's aggression. While these methods might temporarily suppress unwanted actions, they can also foster fear, anxiety, and heightened aggression.

Overlooking Established Learning Theories: Dominance-driven methods often neglect the well-established tenets of operant and classical conditioning, crucial to comprehending animal learning.

Modern Dog Training Philosophies

The broader dog training community has predominantly transitioned away from dominance-centered techniques. Current dog trainers champion positive reinforcement and scientifically backed training approaches. Central principles of this contemporary methodology encompass fostering a trust-filled, positive bond with dogs, understanding their unique requirements, and emphasizing effective two-way communication.

In summary, while the dominance narrative once dominated dog training, modern approaches emphasize science-rooted, positive reinforcement techniques. The ultimate aim remains to cultivate a bond of trust and open communication with our dogs.

In conclusion

As highlighted earlier, the article gives a quick look at the four main dog training methods common today. Naturally, the overarching query becomes: Which method aligns best with both you and your dog?

While my personal inclination as a balanced trainer might seemingly direct my recommendation towards balanced training, it's crucial to understand that the efficacy of any given method often depends on many factors. These factors encompass the dog's unique disposition, the trainer's prowess and comprehension of the method, and the specific objectives of the training.

Before partnering with a trainer, ensure you delve into a few key questions:

Training Philosophy: Which dog training approach do they resonate with the most?

Techniques and Preferences: Provide a transparent insight into the techniques you're comfortable with or keen to learn. Remember, training is as much about the comfort of the handler as it is about the dog.

To facilitate this dialogue, I've made a downloadable PDF [[link here](#)], listing all the techniques discussed in this article. It includes a convenient checklist format, enabling you to mark your preferences. This tool will be invaluable in ensuring that your aspirations and the trainer's methodologies seamlessly fit well together.

Additional Points to Consider:

Guarantees: Find out if the trainer provides any guarantees. A guarantee can often serve as a testament to a trainer's confidence in their approach. It offers you an added layer of assurance and reduces potential risks.

Positive Punishment Concerns: If you have worries about corrections having a negative impact on your dog, clearly communicate your preference for techniques that steer clear of positive punishment.

Lastly, it's always important to remember that the ultimate objective of training is to foster a bond of trust, mutual respect, and effective communication between you and your dog. Choose a path that fortifies this bond while ensuring the well-being and happiness of both parties.