

Obedience Training - Part I

By

Wendy Jordan
(AKA Maggie)

When Carol discussed the Roundtable topics with me, I suggested Sit, Down, and Stand as the exercises to start with for several reasons. First, aside from some foundation games and attention exercises, these are the first commands I start puppies on. Secondly, I like to start them all at or about the same time. Third they are the three positions your dog must achieve to learn all the other obedience exercises. For those of you working with a puppy, I do start a few games first. I'm not in a rush to start sit/down/stand. For those of you with dogs you plan to show in conformation, I might work stacking and the stand for a week or so before introducing sit, and I always work stands at the same time to avoid confusion or the dog thinking "sit" is the only "good" position. Beyond that it's an individual thing, as to how I'll start these three positions. With some dogs I introduce all three in the same five-minute session. With others, I'll take as many as nine days to introduce all three. If I am breaking them up, I will often start with Down and Stand first, introducing Sit last.

With my own dogs, I establish the behavior first and then add the command/cue. However I have found that most new students get confused by this new way of teaching and will give the command anyway. So I allow it and even tell them to give the command first as I feel it's far more important that they learn when the command and behavior should occur and not to repeat the command. But for those of you familiar with behavior shaping, know that the command is not necessary in the beginning.

I don't believe in a right method and a wrong method. I simply believe that there are some methods that are better than others are and that some methods will better meet particular goals than others will.

When I started obedience training in the 70's a six-foot lead, chain choke collar, and your voice was all you needed. Pop if pup does wrong, or pop to make him do what you want...praise when pup gets it right. If pup gets it wrong say "no" and pop again. Pure compulsive training.

What you'll find nowadays is everything from pure compulsive to pure positive but for the most part I'd say that the most successful competition trainers reach a happy medium between the two. Granted I haven't peeked into every competition trainer's ring recently! You can go with pure operant conditioning, using primarily the clicker as a conditioned reinforcer and behavior shaping. However from what I've seen and heard, many trainers are combining lure training and even some compulsive methods with the conditioned reinforcer. Personally I don't have the patience to use behavior shaping for every exercise, so I will lure or otherwise induce the behavior in many cases. There are also still trainers out there who use mild compulsion paired with conditioned reinforcement to teach the exercises. Of course old style trainers still exist as well. Anyhow, I think a balanced trainer is really the best. One who can use the pure positive methods when called for, but who can switch to lure training or mild compulsion equally as well. The Doberman is such a sensitive, intuitive, and intelligent dog that I really feel strong compulsive methods affect them negatively, and they are one of the best

breeds to use operant conditioning with. It helps develop a confident dog that is not afraid of being wrong. However Dobbies are also strong willed, and there may come a time when a correction is called for, and a fair correction can teach a lot.

Regardless of the method used to train the dog, I think what is more important is technique (if the two can be separated). There are certain changes made to how individual exercises are taught from how they were taught years ago, and these changes (If you are aware of them or your instructor teaches them) are extremely conducive to developing the skills needed to not only qualify but do well in the obedience ring. I'm not one to tell every student that they need to score in the 90's or even that they should strive for it. I don't push my students, instead I let them set their own goals. But if you train for a 200 you're likely to get 90s...so if you train for 70's you're likely to NQ. Anyhow, before I ramble on, what I wanted to point out it takes just as much effort to train a dog that can score in the 80s and 90s as it is to train a dog that scores in the 70s. But the new techniques enable you to teach things right from the start and avoid having to go back and correct or change problems.

Example of different training methods:

A simple example of what I'm talking about is teaching a tuck sit from the first time you teach the sit, and to use your left hand rather than your right. The compulsive method to teach the sit is to lift up on the lead with your right hand, until the dog hits the floor or to squeeze the dog's croup. An inductive method of teaching the sit is to use a piece of food in your right hand, raise it up over the dog's head until it sits. All three are valid ways to teach sit and will succeed in teaching a dog to sit. However they also teach a rocked sit and you will have to hope that your dog develops the tuck sit on its own, accept a rocked sit (and the many points you will lose because of it), or retrain the sit later on. However there are two techniques that are better. One is using a behavior marker (clicker) to reinforce any natural sits the dog does (of course if the dog naturally does rocked sits you're still faced with correcting the problem). The other technique involves food (or toy), but instead of stepping towards the dog and raising the food up over the dog's head, you lure the dog forward and slightly up. This will encourage a tucked sit right off the bat, and if you are left handed or can use your left hand well enough, you can start this with the left hand thus teaching the dog not only a tucked sit but also the hand signal for utility.

Conditioned Reinforcers:

A reinforcement or reinforcer is anything that will result in the likelihood that the behavior will occur again. This can be negative or positive, but what I am referring to in most usage is positive reinforcement. Types of reinforcements are food, praise, and play. A C/R or Conditioned Reinforcer refers to the use of an aid such as the clicker which on its own means nothing to the dog, but after conditioning signals the dog that food (reinforcement) is coming, thus in itself becomes a reinforcer. C/R, mainly the clicker, is also called a behavior marker and allows you to say to the dog "That's it...good...etc" the INSTANT the desired behavior occurs. Normally, food, play, and even praise is slightly delayed, but a C/R allows the reinforcement to be better connected to the behavior it is intended to reinforce. If you want to learn more, I'd suggest any of Karen Pryor's books or Morgan Spector's book "clicker training the obedience dog" (Or something close to that!)

A conditioned reinforcer is a signal or cue that signals that a primary reinforcement is coming (food, toy, play, etc). The C/R in itself means absolutely nothing to the dog. But the dog is conditioned to equate the C/R with the fact that the primary reinforcement will follow. Clickers, whistles, and even a word can be a C/R, however a mechanical C/R has the advantage. Once the dog equates the C/R with the primary reinforcement the C/R can be used to mark desired behavior. The C/R also allows us

to delay the P/R (primary reinforcement) slightly. Here's how it works...Dog does behavior, trainer uses C/R, and then steps in and gives food.

Advantages of a C/R are the P/R can be delayed. The behavior is reinforced instantly because a mechanical C/R can be given almost instantaneously. Finally for those of you with hard-mouthed dogs, using a C/R means that you don't have to deliver food to the dog while he/she is performing the desired behavior. Thus the food can be tossed, dropped on the floor or fed from the palm.

Clickers are my choice for C/R, but any mechanical sound is preferable to a spoken word. To introduce the C/R you must first Click (make the sound) then immediately feed (food is the preferred choice for the P/R). Do those multiple times, then start to use the Clicker to reinforce behaviors. Use it for one behavior at a time in the beginning. If anyone desires, I can give you some simple exercises to practice so you can learn more about using a C/R.

When using a C/R, the C/R should occur when the dog offers the desired behavior. It's also important to remember that the C/R marks the end of the behavior. For example if you Click for the dog putting its rear end on the floor (when teaching sit) the dog doesn't have to continue sitting after the click occurs. Its ok if the dog stands up, etc, after the click even if you haven't delivered the food yet. Its also important to remember that a C/R is a promise that a P/R is coming, so every time you click you must follow it with the P/R (food) even if the click was an accident or if you clicked for the wrong thing. Finally, keep in mind that it is the C/R that you fade out, not the P/R (same as what I just said about the C/R being a promise and always follow it up with the P/R). Eventually you will phase out the C/R not the P/R.

There is lots of information out there to teach you further how to use Conditioned Reinforcers and Behavior Shaping to train your dog. So I'll advise that you do some self-study.

Collars, Corrections and More:

I thought this might be an appropriate place to mention a few things. First, as you have noticed, I don't use strong leash corrections and I don't advocate the use of slip/choke collars. I am happy to elaborate on my reasons behind this if anyone would like to know. But in a nutshell, I don't normally (I can and I have in some situations) use these tools and methods as the risk of harm from using them incorrectly is great and the ease of using them correctly is low! I "grew up" on jerk and praise type of training, and trained that way for over ten years. Leash corrections done correctly can be a valuable technique in training used properly, and I have, can, and do still use them. However I find that the average owner has difficulty learning to deliver them and it is the dog who takes the brunt of the owners mistakes. I don't feel that's fair to the dog, no matter how incorrigible the dog may be and so I don't use them with most students any longer. Then there is the fact that even when used correctly, leash corrections are putting stress on the neck, which can lead to further problems down the road. With Dobermans this is especially a concern (as they are prone to vertebrae problems). This doesn't even cover the fact that correction based training when used on a breed that is as sensitive and intelligent as the Doberman, might lead to further misunderstandings, complications, side effect behaviors, and a deterioration of the dogs attitude towards working.

If I am going to use leash corrections (which I personally still do in certain applications) I will only deliver them when the dog is on a buckle collar or a prong collar, and the type of corrections I use are "nudges" or "taps" more than "jerks".

As for collars, I generally start a dog on a buckle collar, and then move to a head halter or a prong if needed. I also have students who use the limited slip or greyhound style collar, and these are as safe as a buckle (IMHO) but offer a bit more control than a buckle. Head Halters are what I suggest for the average dog owner, and prongs are what I use for my competition students with dogs that have progressed in training and have a basic understanding of what we want them to do.

Now saying this doesn't mean that you won't ever see me using a choke/slip collar or that you won't ever see me using a strong leash pop. I use slip collars in the conformation ring, and there is nothing better IMHO. (The terrier leads give you no control whatsoever) I can and will correct a dog strongly (occasionally with the leash and slip collar) for certain behaviors, in particular aggression towards another dog when we are showing in the breed ring. Not that I intend this to be a case of do as I say not as I do...but I just wanted to point out that nothing is never say never. I wouldn't want anyone coming on here and saying "But I've seen you..."

DOWN:

For the Down, we start with the dog in the standing position. I start all dogs with a luring method first, occasionally using a conditioned behavior marker (the clicker) in conjunction - (my preference). This seems to be easiest for most students. From there any confusion or problems are handled individually. I always start with the methods I have found to work best for the handlers, but am always prepared to use another method if my first choice isn't best for the individual dog/handler team. The Down we are establishing first is the folding or sphinx down that is used for the Drop on Recall. A curled Down (or down and over on one hip) is introduced separately and later in training.

Teaching:

With the dog standing, take a piece of food or the dog's favorite toy in your right hand. Handler will be standing or kneeling determined by the dog's size. Tell the dog "Down" then move the Right hand from dog's nose level to the floor, pushing towards the dog with the hand so that your hand is actually moving towards the center of the dog's chest and slightly down between the legs. At this point your dog will either bow, lie down, or try to grab the lure! DO NOT repeat the command! Be patient and quiet, eventually your dog will fold to the floor. Instantly "reinforce" the behavior by giving the food, or throwing the toy forward. If your dog puts his front on the floor but not his rear and IF your patience gives out, you can gently guide the rear down and then reward him. Typically in three repetitions the dog learns what you are asking him to do. Important Note: It is important that you do not move your right hand or your body away from the dog when teaching this behavior. If you do the dog will also move forward rather than giving the desired "fold back/collapse" behavior. If you are getting forward motion from the dog examine your own movement closely. Make an effort to move towards the dog, even taking a step if needed.

Guidelines:

Teach this behavior in repetitions of three. As the dog starts to respond correctly every time, lessen the movement of your right hand till you are no longer luring the dog to the floor but are waiting for him to get there on his own. However do reward him for every correct response by giving the food or throwing the toy. After the behavior is consistent, you will start to work away from the reinforcement by asking him to repeat the behavior multiple times before getting the reward.

Help:

If your dog refuses to fold back and instead sits first, make him stand then start again. You can also use your left hand on the dog's collar, guiding towards the dog and down on an angle (off the shoulder) to help him fold if he doesn't "get it" after a few tries.

Question:

How important is it for them to curl for the long down?

Answer:

I think the curl is very important, especially for Dobermans, as they are less likely to relax on the stays anyway. I prefer a curled down to be developed before I will even introduce the stay. Switching positions (regardless of the position) is the same as breaking a stay and is treated appropriately. However I won't push a student to teach the curl if it is frustrating for them or their dog. If it seems too daunting, they will simply work on teaching a reliable stay in the crouched (sphinx) position. I have a student, who has trained several toy poodles with me, and most of them do the crouch...but toy poodles are different from Dobes.

So teach the curl first, until the dog will automatically go into a curled down on command. (From a sit or a stand the dog should go down into a curled position on one command). When the dog can do this, build the time the dog will hold that curled down with you at their side or directly in front of the dog. Build to 30 seconds. Then proceed as I have described in stays. But keep in mind through all of it that the dog must remain in the curl. Switching hips and switching from curled to sphinx is not acceptable. Go slow and don't proceed to the next level unless the dog is successful at the current level.

However I did want to tell you that while I feel the curled downs are important, you can train the downstay successfully without it. If you don't want to bother with the curled downs, then just work on developing a good reliable stay regardless of the dog's position. However if you do wish to pursue the curled downs, I would go back and reestablish the down first and don't work down stays until the curled down is established. The more time you spend establishing the curled down, the faster the stay in that position will progress.

SIT

The sits I teach focuses on developing a tuck sit rather than a rocked sit. A tucked sit is one where the dog moves his rear end under him to sit rather than walking back with his front legs and rocking onto his rear. (Does that give the right picture?) A Tuck sit is the desired sit for competition, and for the pet dog it isn't any more difficult to teach nor does it take any more time. Also once the rocked sit is established it becomes a very hard habit to break.

Teaching:

Once again I start with Luring (food works best) and the dog is in the stand position. Tell the dog to sit, then using your Left hand, move the hand slowly from the dogs nose, upward and slightly away from the dog. Do not move the hand towards the dog (as is often recommended!) as it will push the dog back into a rocked sit. Keep the hand as close to the dog as needed to keep the dogs focus on the hand. Practice in sets of three. As the sit becomes consistent, phase the food out of your hand, but give it for a correct response. When the dog sits consistently without the lure in the hand, fade out the hand signal. Finally ask the dog to do multiple repetitions before reinforcing. (I'll provide a separate post on reinforcement schedules in a few days.)

Trouble shooting:

When introducing the sit you need to stand facing the dog so that you can use your left hand. Of course once the sit is established you'll work it on verbal cue from all sides, and with hand signal from in front. If the dog insists on rocking back wards, go slower, use a really enticing lure, and put the dog on leash holding the leash snug so the dog cant rock back. Don't pull the leash, but just hold it short enough that should the dog move backwards it will be stopped.

STAND:

The stand is started from the sit position. The stand we are working on establishing is a "kick back" stand where the dog moves his rear legs backwards to stand rather than pulling/walking forward with his front legs. It establishes a more solid, neater, and faster stand and helps the dog to learn the moving stand (utility exercise) faster.

Teaching:

With the dog sitting, the handler should be in "heel" position (dog is at the handlers left side, and both are facing the same direction). Once again we will start this with luring, but use your right hand for this exercise with food in it (rather than a toy). When you tell the dog to stand, you will take one step forward with your left foot, and your right hand will move from your right side, to the front of the dog and into his nose as if you were going to bop his nose with your hand. Be very careful not to show the hand and then move it in front of (away from) the dog. It has to appear and move to his nose in one quick motion. When the hand meets the dogs nose, the dog will take the food. Dog does not have to hold the stand position for any length of time. After a few days at this level, stop stepping forward and simply move your right hand to the dog as you command stand. Once the behavior is consistent, remove the food from the right hand. With the stand I don't fade the hand signal. I find that its confusing and many times the dog will move towards the hand. Instead I will stop using the hand

signal "cold turkey" and will help the dog with my left hand or left foot touching the dog's belly if it isn't able to achieve the stand on just the verbal command.

Help:

If dog is moving forward once you stop stepping, you are probably still making some type of forward motion with your signal, or your signal is delayed. Pay close attention to what you are doing. If he is still moving forward put the dog on leash and hold it short so he can't move forward. You can also touch (not kick!) the dogs back right leg (or belly) with the toe of your left foot to encourage him to pop up instantly.

Question:

Can you teach the stand from the down position rather than the sit position or is it usually called for from the sit?

Answer:

I often work the stand from a down. So yes, you can teach it that way if for some reason you don't want to teach it from the sit. I can't say that it will give you the same (kick back) results as teaching it from a sit, but it might. However I think there is another advantage to teaching it from the sit. The dog learns that stand is an active position, not just the position you assume prior to walking, and the dog also learns that the stand is an alternative to sit. In other words there are some people who teach stand and down but not sit because they don't want their "show" dog to sit in the ring. But teaching the dog sit as well as stand allows you to have the sit reliably on cue (command) so that the dog is less likely to sit off cue.

As for when the stand is "called for", the stand in the obedience ring is called for from the sit or the stand. In Novice the dog is often sitting in heel position prior to the stand for exam exercise, however sitting is not a requirement for the stand for exam so the dog might be standing as well. In utility (the next time there is a stand) the dog stands from a walk. In Schutzhund the dog stands from a run. In conformation, the dog stands from a stand, a walk, and a run! So no, the sit is not always the position the stand is called from.

FRONT:

I teach Front as a separate exercise, and I personally use the command Front as my Formal Recall. Let me quickly explain the difference between Formal and Informal Recalls. An Informal Recall is when you call the dog but don't expect nor even want the dog to come sit in front of you. I use in situations such as hiking with the dogs, around the yard, and in training. The Formal Recall means come and sit close in front of me. I personally only use this in the ring, but it is a practical command getting the dog in a controlled position off leash. When I'm teaching a Formal Recall (which eventually Front becomes) I break the exercise down into four elements; the Wait, the Informal Come (which is two elements responding instantly and coming quickly), and the Front. (BTW, the Finish is a separate exercise IMHO)

Teaching:

Start with the dog very close, and standing. I don't start Fronts from a sit, that's the third part of the exercise that I work on (sit/wait). There are two approaches that I use with Fronts. The first method is the one I have used with students for years, and involves a lure. Food is ideal. With the dog standing facing you, show the food, give the command, and lure the dog into you and into a sit. Food is your best lure initially. As you lure the dog, the food should go from nose level with the dog, moving towards you (holding it parallel to the ground) and then raise the food up the center of your body. Keep the lure close to your stomach as you move it upwards. With an adult dog you may also want to rock back slightly, or step back with one foot to encourage the dog to come in nice and close.

Guidelines:

Keep in mind too that the sit should be straight, centered in front of you. Tucked sit must be well established before starting Fronts! You don't need to say the dog's name at this point in time. The command can be any word you choose, but keep it separate from the Informal Recall command. I use Front, but Come, or Here are other options. Don't lean over your dog, particularly if it is a puppy. (Puppies see option two) You want the dog as close to you as possible, but not touching you/sitting on your feet. The biggest mistakes when teaching Fronts are leaning over the dog, or teaching Front when a tucked sit has not yet been established. Both can result in a sit that is too far away. If you teach Front with a lure, and have taught the dog to catch, you can put the food in your mouth (sorry if this is offensive to anyone!) and spit the food to the dog after the Front. But do this only once Front is established, and you are ready to wean away from the lure. As the dog starts to respond to the Front command, you will fade out the lure. Alternate the hands using the lure, and then eventually put the lure away and use the food only as a reward after the Front. The first time you decide to work away from the lure, you might find it best to point out Front position with your hand first, then drop the hand to your side. Bring the hand back up if the dog is confused and can't find Front on its own. Its important with the Front, not to accept a poor (crooked, rocked, too far, etc) position and in the beginning to help the dog get it right. If the dog does sit incorrectly simply turn away from the dog which will break him out of the position. Don't release, praise, or anything. Set him up for another Front and this time help him do it correctly. Set him up a third time and see if he gets it without the help. If he does, reward and release. If he doesn't, set him up a fourth time, help him get it right, and end right there. BTW, you will teach sit/wait separately before using it on the Front exercise. Once you have taught it, you will start to build distance on the Fronts, and introduce angled Fronts to the dog. Keep in mind that it is beneficial to establish each element separately and perfect them before putting them together into the Formal Recall exercise. Most of your Front work will be at a very close distance.

INFORMAL RECALL:

The Formal recall is an exercise I back chain, meaning that I start with the last element first. However I do start Informal Recalls with puppies before I ever backchain the recall...which means if I'm working with a puppy I really don't backchain the exercise! LOL The purpose of the Informal Recall as I teach it is to create a positive association with the recall command and running to the owner, and to develop a fast recall. When I introduce Informal Recalls to a class/student, I always first give them my recall rules. These aren't the obedience rules, but my rules to live by to assure a good recall.

1. Never call a dog when you are angry, or for something negative (scolding, bath, crating, etc).
2. Reinforce the recall 99% of the time. It's the one exercise I rarely wean away from food on.

- I will use food for one out of every three recalls for the most part.
3. Never let the dog off leash in an unsafe area (meaning no fence) unless the dog is mature (over one year and ideally two years of age), and fully trained (through Novice at least).
 4. If the dog is off leash, don't call the dog unless you have a reliable recall already established.
 5. Don't repeat the recall command. If you call the dog and it doesn't respond instantly...walk away. Don't give the dog any further attention for the behavior. (not coming) OR if you are in the position (i.e.: on leash or in a small room) to train through the problem do so (explained in the training steps).
 6. Always call the dog for something positive. If it's for a negative, go and get the dog.

Now onto teaching the behavior:

I prefer to shape the recall by reinforcing the dog anytime it comes to you. If you are using a C/R, that means you will start by clicking (using the C/R) whenever the dog turns towards you. If not, you will simply praise when the dog starts towards you on its own, and reward (food or toy/play) when it reaches you. Of course you'll be working this in a small room or fenced yard. As the dog starts watching you closer and coming to you on its own frequently, you may need to start moving away in order to put enough distance that the dog will want to come to you!; At this point add a command (cue) such as Here, Let's Go, or Come. This should be the command you will use for informal recalls, not the command that you will use in the obedience ring (come or front). When working this exercise you will initially reinforce the dog for initiating movement in your direction. Praise immediately, clap your hands, talk happily, or of course click! When the dog reaches you end by giving the food, throwing a toy, or playing a game of tug. After a few days of reinforcing the initial movement in your direction, start to reinforce the dog only after it has moved several steps towards you and ideally only after it has switched to a fast trot or a run. (if you have a slow dog, we will need to discuss motivating and encouraging a run) From there, you will gradually delay the reinforcement until the dog reaches you. Of course mix it up, and at any given time it is appropriate to reward an instant step towards you. It will help keep the dog on its toes and develop a quick response. Once you've established the command, practice your Informal Recall in a variety of situations, calling the dog away from mild distractions and in unusual situations such as when he is eating, resting, etc.

Help:

If the dog doesn't respond, or changes behavior after the initial response, you have two choices. The first is to simply turn your back or walk away. The dog didn't get to you fast enough, so there is no reward. If the dog runs to you when it notices you ignoring it, continue to ignore it for a second or two, then turn around and try another informal recall. The second choice is to step into the dog and use a lure (food or toy) to show the dog what it is that you wanted it to do. You'll step in, show the lure, repeat the command, then back up a few steps. As the dog comes towards you, reinforce the desired behavior and then move on to try a few more (or stop right there if you have worked this exercise several times). BTW, the more fun you make the recall and the better the reinforcement, the better your recall!

Hint:

If you have a friend to help in training, try several restrained informal recalls with the friend holding the dog by the collar or lead. The opposition reflex will encourage the dog to "explode" towards you when you call.

Question:

My dog knows what "here" means. He usually responds correctly, even when he is distracted. But, sometimes when he is distracted, with a toy, or barking at people walking on the road, etc he chooses to ignore the command, until we have called him three or four times, or on rare occasions have to go get him.

Answer:

You haven't proofed him to the level of distractions that he needed. I am assuming that the times he ignores the command have been frequent enough that you feel it is a problem. No dog is ever 100% reliable. They will all make a mistake at some point in time. However you should have consistency and at least know what distractions your dog can't handle. My suggestion is that you go back and retrain the informal recall, putting it on a different command altogether to avoid any negative associations he may have with the Here command (if any).

Question:

I know some mistakes I have made, such as not using food as a reward.

Answer:

As long as you always reinforced the recall, it doesn't matter that you didn't use food. Not all dogs respond to food reinforcement (but most do). Just always reinforce it, and most of the times with a strong reward, and never ever call for a negative. Using multiple commands and "allowing" the mistakes to occur was probably the biggest factor in what has developed, as well as not fully teaching the exercise before giving him the opportunity to make a mistake.

Question:

What do you do when you go get your dog? I usually scold him and tell him to go inside.

Answer:

You have 1-3 seconds to reinforce a behavior be it through positives or negatives. In other words by the time you go and get him it is Too Late to "scold him", all it does is creates a negative attitude and may even teach him to avoid you in that situation. This is why it is extremely important to fully train and proof the exercise on leash, and make sure the dog is mature, before giving him the opportunity off leash in an "uncontrolled" situation. If he is on leash and doesn't respond because he is distracted, you can give a leash correction if you wish, followed by showing him what he should have did. If the dog is off leash I recommend going to get him but not to scold. Simply walk in to the dog, show him a lure, move backwards a few steps praising if the dog moves towards you, then rewarding for the right behavior. Then try another Informal Recall and if the dog responds instantly immediately praise and jackpot with a good/big reward.

HEELING:

First remember this is just my interpretation and the way I separate the different styles of the heel exercise. Others may see it differently or call each by a different name.

A. Walking:

This is what I call a basic walk on a loose leash. Basically it means walk with me and don't pull me...but it doesn't define the dog's position any further. The dog may walk in any proximity to you as long as it doesn't pull on the leash. This is what I teach to beginners and puppies first and foremost. For some people it is all they ever need their dogs to do. Others will want or need a more defined Heel and should then train for one of the two types that I'll list next.

B. Informal Heel:

This is a basic or traditional "Heel" exercise. The dog is to walk directly alongside the handler, usually on the handlers left side. There is no focused attention, rather the dog uses its peripheral vision and other senses to maintain the proper position. This type of heeling is extremely useful for the companion dog, and is occasionally still seen in the obedience ring as well. The advantage of this type of heeling is that the dog is under more control than on just a "walk" exercise. The disadvantage is that the dog may tend to lose position, or crowd and bump the handler.

C. Formal/Precision/Attention Heel:

I call this precision heeling, but many people refer to it as attention heel. For this type of heel the dog is to not only be at the handlers left side, but its attention is focused 98% percent of the time on a specific area of the handlers body. This type of heeling is very stylized and can be flashy, and is often seen in the obedience ring these days. The disadvantage of this type of heeling is that it takes a while to teach it and it is more physically strenuous for the dog. The advantage of this type of heeling is that the dog's position will be more consistent and there will be less interference with the handler's movement.

A. WALKING

1. *WALK on a loose lead:*

The Walk command is one that I use several different methods to teach, and I select the method based on the individual dog and owner. I'll introduce all the methods here, as they are simple to explain. My preferred method to use with young puppies and gentle older dogs is shaping the walk using a behavior marker (clicker). This can be done off leash in a "safe" (fenced) area, or on a 6-foot leash (to allow the dog to make choices). I feel it is best if you can work this exercise off leash first either in the house or in a fenced area. If that isn't possible, then it can be started on leash. The handler walks, without saying anything to the dog. If the dog walks beside you for a step or two, you will immediately click and treat (hereafter noted as C/T). Begin walking again and C/T in a few steps if the dog is still by your side. From there continue repetitions of this same behavior, but extend the distance you require the dog to walk beside you. If the dog leaves your side, just continue walking. Eventually the dog will return to you, at which time you should

immediately C/T. What you will see happening is the dog either returning to your side more frequently, and/or the dog remaining at your side. Work this lesson five minutes maximum the first few days. However you can have several lessons in one day. Build the distance that the dog can walk beside you gradually and in turn the length of the lessons will increase as well. After about a week you will find your dog staying close to you and automatically, at which time you can assign a cue (command) word of "walk" (your choice of words) and give this cue just before starting the exercise.

Guidelines:

Remember that the C/R (conditioned reinforcer) marks the desired behavior (staying close) but also ends it. Also remember that a click is a promise to the dog that the primary reinforcement is coming. If you click, Always follow up with the primary reinforcement (food)! This method can be done on any length of leash, although four foot or longer is best, and it can be done on any collar. As your dog catches on to the idea of staying close, start to change directions frequently, and change directions after each c/t.

Help:

If the dog has already been taught to pull on a leash, and is difficult to control enough to start this method on leash (and an off leash area isn't available) you may want to use a head halter (I recommend the Gentle Leader brand) to help you control while teaching the exercise. Do not Talk to or Remind the dog to walk while using this method! You want the dog to make the choice, not rely on you for guidance!

2. *Alternative Method of Heeling:*

The second method I use for teaching walk is a modified version of a sneak away (Koehler). Using a six-foot lead, start walking with your dog. When the dog bounds to the end of the lead, stop still and don't move. When the dog comes back to you (slack in the leash) praise/reward him and continue walking. Follow through with the stop and start method for at least three days. After these foundation lessons of no forward motion unless the leash is slack, you can introduce a modified sneak away. Hold the handle of the leash securely in one hand (but don't wrap it around your hand!), then pick up the middle of the lead with your other hand. On a six-foot leash this means that your dog will have about three feet of leash and therefore will need to stay relatively close to you to keep the leash slack (if your dog can't do this, you might want to repeat the stop and start lessons on the shorter length of leash before going to sneak away). Start to walk forward, and if the dog puts pressure on the leash drop the slack out of your hand (keep a hold of the handle!) while simultaneously turning quickly and walking in the opposite direction. You are Walking, not running! When the slack in the leash runs out, your dog will realize you are headed away from him and should quickly catch up to you at which point you will immediately praise/reward and again pick up the middle section of the leash so that you are prepared to immediately follow with another sneak away when necessary.

Guidelines:

This method requires a six-foot leash. I prefer and recommend that it be done only on a buckle

collar. A prong collar can be used if the dog is too strong to control on a buckle collar. I DONT recommend the use of a choke/slip collar, and this method should NEVER be done on a head halter. The risk of injury to the dog is too great with those collars. Also note, handlers with bad backs, if you have a strong or active (read wild!) dog be careful! Risk of injury to handler is greater with this method as well!

Help:

If you find yourself "pulling" the dog after the turn, you are most likely turning too slowly. You may need to go to a ten-foot leash if you can't get the timing down right. A ten-foot lead will give you an extra second to turn and walk.

3. A Third Alternative:

I have listed the modified sneak away as the second alternative, even though it's not my preference for use with Dobermans. I have found it to be very successful for some dogs and handlers, and it gets the job done a lot faster than the first method that I listed. However I have another preference for strong dogs, fast dogs, or out of control dogs who's owners need a bit more control before they can even begin to think about training. That is to simply fit the dog with a head halter. This requires very little time and training, and does a great job of giving the owner more control and getting the dog focused so that it can begin to learn. A gentle leader, guidance, and verbal praise are all some dogs need to learn to walk nicely on lead. A dog can be fitted with a head halter, and be walking with minimum effort (and minimum strain on dog or handler) within minutes. (Though some dogs take up to a week to get accustomed to it). However, a head halter should only be fitted and introduced by a trainer who is skilled in their use, and certain precautions should be followed. That is one reason why I recommend the Gentle Leader brand, as the Gentle Leaders are usually only sold by trainers/vets who know how to use them, and if they aren't they come with the best set of self help instructions. I also find the Gentle leaders to fit the best for most breeds, and they don't tend to come off unexpectedly as the other brands do.

B. INFORMAL HEEL

This is a basic or traditional "Heel" exercise. The dog is to walk directly alongside the handler, usually on the handlers left side. There is no focused attention, rather the dog uses its peripheral vision and other senses to maintain the proper position. This type of heeling is extremely useful for the companion dog, and is occasionally still seen in the obedience ring as well. The advantage of this type of heeling is that the dog is under more control than on just a "walk" exercise. The disadvantage is that the dog may tend to lose position, or crowd and bump the handler.

Teaching:

In all honesty, I don't teach this type of heeling any longer. I feel that even the family companion can benefit from the formal precision heel, and so when I do have a student who wants just an informal heel I will usually use a modified version of the methods I use to teach formal heel. An informal heel can also be established by using a head halter and short leash. However I do occasionally still teach an informal heel by teaching the walk first, and then move on to binding w/reinforcement. That's what I will describe here. Binding means that the dog is kept close to you by physically restricting its movement. In other words, use a short leash. A 28" to 36" leash works best for most dogs. If the dog is on a collar rather than a head halter, the collar should be positioned high on the dog's neck to give the handlers better control. Ideally it should be a snug fitting buckle collar, but a prong collar is also used in some situations. I do not advocate the use of slip collars, but it is your choice if you wish to use one. Fold the leash up so that the dog only has enough length of lead to allow it to stand by your side without tension. This is what I call a snug leash. Neither the dog or the handler is pulling on the leash, but there isn't any visible slack either. Start to walk forward with the dog, and if the dog pulls you will use gentle nudges (mild pops, more like taps) on the leash to remind him to stay close. Guide the dog through turns, and changes of pace to show him where you want him to be. As the dog has already learned (through the walk exercise) that slack in the leash is good, you should find the dog walking close to you with a fair amount of ease. When there is tension on the lead, and the dog responds by moving in closer to you, be certain to praise. If you have taught the dog to sit, you can help the dog better understand what you are working on, by having him sit and getting him focused before you start walking forward. Give the command you wish to use (heel?) just prior to stepping forward from the sit position.

Guidelines:

As with any exercise or behavior you wish to establish, teach it in a calm quiet area first so that the dog can focus on you. Once established, start to work the exercise around distractions of varying levels from mild to strong. Don't teach this at home and then automatically expect the dog to be able to do this in a new area. It can take up to several weeks to establish a reliable Informal heel.

C. Formal Heeling:

Whew, I think I've bitten off more than I can chew with this one. I've been sitting here trying to figure out how I can broach this exercise and give enough information to get you started without writing a book. Well...here goes:

Teaching:

Precision heeling is best taught step by step. I break down the exercise into each little element, and sometimes I even break down one element into smaller steps as well. Personally I find heeling fun to teach and fun to do, and I try to keep it that way for the dogs as well. However it's certainly one of the most difficult exercises to teach and the length of time it takes can be frustrating for some. Some people rush through it or resort to methods that will get faster but not necessarily better results. I start by teaching attention and teaching the dog to move while maintaining attention. I work the dog first in a straight line, and then in large (20-50 foot) circles to the left, and finally in large circles to the right. Only once I have the dog able to do this, do I venture further into teaching the rest of the elements. However to give you an idea of what I mean by elements, I'll run down the list for you. Speeds and

transitions, Turns (left, right, and about turns), Starts, and Halts. When these are all perfected, I'll introduce proofing, and then once proofing is completed I will start to polish for the ring. Rather than run down how I train each element, I would prefer to answer individual questions and problems that you have encountered. I will say that I feel it is best to work with a skilled instructor who knows how to teach precision heeling, if at all possible. This will give you the best results. However I will cover teaching attention to get you started and anything else that comes up in this discussion.

Teaching Attention:

I use two methods when teaching attention without having a preference for one over the other. There is a third method (shaping) that I have also used and can address if someone would like me to. The first method is the one I've used the longest, and it involves the use of corrections early on in training. It works quite well for most dogs and most Dobes. But if your timing is off or you don't have the patience, or you don't wish to use leash corrections, then you'll want to try the second method instead. But back to the first method of teaching attention. Start with the dog in the sit position at heel. Be careful to make sure that both you and the dog are facing the same direction, and that you aren't turning your body to look at the dog. You'd be surprised at how many people do this without realizing it! Using a lure (food or toy), raise the dogs head up to the point

where he is focused on the left side of your body, as you do so give the dog an attention command (ready, look, etc). Depending on your height and his height, this focal point will be somewhere between your waist and your left shoulder. Be careful not to teach the dog to look into your face, as this will lead to crabbing and forging when you start to heel. Turn your head only enough that you can see what the dog is doing, but remember that he should be looking at his focal point and not into your face. Initially you will work short periods of attention at your side, taking the lure from the dog's nose to the focal point. Praise the dog as he maintains attention, and then release him (only while he is focused). If the dog looks away, lure his attention back up to the correct spot. Do this for several days, slowly building the time that the dog can sit and focus. By the third or fourth day you may find that your dog is focusing on you as soon as you sit him at your left. This is good! You are now going to start to teach him that maintaining that focus is required. A mild leash correction will be introduced and used when the dog chooses to look away. This correction is made by quickly popping the leash straight up towards the sky. The leash is held in your left hand (ideally) and the leash should be snug (not tight). In other words you should only need to make minimal movement to deliver the correction. I use either a buckle collar or a prong collar. The pop correction should not be done on a head halter! A slip collar can also be used, but I don't recommend them. The correction will be used when the dog chooses to look away. The correction should be quick and only strong enough to cause the dog to look back at you. If the dog doesn't look up at you after the first correction, you may correct again. But if that point the dog still isn't looking up, go ahead and lure him back. Once the dog's attention is again focused, immediately praise and release. Keep in mind that while I recommend light leash pops, they must be firm at the same time. It is fairer to the dog to use one firm pop than several light and ineffective ones. From this point you will spend a week or two building the duration of the dogs focus. One thing I have left out is the release command. I prefer a "pop up" release where the dog jumps up on a release command and takes the lure from you. This is introduced from a sit first, but can be done from the stand once established. Dogs who have been taught not to jump or grab will have difficulty with this at first but can learn it if you work on building their motivation for the lure. This release is used when you wish to release your dog from the focused attention. The value of this release is that you are rewarding and releasing the dog for

maintaining the attention and while he is focused. It's important to hold the lure in the area of the dog's focal point and be careful to not move it in front of your dog. Once your attention command, focus, release and pop correction is well established, you can introduce the moving attention. I always start the dog in large circles to the left, as it is easier for the dog. Straight lines will work also if your space is limited. I will stick with the attention command, and not add heel until I am ready to train the elements. What this means is that your dog will be moving in large circles to the left and right, and in straight lines building duration, prior to a heel command being introduced. If you feel you must say something, a simple "lets go" can be used. Now you can see how involved the formal heel is, and why I've found this particular exercise so difficult to condense for the website. To wrap this up, develop the moving attention until the dog can do about two minutes of heeling, and can do this in either direction. After you have the stationary watch down, do a few steps and a release, slowly building up the number of steps and trying to keep the dog guessing when the release will come (varying the number of steps). At that time you should be ready to move into the elements.

Note: Some people prefer to introduce proofing after each stage, and I do use that with some of my students. If you wish to do so, you will proof the sit w/attention first, before moving on. From there you will proof the moving attention once it's established, and finally all of the individual elements.

Method Two:

Lure training the attention heel. This method is very similar to the other two methods, in that each step is still introduced one at a time, and a lure is used in method one as well. The difference is, this method doesn't introduce a correction till further along in training, if needed at all. The difference between Method Two and Method Three is that method three uses pure behavior shaping without the use of a lure. Method Two starts the same as method one, except that your lure should be food unless the dog is highly toy motivated. Some people find it easiest to use small pieces of food and hold several in their hand. Others find it best to use one large chunk of a soft food (cheese, liver, etc). The choice is yours, but the key is to keep a seemingly endless supply of food in your hand. Oh, and if you haven't guessed, this method works best with a hungry dog! You'll start with the dog at your side, and work on holding the food close to your body in an area that maintains the dog's head in the desired position. This spot should be slightly above the dog's head, but still within the dog's reach. Take a few days of feeding in this position, telling the dog ready as you raise the food slightly. If the dog maintains the attention, lower the food slightly and allow the dog to nibble. From there, you will start the moving attention. The key to using the food lure is to not push your dog past his capability. So the initial steps for moving attention might be just three steps forward. You can repeat that several times in a lesson. Gradually build the distance the dog can walk, until you can walk in a large circle. Keep the food close, and allow the dog to sniff/nibble it the entire time. More than anything, at this stage you are simply teaching the dog that he can move with his head up. With this method, you will gradually extend the heel, introducing all the elements while the dog is still nibbling the food. When all the elements are introduced, you will start to gradually raise the food out of the dog's reach, and if the dog maintains correct position, you will reward him either with the pop release or by lowering the food back to him. Naturally you will have to rebuild the distance and all the elements slowly but it should go faster than the initial stage. Once all the elements are introduced, you will work on fading the food lure by making it smaller, and eventually putting it elsewhere and giving it only as a reward.

Question:

My puppy is almost 5 months old. Is she ready to begin heeling lessons?

Answer:

That would depend on what you mean by heeling, and will also depend on your goals. At five months of age she is definitely old enough to be learning an informal (walk on a loose leash) heel. Actually I start that @ 12 weeks of age. She is also old enough at five months to start a formal "pet" heel (not focused attention) if you have no plans to show her in obedience or conformation. Formal "pet" heeling if desired can be started around 16 weeks of age. Finally, she is also old enough to start focused attention/competition heeling, which can be started as early as 12 weeks also. Except I personally don't like to start it at that age, as I feel that it is difficult for the growing puppy and strenuous on their bodies. If the puppy is going to be shown in conformation and obedience, I don't like to start competition heeling (or any heel beyond loose leash walking) till at least 6 mos. of age, and ideally around 8 or 9 mos. If the puppy will only be shown in obedience and not in conformation, then I would start attention heeling around 5 or 6 mos. of age.

FINISHES:

There are two finishes taught and acceptable in obedience competition. The first is the left finish also known as the swing finish, military finish, or flip finish (a variation). The second finish is the Right finish also known as the go around finish. I personally feel that its very important to teach both finishes to all dogs. It doesn't really matter which one you teach first, although the left finish might be easier for the puppy. If you like the flip version of the left finish, it is also best to teach that when the dog has developed good coordination and already has an understanding of heel position. I will start the second finish after only a week or two of introducing the first one. However, do understand that initially there might be some confusion on the dogs part that you will need to work through.

1. The Left Finish:

The left finish is a finish where the dog moves from in front of you immediately to your left by shifting its body to its right (confusing?). In other words the dog moves from in front of you and immediately to your left side without going behind you. The left finish can be a very fast finish, and can be a real stylish finish especially if a little jump (the Flip) is added to it. Some people train the dogs specifically for the Flip, although I find that many Dobermans put the Flip part in on their own.

Trivia:

The left finish was "invented" in the military and rumor has it that we have the Doberman to thank for its development. The Doberman back in its early days of military use was still a very sharp breed. When working the dogs on the traditional finish, some Dobs were known to bite their handler on the um...backside... as they went around. Thus a new method of finishing was found that kept the dog within view of the handler at all times!

Teaching:

The left finish is broken down into three elements. 1st - moving quickly to your left and far enough back. 2nd - turning tightly into you. 3rd - sitting straight in heel position. You can use the targeting, clicker, luring, and force to teach this. Luring is my preferred method. Start with your dog's favorite retrieve toy or a piece of food if your dog isn't motivated by toys. With the dog close in front of you take the lure and move it from the dog's nose to your left side and throw it straight backwards. All we want the dog to do is get up quickly to chase the lure. There is no turning, just a straight-line move for the dog. I would repeat this exercise in practice for about three days. When the dog is springing out of the sit to chase the lure, it's time to introduce a tight turn into you. This turn is done when the dog is at your left and facing the wall (or land) behind you and with his ribs at your left side. The dog turns with his head towards your body. Be careful that this is how he turns, as many novice students get confused and turn the dog away from them. Using the lure, start with the dog in front of you, but instead of throwing the lure straight behind you, you'll loop the lure in towards you and throw it out straight in front of you. So the dog is getting up, running back, turning, and running forward. BTW, if you are using a C/R to help in this training, you will click for step one when the dog moves past your side, and in step two you'll click right after he turns. When the dog (and you!) have the turn down correctly and consistently, you are ready to add the sit. This time, instead of releasing the lure, you'll raise it up forward and tell the dog to sit. It may take a little practice to know where to stop the lure so that the dog sits in the right position. Once the dog sits, he can do a pop up release to get the lure, or you can do a retrieve (or throw) with the lure. At this point remember that it will never hurt to keep training the elements as well as the complete exercise. Every now and then throw in a release out of the finish instead of making the dog sit. It will help keep the dog happy and motivated. BTW, the command for the finish is whatever you choose but make sure both finishes have a different command. I prefer the word "swing" for this finish, but heel, get there, flip, and finish also work. I usually shape the behavior first, using the lure before I put the command in. Once the dog learns what I'm doing, and is consistent with it, I will add the command. However it really won't hurt anything if you add the command right from the beginning.

Hints:

The left finish, while a stylish finish, is the more difficult finish for the dog to execute. A large and or long bodied dog will have the most difficulty with it. I do find a lot of Dobbies can do it well, but pay close attention to developing a straight sit right from the beginning.

2. The Right Finish:

The Right Finish is the Finish where the dog moves towards your right and around the back of you before coming to heel position. The Left Finish is usually a little bit slower, but is still a perfectly acceptable Finish and often preferable for particular dogs. The only disadvantage of the Left Finish is that the handler can't see the dog and will have difficulty knowing if the dog's attention is wandering.

Teaching:

I teach the Right Finish in a similar method to the left finish. Starting with the lure and the dog in front of you, you will pivot quickly 360 degrees starting to your right. When you get the entire way around, you'll throw the lure straight out in front. The dog should follow around with you, and out to the lure. When this behavior is established and the dog is driving around the circle quickly, you can take your spin out of it, and simply move the lure from your right hand to your left hand, then throw it out in front. From there you will put the sit in, but stopping your left hand and raising the lure up as you command sit.

STAYS:

Under the topic of Stay, I will cover the sit-stay, the stand-stay, and the down stay as well as the Wait command. Stay is a delicate command IMHO, because it is so important and because problems can develop if introduced using the wrong method for the dog. Also, I find that most people don't give the attention to this command that should be given. Corners are cut, training is rushed, resulting in stay problems. I don't introduce the stay to young puppies. I feel that the stay command is too stressful mentally and physically for puppies under five months of age. With young puppies I teach down rest at my side in order to introduce self-control. I teach the three stays in the following order, sit/down/stand, although I don't perfect one before moving to another. Although my own dogs start a stand stay as puppies when they are learning to hold the stack for the show ring.

Teaching:

I start teaching the stay command with the dog in the sit position. If I have used the clicker with the dog I will begin the sit stay using the clicker and no command. I will simply build the length of time the dog can sit before I give a c/t. If anyone would like to me to expand upon shaping the stay with the clicker, I'd be happy to. You can teach the stays entirely this way, which might work quite well on sensitive dogs. However my personal preference is to move to a different method after the dog can hold a 20-second sit and I have introduced the command stay. For those of you not using a clicker, begin the stay in the following manner. Put the dog in a sit, tell the dog stay, and stand close in front of the dog. Note: I am not concerned with the handler's position in relation to the dog. Dog does not need to be in heel position to start learning Stay. If the dog stands up, simply tell it to "sit" and remind it to "stay". No correction. Practice up to three sit-stays in a row. Over the next few days, build the length of time that the dog can sit with you directly in front of it (no more than a foot away) up to 30 seconds. Some dogs may achieve this almost immediately, others will take longer. Once the dog can sit-stay for 30 seconds, with you remaining close, work on building your distance. Go a step at a time with each new stay, as long as the dog was successful (30 sec) with the last distance you held. Work on building distance until you reach the end of the leash. Use a six-foot leash for teaching stay. With some dogs this will only take one or two lessons, others it may take a week or more. Don't rush. Once you have reached the desired distance, you will work on building time until the dog can hold the sit-stay for one minute. There is still no correction for breaking a stay. Simply re-sit the dog and remind him to Stay. Corrections introduced too soon can cause stress in relation to stays. When your dog can hold a one min. sit-stay at the end of the leash, you are ready to introduce what I call "snug leash stays" (everyone has their own name for these). The Snug leash stay teaches the dog that stay is an active position rather than a passive one. The snug leash stay must be done on a buckle collar, or with the leash attached to the dead ring (the ring that doesn't tighten the collar) of the slip collar (Do not do snug leash stays on head halters or prong collars!!). The snug leash stay is started with the dog on the sit-stay and you standing in front. Slowly take the slack out of the lead

until you are putting slight pressure on the dog's collar. If the dog resists this pressure and remains sitting, praise him lightly while he is resisting, and then loosen up on the lead to remove the pressure. If he gets up (on the praise or the pressure) re-sit him and start over. In one stay, you will put tension on the leash and release the tension multiple times. Just remember to build the tension in the leash slowly. Over several repetitions you will build the tension until the dog can resist a steady pull. Be very careful not to jerk the leash! Work snug leash stays for several days to a week, until you reach the point where the dog can resist a steady pull. Snug leash sit stays can be used at any point in the future, to remind your dog what the stay is about, and is also a good exercise to work around distractions if you don't wish to use leash corrections. After two weeks or so working the sit-stay as I have outlined it, you are ready to introduce a correction for breaking the stay, if you wish to use corrections. I personally don't use corrections until much further in training if at all with my own dogs, but many of my students do use them. If you wish to use corrections, I strongly recommend a leash correction rather than a verbal one, and rather than any other physical ones. The correction can be given on any collar except for a head halter. The leash correction should be delivered quickly as the dog attempts to get up, rather than after the dog has already broken position. The correction is a quick pop, made straight up towards the sky. Hold the leash in your left hand, and use your right hand to catch the leash and "Pop" it upwards as you step in towards the dog slightly. At this point your dog is consistently holding one-minute sit stays, and can hold the sit through strong tension on the leash. You are ready to introduce proofing against distractions. I do this prior to ever removing the leash. The simplest distraction to introduce is movement of the handler. Do this gradually, and don't go too fast too soon. In other words make one movement, and if your dog remains in position, make another. If the dog is successful with mild movement, or one or two movements during the same stay, do a little more. Ideas are: step right, step left, turn your left shoulder towards the dog, turn your right shoulder, Bend down (as if to tie your shoe), sit down, stand behind the dog, turn your back on the dog. I've listed these in order from the easiest to the more difficult. When your dog can hold the stay through all these movements, introduce a toy or food proofing. Ideas in order of weakest to strongest are; hold the distraction in your hand and move your hand around, throw the object up and catch it in your hand, bounce or drop the object on the ground once, bounce or drop the object multiple times (if food have several pieces to drop), throw the object to your left, throw the object to your right, throw the object past your dog (be ready to correct! LOL). When your dog is steady with these distractions enlist the help of a friend and have he/she use toys and food as distractions in the same way. Then have the person approach the dog on the stay, pet the dog, talk to the dog, even coax the dog to break position (as long as they don't use the dogs name). Finally before using stay in public situations, try to enlist the help of a friend with a friendly dog, and have them move around your dog, play in the same area while your dog is on a stay, etc. At this point, you are ready to continue proofing in real life situations, taking the dog to new places and practicing sit-stay. At the same time, you may begin to build distance and work off leash provided you have a safe area to train in. When you start to introduce off leash stays, you will cease distractions at first. Remove the leash calmly and quietly and place it to the side or behind the dog (or in your pocket). Stay close, and build your distance slowly. It may take a week or two to build to the goal of 30-40 foot distances. Do this without distractions.

Down Stay:

You can start the down stay when the sit stay has been developed past the point of handler distractions. Start the down stay in the same way as the sit stay, and take your time introducing each level of distraction as described above. The only difference is that you might opt to skip the snug leash stay, as this is very difficult to do when the dog is in the down position. If you wish to use a correction for the down stay, it is the same as for the sit stay, except that you deliver the pop with a downward motion towards the ground.

Stand-stay:

Unless you have a show dog that has started early by learning to hold the stack, introduce stand stay at the same time as the down. The only difference with the stand stay is that you shouldn't use leash corrections as you might inadvertently correct the dog into a sit or down instead of a stand, thus confusing the dog! (You can do snug leash stays on the stand, they work nicely!) Corrections for breaking the stand begin initially by simply returning to the dog and repositioning him. If he moved his front right foot, step in and put that foot back to where it should be. But if the dog has drastically moved, just restart the exercise. If the dog steps towards you (the most common movement), simply step in and block/stop the dog by placing your hand on his chest. Once the dog is steady remove the hand and back up to the distance you had been standing.

Finally a word on Wait, which I mentioned at the beginning. I teach Stay and Wait. Everyone has his or her own opinion on this. Some instructors teach only stay, others don't even teach stay but teach that Sit is stay or Down is stay, etc. I personally will take every advantage I can, and I have seen through the years several dogs that truly did understand the difference between stay and wait and were extremely reliable in their responses. Wait by my definition means remain in position but pay close attention...I'm going to give you another command. I never call a dog out of a stay, only from a wait. I personally don't care if the dog is focused on me during a stay, and feel that extreme attention on stays sometimes leads to anxiety on the out-of-sight stays, whereas I do teach attention in the wait exercise. But other than these differences I introduce Wait using most of the proofing exercises listed above. The only difference is that I will often release the dog out of the wait either by calling it (recall), giving it a retrieve command, or simply release it into a game. BTW, on Stays I always step back into the dog (or into heel position) before releasing.

Question:

Do you ever use food treats as a reward during the teaching of the Stay command or is it verbal praise only?

Answer:

I don't think I really mentioned praise/reinforcement much at all! Except of course in mentioning the C/T, (clicker is always followed up with food) and light verbal reinforcement on the snug leash stays. I do use food as a reward even when I'm not using a C/R however, probably not as much on stays as on other exercises. During a stay I would give food reinforcement in two ways, one at the end of the exercise but while the dog is still holding position, and two during the stay. During the stay, particularly with a dog that is a little stressed on stays, I will step in and feed intermittently as the dog is successful. However do this quietly without a lot of talk, and keep in mind that in the early stages the dog will be likely to get up during this (as you approach, when you feed, and/or when you step away after feeding). But it is a wonderful way to reinforce a steady stay and build the dog's confidence in the exercise. The only thing I caution against doing is motivational releases out of the stay. (I do

use them out of the wait!) A motivational release is basically a release followed by the reward but the reward is usually a game or a movement release. In other words throwing a toy, playing tug, clapping your hands as you step forward, etc. I don't use motivational releases out of stays too often, as I want the stay to remain a calm exercise and I don't want the dog getting hyped thinking about the release.

ADVANCED TRAINING TIPS:

One of the first questions I need to broach when discussing advanced training, is when to start teaching the advanced exercises to your dog. Keeping in mind that I start puppies on advanced exercises (go-outs and retrieves primarily), a dog that has trained through the basics with me already has a jump on the advanced exercises. Good heeling can take quite a while to teach and develop, and so I prefer to start precision heeling when the dog is 5-8 mos. of age, and then continue to work on heeling while teaching all the other exercises. I don't recommend "step training" where you train a level, show a level, train a level, show a level. By the time the dog is heeling well, it will also have been introduced to all of the advanced exercises. I might not polish Open and utility before showing in Novice, but the skills have been introduced. So it goes without say that I believe in introducing the "next step" (i.e.: advanced exercises) as soon as the foundation has been laid. The exception is the very young puppy. However I do so much with puppies that by the time we are ready to focus seriously on training, age isn't an issue.

However I will say that some people prefer step training and work best this way. They have difficulty training farther ahead, and seem to work best with their dogs when they set smaller goals. I get students like this on occasion, or students who only want to put a CD on the dog and have no interest in advanced training. For these people I am always supportive of step training (after I've made an effort to talk them out of it!), if that is the road they choose.

Now to confuse you a little, even though I have just recommended moving on to the next level of training as soon as the basics have been established, I also want to caution you to spend the time necessary on each exercise. Train and perfect each element before putting it all together. To relate this to advanced training, I'll give you the example of the Drop on Recall. The D.O.R. consists of five elements (keep in mind the finish is a separate behavior, not considered part of the D.O.R. by me). The five elements are sit/wait, come, drop, come out of the down, and the front. The desired drop (folding down) is started in the very beginning, but needs to be developed to the point where the dog can drop on one signal, from a distance, while moving, and around distractions before you should ever put it together with the other elements for the D.O.R. It is the same with the other four elements. It is worthwhile to take your time and fully develop each element before putting it together. Then once all of the elements have been established, then you can start combining them. Using the D.O.R. as an example, start with the come out of the drop. Then work the come to the drop. Finally put it all together. Throughout training remember to occasionally work the elements separately, particularly if you are working through a problem.

To throw in a little breed specific suggestions, keep in mind that Dobermans are extremely intelligent "thinking" dogs. Corrections if used, must be given fairly, and only when you're certain the dog knew what was expected but was distracted or chose to do otherwise. Corrections given when the dog is confused or uncertain will only lead to more problems. The other problems encountered in correcting Dobs is that by the time the trainer delivers the correction, the dogs mind is already on something else and doesn't relate the correction with the mistake. I suggest that when you encounter a problem in training your Dobe, you take a step backwards and review a bit more, rebuild the

exercises slowly, and focus closely on rewarding the desired behavior when it does occur.

One large part of advanced training focuses on jumping. At the open level you have the broad jump and the high jump. At the utility level you have the bar jump and the high jump. With my own dogs I will do a little bit of jump training when the dogs are young, using 2" or 4" boards depending on the age of the dog. We'll work the skills needed, such as coming over the jump at any angle, going back and fourth over the jump, etc. But I don't work on the jumping itself, which is why I use the lowest board so that there isn't any jumping at all. I don't do this often with my students though, as this is another area where I find students (and dogs) are so motivated by the jumping that they tend to push further than they should despite what they've been told. I don't start jumping above the 8" board until the dog is at least 18 mos. of age. At that point, I'll start 8" and develop the rest of the exercise, then slowly I will raise the jump. However I don't progress over 16" until the dog is 24 mos. of age. I also strongly recommend x-raying hips and elbows (at 24 months with OFA) prior to progressing beyond the 16" jumps. Now, before I end the advanced training segment of this discussion, I'd like to put in a word about the pet or companion dog. Most of my training and this discussion have focuses around training for the obedience ring. However, I have always felt that you don't have to compete to find this type of training beneficial to you and your dog. The further you take your dog in training the better companion dog you will have. You will establish a better line of communication between you and your dog, and a stronger bond.

Go-out:

To teach the Go-out using lure training and a target, begin with small training treats and a plastic container with a lid. Your first step is teaching the dog to RUN STRAIGHT to the target, but of course you are using the food to lure him to it. It is hard for some dogs to learn to leave your side and to do it quickly, so that is your first concern. You can work this alone, putting the dog in a wait, or you can use a partner (who will be placing the food on the container and getting the dogs attention). Put a small piece of food on the container, and make sure the dog sees you do it. (if not, partner can make noise or call the dogs name...or if alone you will have to go with the dog and point out the food the first time or two.) Give the dog a cue word such as "food" or "look", at which point you want the dog looking out to the container rather than at you. When the dog focuses on the container "from hereon called target", give her go-out command (Go, Away, Run, Out, Go out, etc" and release her. Ideally she will run right out and grab the food. If she doesn't you will have to run along with her and show her the food. When she willingly leaves your side and runs out, you must quickly but quietly follow behind her. When she gets to the food and you know she has grabbed it, you should immediately release and praise. A motivational release is appropriate here. You need to be right behind the dog to be sure she has taken the food. She should not sit, turn, or walk towards you until you have released her! This is important. We don't want the dog to learn to turn on her own nor do we want the dog to develop the habit of moving towards you after it reaches the target. With most Dobses it only takes about a week to establish the first step. From there, you will work on building the distance of the go-out (starting at 10-15 feet and building to 40-50), and after that you will work on fading the food and target. When you fade the food and target you can work shorter distances. To fade the food and target, you will start by using smaller pieces of food, and then no food at all (but giving food after you release). From there, cut the container in half height wise, then use only the lid on the ground, then cut a smaller circle out of the lid. When you have reached the point where you have cut out the circle, get double sided tape or tacky stuff (the stuff you use to hang light pictures) and apply it to the circle. You will now hang the target on the baby gait or wall, rather than just laying it on the floor. When you get to this point, you are ready to add the turn and sit. However its important to know that while you are developing the first element of the go-out, you should be strengthening

your random sit and developing the turn and sit separately. Before you use a sit on the go-out you should have a strong instant sit in general. So even when your dog is wandering or walking away from you she will sit immediately when you tell her to. From there you can develop the turn and sit, by saying her name and then sit, and using the leash to guide her if you need to. Be careful that you don't accidentally teach her to walk towards you after her name! We don't want any steps towards you, just a tight turn and quick sit. The first time you put the turn and sit onto the go-out, put the dog on leash and go with her (or on a Flexi) so that you can reinforce what she is to do. As you add the sit, first you will give it after she touches the target, and then you will start to give it just before. Rewarding her for the correct response, but ignoring the wrong ones. Gradually rebuild distance, and you should find yourself with a good go-out.

Retrieves:

I normally start fun retrieves, and go-outs with puppies. So much of novice focuses on staying close to you, that the dogs have difficulty in Utility where they must work away from the handler. This is why I like to start go-outs early on. If you haven't started them yet, I'd suggest making this one of your next exercises. The first advanced exercises I start with my novice students are the retrieve, the drop, and the high jump. The drop is only if they have not already started the drop (from stand) from the beginning. If they have taught it from the start, then they will start to work drop at a distance, and then moving drops. Hand signals are also a good advanced exercise to start early on. Once you have taught the retrieve, you can move right into gloves and scent retrieves, which is nice particularly if the dog is young and not ready to start jumping. When the dog is old enough for jumping, I'll start the high jump first. I'll teach angled jumps, directed jumps, and back and fourth jumps (the turn for the retrieve over the high jump). From there, I will raise the jump height gradually until the dog can jump full height plus two inches. Then I'll put all the other elements in to the full height jumping. Note: Just because a dog can jump its full height, doesn't mean you shouldn't build to full height slowly. As well, once the dog has been built up to full height jumps, I still recommend training at the lower levels for the most part. It is too stressful and totally unnecessary to keep the jumps at the full height. I'll jump full height maybe once a week even though I jump train three or four times a week. I don't start the broad jump until the dog is doing a full height high jump (and naturally old enough to have the high jump at the full height and well established). I feel this is extremely important and beneficial to the dogs training and in particular beneficial to Dobes, as they tend to jump flat and to walk between the broad jump boards. By teaching the high jump first the dog has learned to put an arch on the jump, avoiding flat jumping. It has also built up some muscles to help it clear the broad jump, which at full height is twice the distance of the high jump. When I do start the broad jump, I start with two boards only and gradually extend those two boards. When I can place the two boards at the dogs full jump height and the dog can consistently jump them, I will add the other two boards. This helps avoid the walking that can occur, as the dog learns to the concept of the broad jump rather than simply jumping over boards. In other words he sees the jump as beginning at the first board and ending at the last, rather than seeing a series of boards laying down which are easy to walk on or step between rather than jump.

Formal Retrieve:

I work take it first, then I build the hold command. So don't worry about hold at this part, and remember to reward her for taking it, not necessarily rewarding for giving it. Start with holding the dumbbell at nose level and an inch in front of the nose. If she can take it on command at that distance, slowly move the dumbbell farther away at nose level until you are stepping away from her and extending your arm fully. You will progress at each level (a few inches at a time) only if she is successful at the current level. When you reach arms distance, nose level, you will start to lower the

dumbbell to the floor an inch or two at a time. When you reach the floor, keep the dumbbell in your hand but rest one end on the floor. After that, put the dumbbell on the floor, but keep your hand on it. Finally, place the dumbbell on the floor, but use your hand only to point at it. When the dumbbell is placed on the floor but you are only pointing, try standing beside it. Once she is successful with that, gradually move back to the dog (before commanding take it) going a step at a time till she is eventually doing a "placed" retrieve at a distance of about 6 feet. When she can do this placed retrieve (with you at her side) build the distance of the placed retrieve, and eventually angle the retrieve. When she can do this, you are ready to start throwing the dumbbell. I keep placed retrieves in so long before throwing for several reasons. First, in open you have thrown retrieves (and the act of throwing the dumbbell can motivate the dog to retrieve it) but in Utility you have three retrieves none of which are thrown (all placed) so you lose the motivation of the throw. I find that if the dogs have a heavy concentration in placed retrieves early on, it helps them in utility. Also, Dobes tend to be sloppy on the pickup and keeping the dumbbell in your hand for a long time, and then moving to placed retrieves helps them focus on the pickup rather than being distracted by their drive. If your dog doesn't naturally bring the dumbbell back to you after the "take it" let me know, and I'll help you from there. I've run through this a bit quickly, but I think you'll get the idea from this.

AKC OBEDIENCE COMPETITION:

If you read my post on advanced training, you'll already know that I believe in training through all levels before entering the competition ring. The more advanced your dogs training is, the more relaxed and confident you and the dog will be. For example if your dog can do a go-out and directed jumping, a simple novice recall will seem like a piece of cake. If your dog can stay for five minutes, one minute will seem like nothing. However if you wish to step train, that is fine too, and I would suggest that when your dog is reliable in class run throughs it's time to start thinking about match shows and trials.

However, regardless of how you are training, before you ever even consider stepping in the ring you need to know the rules and regulations that govern dog shows and obedience trials. There are two booklets you need to get from the AKC. They are the Rules and Regulations for Dog Shows, and the Obedience Rules and Regulations. They will help familiarize you with what is expected and allowed at a dog show. The Obedience Rules and Regulations should be studied until you know them well. Like laws, ignorance is not an excuse. You are expected to know these guidelines and rules if you are going to compete under them.

I just attended a trial recently to watch a student of mine. I was very dismayed at the number of handler errors, and poor handling I saw that if improved would greatly improve the performance. I feel strongly that everyone needs a mentor or instructor to help them prepare, even if they are talented trainers themselves. Don't attempt to go it alone, or if you must, plan to attend several match shows to get critiques on your handling. Match shows can be useful tools to improve your handling, test your dog skill, and work through problems.

Now you have trained your dog, developed your handling skills, and you think you are ready to enter an obedience trial. In order to achieve your title, you must earn three leg (qualifying score) under three different judges. So when entering shows, always remember to check who the judge is for your class. Trials have an entry deadline, which is usually 2 1/2 weeks before the date of the trial. However some trials are limited entries and the entry limit may be met before the show closes. Once you've entered a show, it's too late to train your dog! LOL So make sure you and your dog are ready before you enter. If you aren't, and you've already entered, skip the show. I see

people who enter a show thinking it will motivate them to get ready for it. It usually doesn't work. They rush, they revert to other methods to "get the job done", and they enter the ring full of doubt. This usually backfires and results in a poor performance at best. Also avoid the mistake of over training the few days before the trial and the morning of the trial. If the dog knows what to do, it will be fine. If the dog doesn't know it, you aren't going to teach it the days before or the morning of. If you feel the dog needs a reminder "correction" the morning of, then the dog isn't really ready or trained. So relax, and focus on having an enjoyable learning experience. You'll probably find you do far better that way.

The day before the trial pack your car. Again, avoiding the stress from rushing. You'll need your entries and directions on your dashboard, not packed in the back of the van! Other items to take include a chair for you, a snack and a drink (never assume there will be edible food on the show grounds! LOL), a pen, a copy of the rules and regulations, sunscreen if showing outdoors, and an extra jacket and/or raincoat in case of bad weather. There are other things you might prefer such as tissues, sunglasses, a book to read, etc. For the dog you need to pack a bowl and fresh water, crate or bed to relax on, your regular leash and an extra leash, a copy of rabies certificate and vaccination records (I've never needed them, but you should always carry them), an extra collar, a regulation collar (no tags, slip or buckle only), training treats, and if showing in open an extra dumbbell. You'll never need an extra dumbbell or lead until you are ready to step in the ring and can't find yours! When you get to the show grounds, walk your dog and make sure he has eliminated. Play a little, and then put him away to rest. Watch your ring to see the judging procedure and heeling pattern. Pick up your armband and check when you'll be in. Take a deep breath and relax. About two dogs before your turn, get your dog out (earlier if he'll need to potty again) and "wake him up" (play tug, or other wake up/attention games). Warm him up with a brief heel or a few fronts and finishes. Get to the ring when the dog before you is doing his off leash heel. Keep your dog focused on you and ready to work, but don't drill him. As the dog in front of you is exciting the ring, stand back but have your dog lined up (provided it's a speedy judge who calls you in right away). When you are called in, start your heeling from that point (outside of the ring) so that your line up in the ring is actually a halt for your dog. This will give you and your dog a chance to fall into rhythm on heeling before the judge says forward, and will also reduce the stress sometimes experienced on that first lineup. Remember to stay focused on that first lineup.

Keep in mind while you are in the ring that you may not physically guide the dog at any time. This is one of the most common novice handler errors. You can't lift the collar, touch the dog's rear, etc to guide him. Corrections are not allowed at any time either. If you lose your dog while heeling, don't forget that an extra command is allowed (points off) and don't wait too long to use it. Finally never assume your dog has nq'd. Keep plugging on as if you are ok. The judge will probably tell you at the end of your individual exercises whether or not you are still ok. I have seen several people "blow it" when they assumed that their dog had nq'd with a particular mistake. When in fact the mistake (for ex: standing up on the sit/wait part of the recall) was only points off.

TAKING TREATS NICELY:

Food First:

I'll give you my thoughts on teaching your Dobe to take food nicely. But don't ever feed one of my dogs...as any respect you have for me will be lost! LOL Each dog is different. All can be taught to take the food nicely, but I will tell you that the way I train is not always conducive to a soft mouth. Jumping for food (which you'll learn about in the near future), catching food, tug games, etc, can all influence

the occasional hard nips to the fingers when feeding. For me, its something I ignore. In general I don't let other people feed my dog (with the exception of a fellow trainer, or handler) and I am training for competition. Guests, strangers on the street, etc, don't feed my dogs. Friends occasionally do but they are "dog people" and are also appropriately warned. Also, my dogs have all been taught to catch food, so the food can be tossed thus saving the fingers!

During Training:

If you wish to try one of the suggestions, you must use it separate from food rewards during training. In other words work for a few minutes on teaching the dog to take food nicely, but never ever bop the dog on the nose, tell them to take it "easy", etc when you are delivering the food as a reward for a behavior. Reason being if you "correct the dog" as he goes to take the food that is a negative following a behavior that you were attempting to reward. See the conflict? Food must follow the behavior you want to reinforce, with nothing else between the behavior and the food.

Finally you can use a large chunk of food (liver, chicken, etc) and allow the dog to take little nibbles from it. This will put more space between your fingers and the food!

In the meantime, while I have used the bop on the nose technique quite successfully, my preference is to close your fist over the food, and teach the dog to lick and/or reach gently for the food. When the dog approaches your hand with too much exuberance you keep the fist closed on the food. When they nibble/sniff/lick, you praise and give the food. Feeding from the palm will also help to stop the biting.

So work on a soft mouth separate from training the obedience exercises, and use techniques when training that will help to avoid the hard nips.

Teaching the Dog to Catch the Food:

To teach your pup to catch, start with him on leash and in a sit. Hold the food slightly above the nose and feed him. As he starts to reach for it, drop it slightly. Then extend the distance your hand is above his head, but still basically dropping the food. As he starts to try to catch the food, you can back up a little tossing more than dropping the food. But use the leash to prevent him from picking any dropped food off the floor. He must catch it to get it (you can also step on it with your foot if it falls). Some people use popcorn to teach a dog to catch because it's lighter and floats. It takes just a tad longer sailing through the air and gives the dog a better chance of seeing it coming and getting prepared enough to open its mouth.

Also some dogs learn to catch a large stuffed toy first, before they are skilled enough to catch food. The first thing you want to do is put the animal in play/prey drive by moving the toy around (a game of keep-away, if you wish) while the pup is trying to get it. Allow the pup to win in order to build up his/her interest. Now you can start just tossing the toy and letting the pup chase and retrieve it. Then, when you really have him into play drive, take the toy in one hand and act as if you're going to throw it by using an up and down motion. At this point, the goal is to have the dog's head bobbing up and down following the movement of the toy. It doesn't matter if the dog is only a foot or two in front of you. The head motion is what's important. Now, say "catch" and time a gentle toss so that you're releasing the toy as the head is coming up. Try to toss so the dog's head and the toy can meet without the dog having to shift position. Doing this a few times should result in a fairly consistent catch and an association with the word. Now you can start increasing the distance and as the dog

progresses and gains confidence you can gradually reduce the size of the object until it's catching kibble at 10 paces.

GENERAL TIPS:

1. Don't pattern train...in other words; don't put the Finish at the end of the Recall! My student's don't put a Finish at the end of a Front/Recall until they are training at the open level. Except for the rare time that I do a run through with them, or at a match. But never ever in training. Once they get to the open level the start to, but even then most of the training is broken down into the elements.
2. Teach both Finishes. This will help the dog to learn to sit and wait for the command.
3. Work focused attention in the Front position, teaching the dog to sit and maintain attention.
4. When you do a Front/Recall release backwards, stepping back and then turn away from the dog so the dog can't even think of going near Heel position. You can also throw a toy as a reward, have the dog tug the toy or leash, etc.

NOTE:

These instructions were taken from the weekly Roundtable discussions on The Doberman Corner Discussion Group over a period of 6 weeks. They were compiled and edited by Carol Minkus and approved by Wendy Jordan.

THE END