

COMPETITION OBEDIENCE – ATTENTION CLASS

LESSON ONE

LOCATION: Distraction free area (or as close as possible)

DOG: Hungry, lonely and bored.

EXERCISE: **"OK"** - THE "OFF SWITCH" OR THE RELEASE IS THE FIRST EXERCISE YOU WILL TEACH YOUR DOG.

If you are going to succeed in attention training, you must let your dog know when you expect his attention and when he is off duty. To do that we use an "On switch" – "Watch" to get his attention and an off switch "Ok" to release him.

The release command, "OK", is used to end every exercise.

When you are given the order to "Release your dog" or "Exercise finished" you say "OK" in an excited tone of voice, raise your hands, praise your dog and give the reward in an upward direction. As you give the treat bring your hands together, so your dog focuses, equally, on both hands instead of only one. Your dog will learn to focus on the hand that feeds him. If it is always the right hand he will automatically angle toward the right hand. This can create major problems, especially on the Fronts (Recall).

THIS SEQUENCE IS IMPORTANT !!!

The "OK" is the release. Raising your hands focuses the dog upward. The excited tone of voice will raise your dog's spirits. When paired with the treat, the praise becomes synonymous with the food reward.

Re-read the sequence and mentally repeat it every time you release your dog.

When done correctly and reinforced over a period of time, *PRAISE BECOMES A FOOD REWARD IN YOUR DOG'S MIND*. In later stages of training it will be much easier to reduce food rewards if your dog is, mentally, receiving a treat every time you praise him.

One of Pavlov's experiments involved ringing a bell just prior to giving food. After a period of time the dog would salivate and react as if he had received food every time he heard the bell (Except in the fifth and tenth weeks, and this corresponds with learning plateaus).

Let's go back and analyze the exercise!

The food (ball or toy) is the *PRIMARY INDUCEMENT*. The *AUDITORY STIMULUS* or command "OK" is the *SECONDARY INDUCEMENT*. The response (dog jumping up, getting excited etc.) is a *VOLUNTARY RESPONSE* because *COMPULSION* isn't used to elicit the response.

EXERCISE: SIT AND MOVE INTO HEEL POSITION

First, let's discuss "Heel Position". For competition purposes the rules describe heel position as; ***"Whether the dog is sitting, standing, lying down, or moving at heel means that the dog shall be straight in line with the handler's left side, and as close as practicable to the handler's left leg without crowding, permitting the handler freedom of motion at all time. The area from the dog's head to shoulder shall be in line with the handlers left hip."*** This quotation from the Obedience Rules clearly defines the heel position. You must be just as precise and make sure to help your dog to clearly understand exactly where he should be.

Since part of the criteria for the Attention Class is the ability of the dog to sit on the first command we won't go into details of how we teach the sit. We will, however, make sure your dog is doing a proper tuck sit and not a rock sit. Start with two food rewards in left hand, give your dog the "sit" command, praise and give one treat as soon as your dog sits. **You have not told your dog where to sit, only to sit so wherever he sits is okay, he doesn't have to be in heel position.** (When you do the go out in Utility, you will tell the dog to sit and it will be at the other end of the ring, not at your side. Sit means to sit, quickly and wherever he is). Step into heel position, stand there for several seconds then release him with the "OK" command, praise and give the second treat. At this point it doesn't matter if your dog watches you or not, we will get into that later.

DO SEVERAL REPETITIONS EACH TRAINING SESSION. BUILD THE TIME UP TO 30 SECONDS FOR NEXT LESSON.

EXERCISE: SIT AND ACCEPT PRAISE

Since you will be using your voice as well as the motivator to keep your dog's attention on you, he will have to learn to SIT AND ACCEPT PRAISE. This simply means that he will stay sitting while you praise him and tell him how wonderful he is. It is important that he understand that the praise is meant to tell him he is doing what you want him to do and is not a release.

Start by doing the SIT AND MOVE INTO HEEL. Once you are in heel position, you will start to praise your dog. "GOOD BOY, YOU'RE SUCH A CLEVER BOY, GOOD DOG". Don't just repeat "good dog" over and over, change words and phrases. Be sincere and keep your voice happy and excited. Release with the "OK" command, praise and give the treat. If your dog gets up don't repeat the sit, just put him back and start over. The whole idea is for your dog to learn to stay sitting while you praise him and that praise is praise, not a release.

DO SEVERAL REPETITIONS EACH TRAINING SESSION. BUILD THE TIME UP TO 30 SECONDS FOR NEXT LESSON BUT VARY THE TIME ON THE REPETITIONS AND ALTERNATE WITH THE SIT AND MOVE INTO HEEL EXERCISE.

EXERCISE: SIT AND ACCEPT PRAISE AND REWARD

Since your dog already has some of the basic training we will include the "sit, and accept a reward the first lesson.

It will be necessary, at various stages of training, to give your dog treats and still have him under control and if sitting, accept the treat without getting up or regarding it as a release.

Start with several dog treats in your left hand. Tell your dog to "Sit". Step into heel position. Praise your dog ("Good Boy", "Good Girl", "You're So Smart", etc.) and give a treat. Give the food so his head is up but not so high as to encourage him to jump up or move. Any time he gets up, put him back without any additional commands. Alternate between the praise and food until you have one piece of food left, Give the release "OK", praise and give the last reward.

DO SEVERAL REPETITIONS EACH TRAINING SESSION. BUILD THE TIME UP TO 30 SECONDS FOR NEXT LESSON BUT VARY THE TIME ON THE REPETITIONS AND ALTERNATE WITH THE SIT AND MOVE INTO HEEL AND SIT, MOVE INTO HEEL AND ACCEPT PRAISE.

EXERCISE: THE "STRAIGHT" COMMAND

The "Straight" is a very important exercise. With it you will be able to position your dog in the **CORRECT** heel position. If you settle for anything short of perfection that is what you will always get. Remember - Practice makes permanent, only perfect practice gives perfect performance. For our purposes, straight is a position, not a concept. When the dog is given the straight

command it means he moves into, a sit, in the correct heel position. (Review the definition of heel position) The dog can understand what we mean if we use it as a position, but not if we try to teach it as a concept. I have watched handlers tell the dog to "sit straight" during the heeling and later tell the same dog to "sit straight" on a recall and not understand why the dog doesn't catch on.

Originally we used the "Heel" command for this exercise but decided to use "Heel" to signify handler movement and "Straight" for when the handler will remain stationary. (In the beginning you might have to move to encourage your dog to move, but that will be eliminated in later stages of training) We feel the word itself is not important as long as it is used to indicate a place or position and not a concept.

Give the "Straight" command and use the food to guide your dog into "Heel" position. Give the command to "Sit" and guide your dog into the correct place at your left side. Practice this exercise with your dog starting from behind you, in front of you and further out from your left side. You should encourage your dog to take the shortest route to move to your left side, and sit in "Heel" position. In the beginning you probably will have to move your body to encourage your dog to move. Try to eliminate the movement as soon as possible. When your dog starts from in front of you he will have to go back past your left leg, swing around and come forward into "Heel". This is very similar in appearance to a "Swing" finish. Only give a food reward when your dog is in the correct position. Release as usual with "OK", praise and treat.

DO SEVERAL REPETITIONS EACH TRAINING SESSION. MAKE SURE YOUR DOG IS IN THE PROPER HEEL POSITION BEFORE YOU REWARD. DON'T ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS. Remember - Practice makes permanent, only perfect practice gives perfect performance

EXERCISE: WALKING "HEADS UP"

It is not natural for many dogs to walk with their head up, it is something you must teach them. Many dogs will walk with their heads' down or prefer to sniff the ground, as they walk. This exercise will help to show your dog it is to his advantage to walk with his head up.

At this stage this is not a formal exercise and the only command given, will be the release. Later we will formalize the exercise and add a command.

Start with your dog somewhere in front of you. Hold a food reward and the leash in *BOTH* hands. Use the food to get his interest and as he focuses on it, raise it

slightly above his head and start to walk backwards. He should move in to place his nose or mouth on the food. Praise him and continue to take 4 or 5 steps backward and then release him. The food should be high enough to make him raise his head, but not high enough to make him jump up.

EXERCISE: THE "WATCH" - WITHOUT DOG

We taught the footwork, for dog training, without the dog and found it so successful we decided to teach some of the other exercises in the same way. We found the end results far superior when we had the handler practice the more difficult sequences, without the dog first.

WARNING!!

I should warn you that if your non-doggy friends and neighbours thought you were strange, the following will prove it beyond a doubt. Phrases like "elevator doesn't go all the way to the top floor", "a few sandwiches short of a picnic" and "one clown short of a circus" will become part of their description of you.

You will need; A object to act as an imaginary dog. (a pillow, cardboard box, or even a stuffed animal); A leash (short, about 2 feet long) and Something to simulate a treat (it can be a real treat or you can use a coin). Place your imaginary dog on the floor near you (not in Heel position). Take the imaginary treat between the thumb and forefinger of your **RIGHT** hand. Hold the leash in the **FIST** of your **LEFT** hand. Give the command "SIT" to your imaginary dog. Step into HEEL position. Place your **LEFT FIST** (holding the leash) on your **LEFT HIP**. With small dogs you can let the **LEFT** hand lower, at your **LEFT** side. Mentally remove all slack except 2 inches. Praise your dog. Say "WATCH", bring your **RIGHT** hand, with the imaginary treat across your body and up in front of your imaginary dog's nose. Continue to raise the imaginary treat and give it to the **Left Hand**. **You should have the left hand, holding the leash, in a fist and it should be anchored on the left hip. The treat should now be in the left hand between the thumb and forefinger.** Praise your dog, "Good Boy"/"Good Girl". Release your imaginary dog with the "OK" command, praise, and give him the imaginary treat.

You should repeat this 10 or 12 times until it becomes natural and you can do it without thinking. It will be harder to do correctly when you have the dog to think about. Repeat it

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