

# Teaching your dog tricks, why you should

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Teaching your dog to do tricks has many advantages; its a great way to stretch your dog's mind and keep her occupied during bad weather or when you're too busy to go for a walk. Different tricks can also make sure your dog's body remains flexible and strong. A lot of tricks teach your dog behaviours that will improve performance in obedience training.

Lastly, and mostly importantly, its a fabulous way to bond with your dog and teach them that hanging out with you is great fun, which makes them more responsive and biddable overall. When teaching our dogs obedience we tend to be quite serious, so trick training is a great way for us to lighten up and remind ourselves (and our dogs) that training should be enjoyable. My obedience training clients are often amazed to see the improvement in e.g. their dog's heeling, after breaking off do do something seemingly silly.

If you're a fan of clicker you can use your clicker to capture all kinds of behaviours your dog does normally that you'd like them to repeat. Perhaps your dog has a way of lying down with his paws crossed and head on one side that you find cute? Click it and reward it every time your dog does this. Once he's offering you this pose, add a command word, e.g. 'look cute', and voila, your dog has learnt a new trick. If you don't have a clicker you can mark the behaviour you want with the word 'yes' and reward. Using 'yes' is better than saying 'good dog' as your can say it much faster, that way there's less chance of your dog being confused about exactly which behaviour he got the reward for.

Tricks you can teach your dog are limited only by your imagination. Googling phrases like 'dog tricks' and 'teach your dog tricks' can yield loads of good ideas and tips about how to teach different tricks.

To get you started, one easy trick to teach your dog is to sit up and beg. This one is useful as it teaches your dog to sit up straight and also helps to strengthen the hind legs and make your dog more aware of them. Many of our dogs tend to be very 'front wheel drive' and we often emphasise this by petting our dog from the head or neck down to the mid back area. In TTtouch we often use touches in the hindquarters to improve a dog's body awareness, which also improves his balance and gait. Similarly, teaching this trick can help with this.

Get together several food treats that your dog likes and begin by asking your dog to sit. Once your dog is sitting, place a treat right against her nose and then raise it slightly up and slightly back. The aim is to have your dog balancing on her hindquarters, not leaping up onto her hind feet. If your dog does jump up in this way, try holding the treat a bit lower. If your dog is toppling back a bit then hold the treat slightly further forward.

If your dog doesn't seem keen to follow the treat you will probably notice that as he sits he is leaning to one side, resting his weight on either the left or right hip instead of sitting up straight. This makes it difficult for him to balance on his hindquarters. Reward your dog the first few times for straightening up and leaning towards the treat, usually with slight movements of the front paws as if he's about to start going up. Once you've done this a few times hold back on giving the treat and see if your dog will try a bit more. Most dogs will figure out they need to sit straight to get this right pretty quickly.

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