12 Rules for Training

Purdue University Animal Behavior Clinic

1. MAKE LEARNING FUN FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR DOG. Spend 10 minutes two or three times daily. The training sessions should be separated by about four hours for maximum efficiency of learning. Normal dogs of any age can learn if you use patience, praise, and rewards.
2. Train the dog to come, sit, stay, down, and down-stay, and to heel - in this order. Be progressively more demanding. If the dog fails at any level, stop, do not reward, and start again at a simpler command. You will find that your dog's motivation to perform decreases as the complexity of the task increases. Make learning fun!
3. Use one-word commands. Do not combine them with the dog's name, which should only be used to get the dog's attention. It is easy to talk too much to your dog. If you do, the command you are trying to reach gets lost in all the verbiage. This is a common mistake made by beginner dog trainers.
4. Teach the dog a behavior by using a food lure; for example, teach the dog to sit by holding the food at the tip of the dog's nose and slowly raising it over his head; as the dog's nose goes up, he will sit. Once he sits, give him the food treat. This is calling luring. Teach a behavior in this manner and once your dog is reliably performing the behavior, add the command. For example, say, "sit", then lure him not a sit and as soon as he sits, reward him. Never repeat a command more than twice; doing so will teach the dog that he does not have to respond to the command.
5. Train the dog in a quiet environment with few distractions. Once the response is learned there, move the training location to progressively more complex and stimulating environments. The dog will have to be trained in each environment that you wish him to respond in. You may start in the basement, move on to the kitchen, backyard, street, plaza, train station, etc. If the dog fails at any level, go back to the previous level.
6. Appropriate responses should be rewarded within 1/2 second of the behavior being completed.
7. The dog will learn most rapidly if every desired response is rewarded. Once the behavior is established, reward it intermittently. This will make the response more permanent and less likely to be forgotten.
8. Use small or brief highly valued rewards. Find out what your dog likes (food, touch, voice, and praise) and use that reward most frequently in the beginning. As the training progresses, mix up the types of reward given. Reserve the most valued rewards for the most difficult tasks. When your dog does well, give him the "jackpot" - a big reward.
9. Once the dog has learned the commands from one person, have other members of the family train him to respond to them. If the dog knows the commands well, this should not take long.

10.If your dog responds only when he feels like it, start training again using these rules.

11.The longer an unwanted, learned behavior has been performed, the longer it takes to recondition it.

12.Punishment does not work in teaching behavior - the opposite of a reward is no reward, NOT punishment! Punishment may frighten or excite your dog, which reduces his ability to learn. If the dog is performing some unwanted behavior, ignore it, or instead, give the dog a command, make him do it by luring or prompting him, and then reward him for the appropriate behavior. If you totally ignore an unwanted behavior, the dog will not be rewarded for performing it, and it will eventually stop. However, there will be an initial increase in the unwanted behavior before it goes away. At this point, it is extremely important not to reward the behavior.