

The 3 Ds of Dog Training

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In an ideal situation, you can teach your dog new skills by progressing through the 3 Ds. To better understand and properly use the 3 Ds, I will use the cue “sit-stay” for an example.

Duration: When you are teaching “sit-stay,” you typically ask your dog to sit and then make a stop sign signal with one hand toward your dog and the other hand behind your back with a treat, then say, “Stay.” When you are first starting out you wait a few seconds, praise with “YES,” treat and love! You keep doing this until your dog is able to “stay” for designated lengths of time. If your dog breaks the “stay” before you are ready for him to, you kept him there too long and he wasn’t ready to progress that fast. Go back to a time that you know he can stay and succeed and continue there until you are sure he is ready to move on making sure that you release the “stay” first.

Distance: Once your dog is able to sit in a “stay” for designated lengths of time, you are ready to start moving away from him. To start, take one step away from him and then step right back toward him and release with “Yes,” a treat and love! As you progress, take 2 steps, 3 steps, 4 steps, always coming back to him and releasing him. If he releases himself before you come back, he wasn’t ready for the extra step. Go back to the distance that he was successful.

Distraction: This is the hardest one, this is when you need to give your dog grace and know that it is going to be trying. All of the skills that your dog knows will be a little bit more challenged outside when the wind is blowing, at the park where there are other dogs, even in the backyard when a bird flies by. If your dog can “stay” for a whole minute with you 10 steps away inside, outside, you may need to start off slower like you did with just duration and build up from there. It will go faster because he knows the skills, but understand that this is a challenging part of his training and one that needs your understanding and commitment to positive training.

When dogs are learning a new skill, first and foremost, always set them up to succeed. If your pup is struggling with a skill, break it down even further and up the ante! Higher value treats may be necessary. High value treats are extra special treats that help keep your dog’s attention. When you are training at home, you might be able to use his kibble, but if you are in a park, you may need to use boiled chicken, dog food roll, or string cheese, all cut up in small pieces.

When you use praise, treats and love to train your dog, you are creating a fun experience for him. Your dog wants to please you. Watching your dog succeed and knowing that he feels more confident is a very empowering feeling. So, grab a treat bag, strap it around your waist and spend some time enjoying your dog and letting him show you how quickly he can learn with praise, treats and love.

