



Enrolling In Dog Training Classes

Reproduced from Article by [Animal Wellness Magazine](#) Mar 14, 2016

I remember the excitement of signing up for my first summer camp. The brochure said the camp offered archery, swimming, baseball, camping, and all kinds of stuff a ten-year-old boy like me wanted to do.

The first day it rained. The indoor activities that looked so fun in the colorful brochure didn't materialize. What did materialize were board games and reading. The next day the sun was out but we were told the archery field was closed. So we ran laps and did jumping jacks. We camped out one night – not in the woods, but behind our barracks. The campfire dinner consisted of gritty hamburgers and roasted marshmallows. The whole experience went downhill from there.

Enrolling in dog training classes is a lot like summer camp. Sometimes the experience doesn't live up to the brochure. If you're enrolling in a dog training class for the first time this summer, keep the following five considerations in mind when making a choice.

1 What is the teacher/student ratio?

The rule of thumb is a maximum of eight students per instructor. If there are more than eight, you and your dog's safety might be an issue. Either way, you'll certainly receive less personal attention.

2 Where does the class take place?

Is the area clean and protected? A city park or neighborhood parking lot can be fine but a park that has dogs running around off leash or a parking lot with heavy traffic are unsafe. Some trainers present the first week of class without dogs in order to go over training theory without the students being distracted by their dogs. This means the first class might meet in a different locale – but it should still smack of professionalism I know a trainer here in California who meets the enrollees in a bar for a little hair-of-the-dog. Not the greatest first impression.

3 Are the handouts professional and easy to understand?

Handouts are the instructor's "face to the public." You can get a feel for his/her attention to detail by reading what he/she is presenting.

4 Are aggressive dogs allowed in class?

Accidents happen, but having yourself or your dog attacked cannot be one of them. No beginning class should allow aggressive dogs. Some advanced classes do, but they're set up for safety and closely monitored with experienced handlers.

5 Does the teacher practice what he/she preaches?

These days, almost all dog trainers refer to themselves as "positive" trainers. After all, who would enroll in a class if the motto is: "I will teach you to physically punish your dog"? But positive means different things to different people. The term is used by trainers who use positive methods (treats, petting, praise, play, etc.) as well as those who use negative methods (leash corrections, pinning, hanging, biting, shocking, hitting, etc.). The difference between the two is this: positive trainers use the term to mean the training is proactive. The dog is managed by using leashes, baby gates, etc., so he cannot do something unwanted and then, step-by-step, he is taught to redirect his energy to desired behaviors. Negative training is primarily reactive. The dog is set up to do something undesirable and then punished for doing it. The dog is then rewarded (positive training) for the appropriate behavior.

Preparing for class

So now you've chosen a good class that uses positive training methods. Before you and your dog head off to your first session, set yourself up for success with this pre-class checklist.

- Check your dog's collar to make sure it cannot slip off. Keep the leash looped around your wrist so it cannot be pulled from your hand.



- Bring plenty of high quality treats and make sure your dog is acclimated to the treats you're planning to use in class. Young puppies have sensitive digestive systems. If your dog is only used to kibble, using real chicken and cheese as rewards in a class can upset him. Don't feed your dog before class; that way he'll be more motivated by your treats.

- Bring a bowl and water.



- Bring a blanket or bed. Some classes are held outside and the parking lot can get pretty grungy. If held inside, the floors can be hard, cold and/or slippery.

- Exercise your dog before class. If he expends a little energy beforehand, he'll be less inclined to act out during a training session.

- When you first walk into the class, give your dog time to get used to the surroundings. Don't ask her to sit, lie down or do anything. The newness of the situation will trigger a rush of adrenalin and your words will fall on deaf ears.

- Be relaxed and friendly. Your dog feeds off your attitude, so take a couple of breaths if you're feeling a bit overwhelmed.

- Wear comfortable clothes. Put on shoes that won't slip, avoid jewelry that jangles, and for the sake of both the dogs and other students, wear no heavy cologne, perfumes, or aftershave.

- Keep your dog away from other dogs until the instructor says it's okay and shows you how to do a meet-and-greet. Often, a well-meaning participant will show up in class with a newly rescued shelter dog, not knowing that he's aggressive, especially around food. This can lead to problems.

Training classes are meant to be fun for you and your dog. Use common sense, trust your intuition, and you'll both have an enjoyable and educational experience.

When to walk away

If you're uncomfortable with a trainer's methods, it's absolutely okay to say so and walk out. Here are two red flags:

- The instructor should never shame you, tell you it's "your fault" or that you aren't being "dominant" enough.

- Above all, never ever let an instructor use your dog to demonstrate something and then jerk, hit, bite, pin, hang, or yell at him. If that happens, stop the trainer immediately and leave.