

Attention Training and Name Recognition

First your dog must be introduced to the clicker. If not done already, please read the article *Clicker Training*. Clicker training helps the dog learn by engaging her brain. It is very different from force training.

Have your dog in a quiet area, such as in the backyard, on a regular leash or longer light line. Use no verbal chatter for this introduction. When she looks up, click, and then treat. By the second click, she should be running to you to receive her treat. Treat her when she is at your left side, not sitting yet. Once she's at your left side, and has received her treat, start to walk. When her attention wanders into sniffing, stand still; just watch her with your peripheral vision. When she looks up, click, she runs to receive treat, we walk on together.

Introduce many changes of direction. By the second day, do attention work first in the back yard and then on the front sidewalk, for 25 feet or so, amid distractions. Each session lasted about five minutes. Dog becomes more attentive.

Remember to stop and stand still when your dog's attention wanders; and remember to click each time dog looks up at you. Give a reward for each click and remember to change direction. Your changing direction will encourage your dog to become more attentive.

For teaching your dog's name: the techniques you'll use will vary according to the circumstances, whether you just got a new dog or have had your dog for a while. Does your dog know Sit? Do you have your dog sit before you put down her food bowl? If so, say "Charley, sit." Use the name in front of the command word.

Do not over-use the dog's name. Avoid the dog's name in conversations with people. Otherwise the dog will hear its name so often that it will learn not to pay attention when it hears its name. You can say to other members of the family, "Did you play with the dog today?" Or "Did you put fresh water in the dog's bowl when you came home from school?"

Attention and name-recognition are two different things, but it is understandable that you want your dog's attention when you call her name. Please be patient, and remember that dogs do not learn by hearing commands shouted at them.

First, to help the dog learn, we must teach it. Then we repeat the teaching so that the dog makes many, many associations in her mind. Only much later do we add the cue (the command word or hand signal) for that skill. The reason for this delay in adding the cue is that we want to help the dog have many, many successful experiences at each skill level, rather than to fail.