

Choosing a Trainer



1. Training your dog should be fun! A competent instructor will allow and encourage you to observe a class prior to making the decision to enroll. In a well-run class, dogs and people will be enjoying themselves and having a successful learning experience. Look for an instructor who is approachable and who encourages participants to have a good time. If space permits, an instructor should welcome and encourage all family members and others who interact with the dog to attend class.
2. A skilled class instructor will:
 - a. Provide a clear explanation of each lesson.
 - b. Demonstrate the behavior(s) that students will be teaching to their dogs.
 - c. Provide clear instructions and written handouts on how to teach the behavior(s).
 - d. Give students ample time in class to begin practicing the day's lesson.
 - e. Assist students individually with proper implementation of techniques.
3. A skilled and professional trainer will encourage dialogue and be courteous to both canine and human clients alike.
4. You want to be comfortable with the training tools and methods used by the instructor. A skilled and professional dog trainer employs humane training methods which are not harmful to the dog and/or handler, and avoids the practices of hanging, beating, kicking, shocking, and all similar procedures or training devices that could cause the dog great pain, distress, or that have imminent potential for physical harm. You have the absolute right to stop any trainer or other animal care professional who, in your opinion, is causing your dog undue harm or distress.
5. A conscientious trainer will stay informed about innovations in dog training and behavior tools and techniques. Check to see if the instructor is a member of any educational organizations such as the APDT, and whether s/he pursues ongoing educational opportunities.
6. A good instructor will take care to protect your dog's health in a group setting. Ask if dogs and puppies are required to be vaccinated prior to class and, if so, which vaccines are required. Make sure you and your veterinarian are comfortable with the vaccination requirements.
7. Current clients are a valuable source of information for you. Attending a group class gives you the opportunity to ask clients how they feel about their experience - if they are enjoying the class and feel that their training needs and goals are being met.
8. Because of variables in dog breeding and temperament and owner commitment and experience, a trainer cannot and should not guarantee the results of his/her training. However, an instructor can and should be willing to ensure client satisfaction with his/her professional services.

Ask others in the local dog-related industry for schools they recommend. Ask vets, groomers, breeders, dog-sitters, rescue organizations, and local authorities and associations. Look for a training institution that has been in place for many years - how long have the instructors been training, what do the instructors like about the school? Does the school offer educational events and are they a good community member? Aversive methods such as alpha rolls, distracting dogs by pulling, loud noises, spraying water on the dogs, pinch or choke collars or other forceful methods can create secondary, unwanted behaviours. Question 'lifetime guarantees' and institutions that don't include you in the training programs. If the institution cannot describe enthusiastically their methods to you, or invite you to visit a class in progress before you join, consider an alternative location.

