

# The Four D's in Helping Your Dog Gain Fluency – Terry Ryan

Trainers strive for fluency in every exercise. A dog is fluent when she can perform on cue, no matter what the circumstances. "Sit" - If your dog responds well to the sit cue indoors by the couch, that doesn't necessarily mean she will respond appropriately to a sit cue outdoors next to another dog. Dogs don't seem to generalize well. Common criteria for many basic dog training exercises start with the letter D. As you're making one D more difficult, relax the other criteria. Doing so reduces the possibility of a failure and increases the probability for reward. Rewards drive behaviour!

## **DISTANCE of TRAINER**

If your dog will sit and stay reliably when she is very close to you, start moving a little farther away. Use a fenced area or a long leash. But don't increase the difficulty of distance, duration, distractions and continue to reduce the number of reinforcements all at once.

## **DURATION of EXERCISE**

When the dog is successful for short periods of time, try extending the exercise a little. Ping pong back and forth on duration. One time it might be 25 seconds, next time 10, next time 40 seconds, and then 15. But don't increase distance, duration and add new distractions at the same time. You might want to return to her in the middle of the exercise, tell her she's good, give her a treat, then continue the exercise.

## **DIVERSITY of ENVIRONMENT**

If your dog performs well in her usual, calm training environment (home, yard, training class), it's time to complicate matters a little by introducing distractions or taking her to different places to practice. Will your dog sit and stay in your living room while you put on your coat? Good! You wouldn't want to try that the first time if she was in the other end of the house. Nor would you want to overwhelm her with a five-minute onslaught of coat on, keys, leash and open door.

## **DELIVERY SCHEDULE of REWARD**

It's appropriate to begin training with a continuous rate of reinforcement (reward every behaviour). Within a few trials, see if your dog will do a two-fer. (sit, stay, release followed by another sit, stay release). Another criterion for delivery of reinforcement might be the speed of the response in relation to the cue. Perhaps you will concentrate on the quality of the response, for example a straight sit versus a haphazard sit. If you're stepping up the one level of difficulty you may want to go back to temporarily to delivering the rewards more frequently.

## **Our childhood teachers were wise...**

This is what Dr. Seuss would have said about criteria, cues, and rate of reinforcement:

I do not always heed commands, My dear but often silly man.  
I might not sit if near a goat, How could I lay down on a boat?  
Perhaps I'd lie down in the house, But not if I have seen a mouse.  
Don't tell me "heel" when I've smelled a fox, Or found the biscuits in the box.  
I'd find it odd to hear words said, If you were standing on your head.  
And wonder if "stay" means "do come here", If you said it to me from a chair.  
I cannot always just obey, What ever silly words you say.  
Cause if I'm staring at the cat, I will not hear you that is THAT!

©'02 S.Clothier

