

## **Fast Track to Perfection**

### **Ian Dunbar**

*Ian Dunbar is a veterinarian and behaviorist who has an international reputation for his "lure and reward" method of training animals. Born in England, he holds degrees from the Royal Veterinarian College of London University and in psychology from the University of California. He now heads the Center for Applied Animal Behavior at his California alma mater. Dunbar has written extensively about his speciality, coauthoring a series of volumes on different breeds of dog. In this selection, he shows readers how to apply his methods to training puppies.*

Puppies mature at an astounding rate. Don't let yours fall behind on the developmental curve. Nearly everything a puppy needs to learn must be taught in 12 weeks - between the ages of 2 and 5 months. You can buy yourself time by knowing what and how to teach the puppy before you bring it home. Go to puppy classes, read behavior and training books, watch instructional video and consult your veterinarian. Then raise your puppy perfectly by meeting these six training deadlines.

#### **Deadline 1: Before You Bring Home a Puppy**

Your puppy should be accustomed to a domestic environment before you bring it home - at around 8 weeks of age. Make sure it has been raised indoors and in close contact with people. It should be prepared for the clamor of everyday life - the noise of the vacuum cleaner, the hoopla surrounding sports programs on television, children crying, adults arguing. Early exposure - before the pup's eyes and ears have fully opened - allows the puppy to gradually assimilate sights and sounds that otherwise might frighten.

The window for socializing begins to close by the time the pup turns 3 months of age, and its most impressionable learning period starts to fade by its fifth month.

## Deadline 2: Puppy's First Day at Home

Misbehavior is the most common reason dogs end up in shelters. This is especially sad because owners can prevent most behavior problems. For instance, if you avoid leaving the pup unsupervised, it won't chew furniture and belongings or soil your house; while teeny accidents do little damage in themselves, they may set a precedent for habits in months to come.

When you cannot watch your pup, confine it to a crate or a puppy-proofed room which should contain:

- \*a comfortable bed

- \*a bowl of fresh water

- \*a doggie toilet placed away from the bed and which simulates the outdoors.

Lay down a sheet of linoleum and cover it with a disposable plastic sheet.

Next lay newspaper or something absorbent. Top the three layers with dirt or sod to teach the pup to relieve itself on grass (or concrete slabs for city pups who relieve themselves curbside).

\*Hollow chew toys with kibble inside to reward your puppy for chewing toys rather than furniture. During its first few weeks at home, a marvelous training ploy is to serve your puppy's food only in chew toys. After it's a chew toy-aholic - and has not had a chewing mishap for at least three months - begin to serve its dinner in a bowl.

At least once every hour, release your puppy from its crate, quickly leash it and hurry it to its outdoor toilet area. Stand still and give the pup three minutes to produce. When it does, lavishly praise and offer *three* extra special treats. Freeze-dried liver treats work well because dogs love their strong smell.

If your puppy eliminates, it may be allowed supervised exploration of the house. If it does not eliminate, lead it back to its crate or puppy-proof room and try again in half an hour.

Keep up the once an hour schedule until your pup is at least 3 months old to make certain it never eliminates indoors. After 3 months of age pups start to

develop the bladder control necessary for longer waits between potty breaks, but you must still be vigilant. One mistake can set a bad precedent.

Always reward your puppy for using its outdoor toilet area, but wait until it has completed its shots before taking it to public property; otherwise it can pick up other dogs' diseases. A pup must not walk or sniff where other dogs have been until it has developed sufficient immunity (between 3 and 4 months old).

### **Deadline 3: Puppy at 3 Months**

By 3 months your pup must master socialization and basic manners. Pups who do not will have a hard time picking up these skills later in life. Unfortunately, the risk of disease means dog-to-dog socialization must wait. Meanwhile, teach your pup to be people-friendly.

As a general rule, your pup should socialize with at least 100 people before it is 3 months old. This is easier than it sounds. Invite eight friends over each Sunday to watch sports on television. Each Monday invite eight different friends to watch *Dateline*. Catch up on outstanding social obligations by inviting family, friends and neighbors to weekly puppy parties. On another night, invite some neighborhood children. Socializing a puppy is great because it does wonders for *your* social life.

Show your guests how to hand feed the puppy's kibble to encourage and reward it for coming, sitting and lying down. Ask your puppy to come. Praise profusely as it approaches and offer a piece of kibble when it arrives. Back up, then do it again - and again and again. Then say, "Puppy, Sit" and slowly move a piece of kibble from in front of the puppy's nose to between its eyes. As the puppy raises its nose to sniff, it will lower its rear and sit. If the puppy jumps up, you're holding the food too high. When your puppy sits, say "good dog" and offer the kibble. Now say "Puppy, Down" and lower a piece of kibble from in front of the puppy's nose to between its forepaws. As the puppy lowers its head to follow the food, it will usually lie down. If your puppy stands, hide the kibble in your palm until it lies

down. Then say “Good dog” and offer the food. Coach your guests until each can get the puppy to come, sit and lie down three times for a piece of kibble.

When a puppy approaches promptly and happily, it is a sign the dog is people-friendly. Sitting and lying on request indicates respect for the person issuing instructions. If your puppy is regularly hand-fed by guests, it will learn to enjoy people’s company.

#### **Deadline 4: Puppy at 4 1/2 Months**

Seemingly overnight, puppies become adolescents. Enroll in a training class before yours is 14 weeks old - that is, before it starts to test your limits. A professional will teach it to stop nipping and other behavior no-nos, as well as temper its hyper-turbo energy.

Most puppies can start classes at 3 months. Classrooms are generally safe places: the puppies are vaccinated, the floors regularly sterilized. I advise delaying walks in public places until your puppy is 4 months old because of the risk of disease.

Puppy classes develop canine social savvy through play with other puppies in a controlled setting. Most classes are family-oriented, offering pups opportunities to socialize with all sorts of people - men, women, and children. The number of behaviors your pup learns in its first training session will amaze you. Shy and fearful pups gain confidence. Bullies tone it down and become gentle. All dogs learn to come, sit and lie down when requested and listen to their owners and ignore distractions.

#### **Deadline 5: Puppy at 5 Months**

Take your dog everywhere - Errands around town, car trips to visit friends, picnics in the park and especially to explore the neighborhood. And bring a little bag of kibble. Give a couple of pieces to each stranger who wants to meet your dog. Ask each person to offer the kibble only after your pup sits to say hello.

At this point, you may come to believe the canine weight-pulling record exceeds 10,000 pounds. Your dog also may begin to ignore you. A few tips:

**\*Make your dog walk for its dinner.** With kibble in hand, stand still and wait for the dog to sit. Ignore everything else your dog does; it will sit eventually. When it does, say “Good dog,” and offer the kibble, take one giant step forward, stand still and wait for your dog to sit again. Repeat this until your dog sits each time you stop. Now take two giant steps before you stop. Then three steps, five, eight, 10, 20, and so on. *Voila*, your dog walks calmly and attentively by your side and sits each time you stop.

**\*Take a few time-outs on each walk.** Sit down, relax and allow the dog to settle down and watch the world go by. If your pup is not the sit-still type, take along a treat-stuffed chew toy as an incentive.

**\*Never take your dog’s sound temperament for granted.** Outdoors can be scary and offer the occasional surprise. Give your dog a piece of kibble every time a big truck, noisy motorcycle or child on a skateboard whizzes by and your dog doesn’t overreact.

**\*Don’t make a habit of letting your dog off-leash to run and play with other dogs;** your dog may eventually refuse to come when called. Instead, take your dog’s dinner to the park and, throughout its play session, call your dog every minute or so and have it sit for a couple of pieces of kibble. It will soon get the idea and its enthusiastic response will be the talk of the park.

### **Deadline: Now and Forever**

Continue walking your dog at least once a day and take it to a dog park several times a week. Find different walks and dog parks to meet a variety of dogs and people. If your dog always sees the same people and dogs, it may regress socially and become intolerant of strangers.

Now enjoy life with your good-natured, well-mannered companion. Give your dog a special bone - Good dog! - and yourself a pat on the back - Good owner!

