

The Personal Best "Walkabout Route"

By Terry Ryan

Mission

Help you monitor progress during your pet's training.

Does your dog leap around at the front door when someone knocks? Does he push into the refrigerator when you open the door? Does he tangle you in the leash on the way down the steps for a walk? Internet is full of advice on how to train dogs. Something not often addressed is helping owners realize the success they are having in training. Likely, your family is too close to see gradual, but constant improvement in your pet's behavior. This personal best activity might help. At any rate, it will help make your practice more fun and practical.

Step 1.

Plan a walking route in and around your home that includes locations associated with a control problem. Plan to substitute the annoying behavior with substitute, appropriate behaviors such as Sit, Down, Heel.

Example: It's Monday night. Jennifer takes note of the time. She gets the leash and walks to the door. Toby's there, bouncing around, ready for his walk. Doorways have a way of pushing a dog's ON button!

- Toby must remain sitting at the front door while Jennifer attaches the leash to his collar.
- Jennifer opens the door. Toby remains sitting until they walk out together in heel position. Toby sits again while Jennifer closes the door and reopens it
- Jennifer goes through the door and back into the house while Toby sits. Jennifer then calls the dog in, closes the door and plays with Toby for ten seconds as a reward for being good.
- Jennifer must settle the dog into a sit after the 10 seconds of play to work on Toby's OFF button!
- Next they walk to the utility room. It has a door opening to the garage, so it's one of Toby's favorite places. Time for a ride! Another ON button for Toby. If Toby's leash becomes tight, Jennifer simply takes him back to the start to work with him. Alternately, she can simply stand still and not go forward to give him the idea he's not going anywhere! Toby want to get to the car. And he will, he will train Jennifer to take him there by keeping his leash slack.
- Now Toby must remain on a down-stay by the car door while Jennifer opens it. He gets to jump in after a wait of 5-15 seconds.

Jennifer works with Toby a little every day but doesn't do the timed route again until next Monday night. Chances are she will prove to herself that she and Toby are making progress. The best part: the good manners learned on this set route, can carry over to other times and places Jennifer needs Toby's cooperation.

Make up your own walk-about-route. Be creative. Your route might include a stop at the refrigerator. Perhaps you'll ask your dog to sit and stay while you open it and rattle some food around. Maybe you will get your dog to sit and stay while you close the door and cross the room. At random, you can provide a food treat for your pal's good sit and come-when-called behavior. But no treat, if your dog hasn't stayed in position! And, importantly, only sometimes if he's been good. Dogs remember their lessons best when they have to play the lottery for their rewards.