

Laying a Foundation of Obedience for Natural Ability and Utility Dogs

RMC NAVHDA – February Training Day

RMC NAVHDA's mission is to help each handler develop their versatile dog into an efficient, well-adjusted hunting companion. **Remember that you are the primary trainer of your dog** – and the chapter is a support system to provide the tools and help you reach your goals. This work list is one of those tools. It provides a training regimen to lay a solid foundation of obedience in your dog – all exercises can be completed in your home and yard. **Consider this your homework; use it as guidance in the coming months.** Once your dog masters all these exercises, it will be well on its way to future success in both field and water!

Recommendations for Success:

- At least 3 practice sessions per week, 15-30 minutes long
- End each session with success. Keep training fun for your dog! Use more sessions, of shorter length for young dogs/pups – and remember, stop immediately if dog's interest lags.
- Create a calendar to track your progress. This will also aid in making sure you train all the different obedience sections frequently.

Recall

- a. On-leash, with dog a few steps from you, call its name, followed by "come". If dog comes toward you, praise AFTER dog arrives at your desired finishing position (in front of you or at heel and either standing or sitting as you prefer). If dog does not come to you, a short tug on leash as you repeat command (praise when dog gets to your side, not before). If dog continues to ignore, issue "come" command and pull in dog to your desired finish position calmly; praise when dog they get to the correct position. Repeat as needed till dog comes on first command.
- b. On-check cord, repeat steps in (a) above, but with dog at increasing distance, until dog is coming every time. Start this in a calm setting without distractions; gradually, work in distractions. Some trainers use small treats to reward dogs at this stage.
- c. Off-leash, when dog is reliable on check cord, repeat program as in (a, b) increasing distance slowly; praise lavishly for good work. Note: we will discuss enforcement of this command at a distance, including throwing noisy object and e-collar use in future months.

Learning leash manners: Having our dog's focus and attention is key for loose leash walking. Build the amount of time your dog will keep its focus on you as you are walking slowly and consistently.

- a. On-leash walk few steps, if dog tugs, quick tug back (do not let dog pull steadily; reverse direction and keep moving so the dog learns to catch up and walk with you. Praise for no tugging (indoors, without distractions, then with distractions).

Heeling on/off leash

- b. Heel on-leash - indoors, without distractions, with distractions – stopping/starting, entering rooms
- c. Heel on-leash outdoors - in yard without distractions, with distractions, sidewalks, stopping/crossing streets, increase exposure to people/crowds.
- d. When dog has mastered all of above, repeat above off-leash ONLY indoors, and outdoors in fenced/secure locations

Basic Land/Water Bumper Training Progression (It's Not Just a Progression, It's a Game)

Required Stuff: Bumpers (variety)

Time (5-15 min of undivided attention)

- a. Prepare the Game Space for Success
- b. Land: Confined Area (Indoor/Outdoor)

- a. Remove Other Toys
- b. Eliminate Other Distractions (yours and the dog's)
- c. Introduction to Bumpers
 - a. "Play Bumpers"
 - b. Even though this is "A Game", Bumpers are not toys
 - c. "Play Bumpers"/Short retrieves on a long lead in confined area/"Play Bumpers"
 - d. "Play Bumpers"/Lengthen retrieves on-lead in confined area, introduce "The Finish"/"Play Bumpers"
- d. Things to Remember
 - a. Finish sessions with "Play Bumpers", it's still a game
 - b. Keep sessions short/Don't play until the dog is tired/Leave the dog wanting more

Whoa

- a. Get dog accustomed to table – walk up and over repeatedly.
- b. For young pups, stop with leash on table; hold dog calmly for few seconds, release and praise, walk off table – repeat until dog stops with you.
- c. On table – practice until dog stops with single calm "whoa" command and no leash pressure; release -use same release command for whoa, down, sit: "free" works!
- d. On table – practice stopping/starting several times across table, until perfect (with single command/no leash pressure)
- e. Extend distance of dog from handler using check cord; practice till perfect
- f. Use slight pressure on check cord to have dog resist moving – practice till perfect
- g. Off table – no distractions, return to leash/dog at side; practice till perfect
- h. Off table – add distance with check cord
- i. Take outdoors/with distractions; back up to (b) with leash till perfect; then extend with check cord
- j. Indoors, remove leash and practice stopping dog with single command near handler's side; when perfect move to (i).
- k. Indoors, no leash/check cord... extend distance from handler, practice stopping dog at distance. When perfect, move to (j).
- l. Move outside, extend distance, introduce distractions.

Down

- a. On table or floor: place dog in down position – hold till dog accepts for few seconds; praise and release.
- b. Repeat, extend time slowly till dog will remain down longer; praise and release.
- c. Move a step/or 2 away from dog; praise and release after a few seconds.
- d. Repeat c) gradually increasing distance from dog, and duration of time.

Sit/stay

- a. Place dog in "sit" position (no "stay" needed). Release after few seconds, praise.
- b. Repeat, gradually increasing time before release.
- c. Repeat, and begin to distance handler from dog; reduce time before release at first...extend gradually.
- d. Place dog in "sit", walk out of room for few seconds, return and release. Repeat, gradually increasing time handler is out of dog's sight.
- e. Introduce distractions.

Place

- a. Walk dog on a leash towards a place board or bed. Say Place and reward dog when all 4 feet are on object
- b. Release dog with heel to walk around and repeat
- c. As dog begins to walk willingly to place, stop walking a step or two before the place board or bed and have the dog go in front of you to get to place on their own. Praise and release dog with heel and repeat

- d. Continue extending the distance the dog walks to place without assistance from the handler until they are going to place 10 feet away.
- e. Start extending the time the dog stays on place before releasing. All 4 feet need to stay on place until you release the dog.

Beginning of trained retrieve: hold and carry; release (on table)

- a. Whoa dog on table, then place bumper in dog's mouth, command "hold", and start walking dog while they hold for a few seconds, remove with an "out" command NOTE – No chewing of bumper allowed – if dog wants to roll/chew bumper, bump leash, hold collar/jaw in one hand and bumper in other, and use "no" to prevent additional mouthing. As soon as dog quiets have it release bumper and praise. Repeat until the behavior stops.
- b. Repeat, lengthen time of holding and make the heeling more challenging, such as turns, moving faster up and down the table, jumping on and off the side of the table, etc
- c. Once dog is willingly accepting, holding, and releasing after several seconds, begin having it move more with heavier bumpers and off-camber objects.
- d. As the dog progresses with bumpers, move to dead birds (chukar, pheasant, duck)
- e. Supplemental homework: Have dog return to finish position and hold bumper while receiving praise, tapping bumper instead of taking it etc.

Drags for Natural Ability Puppies – This is an important first step in teaching mental stability for Puppies. Drags allow for the handler to lay a scent trail that is consistent and the handler knows exactly where the trail is.

- a. Begin teaching the puppy how to focus on the ground. (ie point to the ground with some kibble or beef broth trail saying "look here" and moving slightly forward to the next objective
- b. Dog should follow short (25-foot) drag to bird at start of this exercise... if not, shorten drag until dog is successful in locating bird.
- c. Place a feather pile at the beginning of the drag to help the puppy understand what it is looking for
- d. Keep the puppy calm and moving slowly in a forward progression towards the bird on a check cord. We don't want puppies to be searching for the bird but slowly working ground scent to find the bird.

Drags for Utility Dogs - (Only for dogs that are reliably retrieving to hand – WAIT on this exercise until your dog is retrieving well). Only work a few drags 1-2 times/week – quit if dog appears bored with the work. Most dogs progress on this work very quickly.

- a. Dog should follow short (25-foot) drag to bird at start of this exercise... if not, shorten drag until dog is successful in locating bird.
- b. Gradually lengthen drag till 100 feet – can reuse drag track location if necessary.
- c. Repeat until dog is successful 3-4 times in a row.
- d. Place 1 bend in drag track, shorten drag to 50 feet... repeat until dog is successful 3-4 times in a row.
- e. Gradually lengthen track, adding a slight obstacle (such as through a brush line, into dense grass. Do NOT try to overcomplicate track at this point (circles or tight U's in track) as this can be counterproductive – dog may begin to rely on a search with eyes/air scent instead of tracking with nose