



**UNLEASH
YOUR DOG'S
INNER
LEGEND**



ASK THE EXPERT: SPEECH TRAINING YOUR DOG

Ask most dog owners and they will tell you of more than one occasion when they thought their dog understood exactly what they were saying. And it would seem the results of a study by a group of Hungarian researchers is backing up that theory.

Through the use of MRIs, the researchers discovered that dogs use the left hemisphere of their brain to decipher the meaning of words spoken to them and connect these to emotions the same way that humans do. In short, dog owners are not going crazy and might actually be onto something.

It's a revolutionary study that once again confirms the impressive intelligence of our furry BFFs and that speaking to your dog is a powerful tool towards building a relationship. The results of the study also got us wondering about what the best ways to teach dogs to understand a few words are.

Word limit

Studies show that the average dog can understand about 165 different words; a number which can, in some cases, be increased with additional training.

In fact, back in 2013 a Border Collie named Chaser made the news as "the smartest dog in the world" thanks to her impressive knowledge of over 1 000 words.

And it doesn't have to be just words. It has also been documented that dogs that live with deaf or hearing-impaired people can be trained to respond to hand signals and certain noises.



Getting started

Chaser's success did not happen overnight and required 5 hours of training, 5 days a week for 9 years. And while training your own dog might not require this level of dedication, owners should keep in mind that getting your dog to understand and respond to certain words is a lengthy process that will require dedication and patience.

Dogs respond best to rewards-based training, which means giving them a snack, positive praise, or some affection when they execute a command correctly. This is the best way to train them to respond to vocal cues or commands like "sit", "come", "stay", "down" or "no".

Adding more words

Learning leads to more learning. Once your dog has mastered simple commands, you can use the same rewards method to start expanding their word knowledge. Most of the words your dog will be able to pick up are the names of objects and words associated with commands. They are not abstract thinkers and won't do well with words that don't involve the tangible.

Words that are associated with your dog's favourite activities, like eating, playing or a walk in the park, are often the easiest for them to learn.

Start off the training by showing your dog an object and repeating its name. Then hide the object and continue repeating its name while the dog searches for it. Should they find it, reward them with food, affection and good praises. Repeat this until they eventually retain the word, making sure to gradually replace food with other rewards.



During the training process it is also beneficial to ensure that no other objects are around in order to not confuse your dog. You should also use a positive tone during training as your dog can sense when your energy is low or when you are getting frustrated, which will hamper the learning process.

The benefits

A dog that knows simple vocal commands is much easier to control. This is especially beneficial during moments of increased excitement or aggression. For example, a simple "freeze" command can be used to stop a dog from running into traffic or to prevent it from attacking another dog or a person.

Training also leads to a better understanding between owner and dog, and reaffirms the owner's position as leader of the pack. Studies have shown that dogs that know their place in their family are much happier and less stressed than dogs who assume the leadership role.



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