

**Jim Dobbs' "Grip Method" of Training the Retrieve** *(taught to me by the late Ron Roman)*

**1) Walking the table:**

- The training table needs to be a good place. Take the dog on the table, walking the dog up and down, and giving lots of treats. We want to make the dog love the table.

**2) Gloved Hand:**

- Attach the dog to a post to take away his option of flight. Hobbles work well here also to keep the dog from pawing at you while you work with the gloved hand.
- Grip when the dog fights, relax and calmly praise when the dog complies. Use no command here.
- Focus on time in the mouth rather than in-out repetitions.
- Shoot for 1 minute of compliance, 2-3 sessions should be enough.
- Teach a command for "out" (out, drop, give, etc...)
- Give LOTS of treats. Treats lower stress and provide stress gauge to the handler.

**3) Grip with Dowel:**

- Tie the dog short
- Support lower jaw for 1-2 sessions (training wheels). After that, apply ear pressure when the dowel slips out.
- Begin to use "Hold" command to communicate the desired holding/gripping behavior.
- Focus on time in the mouth rather than in-out repetitions.
- Get the dog moving ASAP, and WALK THE TABLE.
- At first, tug test each time the dog returns to the end of the table.
- Escalate to random tug tests from all directions.
- The goal is to make dog grip dowel firmly all the time. No crunching or mouthing.
- Continue "out" training. Require dog to sit for delivery.
- Move on to next phase when dog is gripping well and walking the table. This may take several sessions.

**4) Grip and Fetch w/ Dumbbell:**

- Same steps as dowel for grip.
- Transition to pick-up and "Fetch" command.

- Do Fetch in motion, short reaches first then longer.
- Condition the pick-up location. (picking up from the same location)
- Use ear pinch for forward and pick-up motion.
- Continue ear pinch for incorrectly picked up items.
- Balance time in w/ in-out repetition.
- Call dog to you, and send dog away to fetch
- Be sure to walk the table after each pick-up, enforcing good grip behavior.

**5) Transition to electric collar:**

- The dog must be reliably picking up w/ ear pinch.
- The dog must be antsy to get to dumbbell (you must have to hold him back).
- Begin w/ lower level of stimulation and transition to higher level.
- Condition the behavior. Rely on ear pinch, not collar for noncompliance. With time you can do more w/ the collar. With repetition and conditioning the collar can be relied upon more to push the dog.

**6) Grip and fetch w/ bumper:**

- Go through steps 4 & 5 with bumper.
- Use bumper w/ ends wrapped w/ wire to promote center pick-up.
- Spend time on EVERY step.
- This is a good place to start w/ weights.

**7) Grip and Fetch w/ real birds:**

- Go through steps 4 & 5 with frozen, thawed, and live, birds & Game (start w/ rubber bird)
- Spend time on every animal the dog will be expected to retrieve (I save fox for later).
- Spend time on EVERY step.

**8) Grip off table w/ Bumper:**

- Heel, sit, here, and heel to place without dropping. If dog drops reinstall w/ pressure.
- Repeat w/ rubber pheasant and real birds.

**9) Fetch off the floor:**

- Start with the dumbbell.
- Condition the location.
- Use the collar.
- Repeat the process for bumpers, rubber birds, and real birds
- Do three dummy pick-up drill (can be found in Dobb's retriever training manual, p.101).

10) **Fetch to pile:**

- Start w/ bumpers and/or rubber pheasants.
- Use “come” w/ collar to condition the dog for quick pick-up.
- Condition the location.
- Use “here” or “come” command at pick-up
- Move to farther pile and push dog to failure.
- Force dog to complete one more retrieve.
- Do again w/ real birds.

Now you are finally done! Remember to require good grip and clean delivery ALWAYS & EVERYWHERE!!!

**Key Points to Remember:**

- Use positive reinforcement often—use treats to keep up attitude and gauge stress.
- Be as constant as possible with training regimen
- Reread training notes prior to each session
- Collar use—remember to condition before you reinforce
- If the dog has 2 failures in a row, back up.
- If you have to make the dog pick up the object, use the ear pinch, not the collar. Back up if necessary.
- Review progress from previous session before beginning new material
- Stop on a success, even if you have to go back and do something easy. Stop early to ensure success if necessary.