

SEMINAR OUTLINE

you're conducting a stand-alone husbandry seminar, consider letting your students decide which 3 or 4 behaviors to focus on. Provide them with a list of possibilities from which to choose. My list includes:

- getting in the tub and standing for a bath
- presenting paws for nail trims
- allowing teeth-cleaning/holding mouth open
- swallowing "naked" pills (i.e., not wrapped in food)
- tolerating brushing and de-matting
- holding still for injections and blood draws
- permitting insertion of a thermometer
- accepting ear cleaning
- urinating on cue
- lying on side while body is massaged and manipulated

Discuss the definition of each chosen behavior in some detail, showing a live demo or video of the completed behavior whenever possible. Before any training, assess where each of the dogs is on the shaping "ladder" for each goal behavior. For example, Spot may clench his teeth and pull away when his owner tries to give him a pill, run into the closet when he hears bath water running, and snarl when his owner reaches to touch any of his paws.

Next, ask your students to design shaping progressions for their own dog using each dog's individual starting behavior. Provide handouts that illustrate diagrams of blank shaping ladders with at least 10 – 12 rungs. Take time to help each student fill in the bottom rung (= how the dog behaves now) and the top rung (=the ultimate behavioral goal). Then, for homework or during class if time permits, have your students fill in the other rungs, splitting the behavior into successive approximations. You can give suggestions, but allow your students' to create novel ways "up the mountain." Besides, they'll be more invested in the process if they help create the shaping programs. Some examples:

1) Brushing

1. dog runs away when she sees owner holding brush
2. dog will eat treats from owner's hand while brush is on floor nearby
3. dog will eat treats placed on brush
4. dog will nose-touch brush lying on the floor
5. dog will allow gentle petting anywhere on body
6. dog remains relaxed when hair is gently tugged or rubbed in wrong direction
7. dog remains relaxed when body is touched with brush for 1 second
8. dog remains relaxed when body is touched with brush for 3 seconds
9. dog targets nose on owner's fist while standing for 1 second
10. dog targets nose on owner's fist while standing for 3 seconds
11. dog targets owner's fist for 3 seconds while being touched with brush for 1 second
12. dog targets owner's fist for 3 seconds while being touched with brush for 3 seconds
13. dog is relaxed for full-strength brushing for 3 minutes at a time

II) Swallowing pills

I once helped care for a walrus who'd had major abdominal surgery. Her recovery included taking nearly 300 pills three times a day! Stuffing all those slippery pills into the gills of Georgie's food-fish took a long time, tried my patience, and was futile if she wasn't feeling well enough to eat. So, the other zookeepers and I decided to teach her to swallow "naked" pills. Within about two weeks, we were able to pour all 300 pills into her wide-open mouth and ask her to swallow. As a reward she got a handful of fish (if she was hungry) or a couple of Tums (if she was refusing food). No kidding – she ate Tums like they were candy. Go figure.

Let your students know that their dogs' pills can't always be wrapped in cheese or some other yummy treat. Some medications need to be taken on an empty stomach, and a food-covered pill won't tempt a really sick dog.

1. dog clenches teeth shut when owner approaches her with a pill
2. dog can catch and eat a kernel of popcorn lobbed to her (Note: dog is prevented from eating any food that falls on the floor throughout this training progression.)
3. dog can catch and eat a piece of hotdog lobbed to her
4. dog can catch and eat a piece of hotdog in which half of a small empty gelatin capsule is imbedded [Note: gelatin capsules are available at pharmacies and health food stores.]

5. dog can catch and eat a piece of hotdog in which a whole gelatin capsule is imbedded
6. dog can catch and swallow half of a gelatin capsule filled with hotdog
7. dog can catch and swallow a whole gelatin capsule filled with hotdog
8. dog can catch and swallow a small empty gelatin capsule – no hotdog
9. dog can catch and swallow a small real pill
10. dog can catch and swallow a medium-sized real pill
11. dog can catch and swallow any pill

III) Cleaning teeth

1. dog clenches teeth shut when owner handles his mouth
2. dog allows owner to briefly touch the underside of his muzzle with one hand while owner uses other hand to feed treats to the dog
3. dog allows owner to touch the underside of his muzzle for 5 seconds while owner feeds treats to the dog
4. dog allows owner to cup her hand under his “chin” for 5 seconds, then gets a food treat
5. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand for 5 seconds (this is a form of targeting; dolphin trainers call it “stationing”)
6. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand for 2 seconds while she gently touches his lips with her other hand
7. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand for 5 seconds while she gently touches his lips with her other hand
8. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand for 2 seconds while she briefly lifts his lip with her other hand
9. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand for 5 seconds while she lifts his lip with her other hand
10. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand while she runs her finger over a few of his front teeth
11. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand and offers minimal resistance when his owner gently opens his mouth for 2 seconds
12. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand and offers minimal resistance when his owner gently opens his mouth far enough to touch his tongue
13. dog rests muzzle in owner’s cupped hand and voluntarily opens his mouth a tiny bit when the owner reaches toward his lips
14. dog keeps mouth slightly agape while owner runs her finger back and forth over his upper incisors and canine teeth

And eventually ...dog rests muzzle in owner's cupped hand with mouth open for 15 seconds while teeth are gently rubbed with a toothbrush, gauze or a metal scraper

IV) Trimming nails

I'll let you create your own shaping plans for this behavior. Here are some lessons I've learned from my attempts to teach nail-trimming to pet owners:

- Begin by giving each student a handout with a clear drawing of the parts of a dog's nail, indicating the location of the quick and the best angle to cut the nail
- Discuss and show your students the different tools available (i.e., scissors-type clippers, guillotine clippers, Dremels). Don't forget the styptic powder.
- Warn folks that a Dremel can get wrapped in fluffy dog hair or dangling human hair. (I once got an instant dreadlock while trimming nails.) For dogs with hairy paws, try pulling a panty hose over the paw. The dog's nails can poke through the nylon while the hair is held away from the nails.
- Discuss and demonstrate various positions for nail trims (e.g., on a raised surface for a toy dog; standing – like a horse for a farrier - for large dogs; dog lying on her side on the floor; dog lying on her back supported between the outstretched legs of her owner; etc)
- Demonstrate with a live dog to review where to clip. Be conservative – trim just a tiny bit. Blood is awfully discouraging at this point.
- Have your students clearly define their goal behavior. I encourage my students to set their first major goal at being able to trim just one nail per day. The whole process should take no more than 10 seconds, ideally just prior to the dog's mealtime. After a couple of weeks at this level, owners can progress to trimming the nails on one entire paw before dinner. For most dogs, it should take at least a month of training before they are totally relaxed throughout a complete pedicure.
- Typically, the most salient reward in this training procedure is the release of the dog's paw (or turning off Dremel). That moment of release is a huge negative reinforcer for the dog. Be sure that your students are releasing their hold on the dog's paw only when he's relaxed. No releases for struggling, squirming, whining, or other assorted hissy fits.