



FOOD & TRAINING

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There's a big difference between using rewards for training and bribery. An example would be calling the dog to you and rewarding him for coming vs. dangling a piece of food and saying, "If you come to me I'll give you this." That would be bribery. But if you call the dog to you and *then* present the food and reward him, that's a reward. This is called positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement using food is the most powerful training technique.

[It is a dog's nature to work for his food. By using food in training, we merely harness this natural desire.](#) As animal behaviorist Cesar Millan points out in his book, *Cesar's Way*, *Even if they're not going out to hunt everyday, it's natural for them to expect to work for their food. It's what they were built for. Thousands of years ago the first dogs learned that hanging around humans was an easier route to survival than frustrating hunts where they were only successful 5% of the time. However, our early human ancestors didn't give these dogs a "free ride". They exploited the dog's natural ability to scent out and capture prey, and later, to keep farm animals in line and pull equipment to heavy for humans. So, essentially dogs have been working for thousands of years - whether for us or for themselves.*

In addition, there is absolutely no reason to feel ashamed about rewarding a dog with food. It is a kind way to train in new behaviors as opposed to hitting the dog or jerking him with a choke chain.

You won't have to use food in training forever. It's just a means to an end. The reason food is used in the beginning is because every dog likes it, every dog needs it to survive, and by using food, something which they need in order to survive, there is built in motivation to work for it.

When using food, use little tiny pieces that are easy for your dog to chew so you can get a whole bunch of repetitions in. If you get a whole bunch of repetitions in, the behavior becomes stronger and more reliable. Whenever you reward your dog with treats, break each treat into many small pieces.

At first you're rewarding the dog every time for doing the right thing, what is known as a "**continuous reinforcement schedule**." It is important to reward every correct behavior. After the dog really knows the behavior so it's rock-solid, you will change your approach.

Phasing Out Food Lures and Rewards

Initially, we're using training treats both as lures to entice your dog to "come", "sit", "lie down", and as rewards for doing so. But we won't do so forever! Thereafter, we'll use different items as lures and rewards. For example, lure the dog with a Kong but reward him by throwing a tennis ball. Or, lure the dog with a food treat but say "Go play!" as a reward. After a few repetitions, you'll dispense with food lures entirely—your verbal instructions and hand signals will suffice; from now on, only use kibble as a reward. Finally, dispense with training treats as rewards. Instead, ask your dog to sit and/or lie down before every enjoyable doggy activity. Have your dog sit, stay, or lie down, before a belly rub, before throwing her ball, before letting her off-leash, and before inviting her to share the couch: i.e., replace food rewards with more meaningful life-rewards

7 Ingredients to Maintaining Successful Positive Dog Training

- 1) Begin to vary the times you give a treat by only rewarding the best efforts such as initial or quick responses. By randomly rewarding the dog for his best efforts, you shape the behavior exactly the way you want. The dog learns *faster* is better.
- 2) Put food rewards on an **"intermittent or variable reinforcement schedule."** Instead of rewarding your dog with food every single time, you'll now reward every other time or every 3rd time **and praise your dog instead for the other times**. If you include praise regularly as part of your positive training, your dog will have a very positive association with praise and it will still have value even when the treat is absent. Remember to implement an intermittent reward schedule only **after** you're sure your dog can perform the behavior 8 out of 10 times when using a continuous reinforcement schedule. When implementing a "intermittent reinforcement schedule", it's also important to not become predictable with your pattern of rewarding or your dog will quickly figure it out and will learn to work only when he thinks there is a reward coming. If you've ever played the slot machines in Las Vegas, you've been a victim of variable reinforcement ratios. All that means is that you keep playing because you might win!
- 3) Introduce pleasurable **"alternate rewards"** besides the food treat. Exciting things such as **"life rewards" - going for a walk, a quick game of tug-o-war, a tennis ball or bone to chew on, a ride in the car, getting to go in and out of doors, even your dog's meals**. Whatever is valuable to your dog can become the reward!
- 4) Fade (gradually remove) the lure. Luring is using a treat to show your dog what you want him to do. If you don't fade the lure early in the training process, you and your dog can become dependent on the presence of treats to get the behavior to happen. **As soon as your dog can perform the behavior easily for the lure, begin fading the lure** which you'll replace with the verbal cue for the word. Essentially the word you're using for "sit" or "down" becomes the equivalent of the lure.
- 5) It's also very important when using food in training to **"Randomize the Treats"**. Always use **3 or 4 kinds of treats** when training so your dog never knows what's coming. **This will keep him excited about learning, much more so than using one treat**.
- 6) In addition, for a breakthrough behavior or for a really great effort on your dog's part, shower him with treats like he struck gold. This is called a **"Jackpot"**. When you do this, you will really reinforce that particular behavior in your dog's mind - making it stick!
- 7) Finally, it's a good idea to always end the training session on a **"high note"**. Don't wait for your dog to get burned out before you call it quits. Always end it on a high!