

Training for Objects

Often times we expect our dogs to automatically do things that we have not trained them for.

One really good example is using a ramp. As our dog ages we realize he is too big to lift and needs a little help getting into the back of the SUV. Voila! We get him a ramp...even though he may have never seen a ramp before in his life...

During holidays some of us would like our dogs to wear something cute and/or decorative, even if they have never done that before...

A new dog craze comes along and we want our dog to join in and wear goggles too...

It's a very human thing to think we can just strap on a pair of antlers and have our dog sit still with Mr. Claus (or any other holiday decoration and icon of your choice). It's a very dog thing to be upset or uncomfortable or unable to do what is being asked due to a lack of experience.

Training to use a ramp or wear a hat (or whatever) is best done in a purely positive manner with lots of appropriate rewards. Think of it like trick training where you do 3-5 repetitions, 3-5 times a day.

A ramp is an easy obstacle. You may want to start with it flat on the ground and work up to the height of your vehicle. Line the ramp with a few treats and lead the (on-leash) dog across it. Use a term like "ramp" or "on", whatever works in your vocabulary. Lead them in both directions on the ramp. Unless your dog is seriously afraid of the ramp, this usually goes fairly quickly.

A good way to start with a sweater or clothing item is to just lay it on the dog without fastening it. This will give you a good idea how comfortable the dog is with the item. Reward for having it on in each stage as you progress to being fully dressed.

For hats, goggles, and things that go on the head (and around the ears), go slowly. Reward like crazy. This is where they will be the most sensitive. Make sure whatever you have, fits properly. If it's uncomfortable they are probably never going to wear it well.

I find many dogs like to hear us laugh, which can be a bonus when we're teaching them to do something a little silly. The more relaxed you are while training, the more comfortable your dog will be. Start this training now and by the holidays your dog will be ready for the family portrait!

