



## WHY TRICK TRAINING IS GOOD FOR DOGS...AND THEIR PEOPLE

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Here in the AKC's Canine Good Citizen department, we receive frequent requests from trainer and dog owners who want us to expand the menu of fun things people can do with their dogs.

Trick training is becoming increasingly popular and many evaluators teach a few tricks in Canine Good Citizen classes.

Trick dog training as we know it began in the 1920's with the movie dog, Rin Tin Tin. In 1943, a Rough Collie named "Pal" created the character of Lassie for feature films. Pal's trainer, Rudd Weatherwax, wrote a trick dog training manual in the 1940's. The manual was based on positive reinforcement and food rewards for correct behaviors, a training method that was uncommon at the time.

In the 1960's, Captain Arthur Haggerty trained dogs for movies, and in 1977, he co-authored the book, "Dog Tricks." Today, there are at least 10 trick dog training books and multiple videos. Currently, Kyra Sundance's popular *Do More With Your Dog!* program has books and videos, conducts workshops, and issues titles.

So, with all the training options available, why do tricks? First of all, trick training is FUN. Owners enjoy teaching tricks to their dogs. Dogs enjoy learning tricks and earning reinforcers during training. These reinforcers may be a food reward or a very happy, excited owner who is praising the dog. *Tricky Trainers* offers tasty treats that are the perfect size for tricks training.

Tricks are simply behaviors, and learning these behaviors puts the dog in a learning-to-learn mode. Tricks are behaviors that can be done for entertainment such as "say your prayers," physical activity (such as weave poles or spin), or as useful practical skills (e.g., "paws up" so the dog stands with front paws on a stool to raise his head for petting by a patient in a hospital bed).

What I like about trick training is that it will make a trainer out of a beginning trainer. Correctly using the behavioral

principles of shaping, chaining and reinforcement will be required of the successful trick dog trainer. I like the fact that trick dog training requires the handler and dog to work together as a team. Pushing, shoving and pulling the dog into position don't work in trick dog training.

Dog owners like to show off their dog's tricks. Many owners who are happy to instruct the dog to give you a "High Five" or demonstrate a "spin" would be unlikely to say, "watch how nicely he walks on a leash," even though that behavior is critically important.

Tricks can make a shelter dog more attractive to the public. A potential adopter is likely to see the dog as smart and a good companion when it can do tricks. Trick training is also great for children and teens who are becoming interested in dog training. Teenagers who like to impress their peers can certainly impress them with a dog who does tricks.

Trick dog training often involves the dog getting physical exercise. Dogs get a lot of mental exercise from tricks as well. After a trip outside for physical exercise and a tricks training session, dogs who once looked for way to get in trouble when left alone may be happy to climb on the couch and take a nap.

[Get started with teaching your dog tricks.](#)

*Check out [Tricky Trainers](#) treats for your tricks training.*

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