

Dog Agility Pre-School

Cathy Toft
(530) 759-8637
cathy@r-plusdogtraining.info
<http://www.r-plusdogtraining.info>



Dog Agility Pre-School – Basic Concepts Susan Garrett resources

Dog Agility Pre-School draws about, oh, 90% if not more upon Susan Garrett's brilliant approach to agility training. Here's a summary of her must-read resources:

DASH: In DAPS we introduce each exercise in these steps:

DESIRE: The first step is to make whatever you're doing with your dog to be intensely reinforcing. Not only will your dog want to do this behavior that you are teaching, eventually, your dog will find YOU and WORKING to be secondary reinforcers in general, based on your consistently intensely rewarding each thing you do with your dog. People often ask me how to build focus in their distracted dogs. I would say that adhering strictly to DASH in all of your training is the very first step.

ACCURACY: A common mistake inherited from traditional dog training is to start out with accuracy ("don't let your dog be wrong!"). This philosophy is not present in operant training, because your dog expects you to change and to raise criteria as training proceeds. Working on accuracy first is demotivating to a dog because the reinforcement rate is too low. It's also an area where you are tempted to be non-operant, especially if you put accuracy training first and foremost. In our training, it's the second step, as the dog learns fluency after she has discovered that this behavior is really fun.

SPEED: Sometimes in agility it's common to put speed in too early as a criterion. Actually, we will try to build speed naturally through building desire. Sometimes that's counterproductive, as there is obviously a trade-off between accuracy and speed, but without desire you have nothing to train. We can build speed stepwise, alternating accuracy and speed training as we raise our criteria.

HABITAT: Ok, I'm an ecologist so I think this is cute. Back to dog training, dogs are very contextual. Also distractions tend to vary with location, err, I mean, habitat. You teach a behavior first in a low-distraction environment and then take your training on the road. Every time you change locations, you'll want to start with an earlier stage of training and build back up your desire, accuracy, and speed.

Books & Videos:

Ruff Love: This book has some of her exercises in it, such as the 1-2-3 game. It's generally held that this book is a little extreme. When I first read it, my impression was that it was written for people who don't need it. I'd tell a beginning dog person "Don't try this at home". Susan promises us a kinder/gentler second edition of Ruff Love. Nevertheless, if you have a dog with serious behavioral problems and want to bring that dog around, this is the program to follow.

Shaping Success: A must buy.

Success with one jump DVD: on my list to order! This just came out.

Web sites:

<http://clickerdogs.com/index.htm>: Susan's Say Yes web site. Surf to her Articles, print out and save them.

<http://www.adaa.com.au/articles/learmsg.htm> An amazing article by Tracey Harrison-Hill: what I learned from Susan Garrett. This is Susan Garrett distilled, the reader's digest version, i.e., a quick entry into Susan Garrett's genius, an abstract of spending a week in one of Garrett's workshops.