



Behavioral Applications Regarding Canines Training Efforts to Increase the Adoptability of Canines

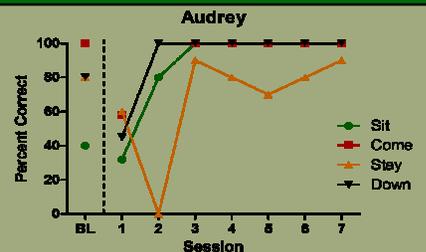
Allyson R. Salzer, Krista R. Falk, Eric N. Markham, Shelby C. Lokken, Kylie N. LeGate, and Carla H. Lagorio
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



About B.A.R.C.

Behavioral Applications Regarding Canines (B.A.R.C.) is a competitive internship program run through UWEC's Psychology Department. Students in the B.A.R.C. program implement behavioral training techniques with canines at the local humane association to increase obedience skills and decrease problematic behaviors, with the ultimate goal of improving adoptability potential and long-term adoption placement. Simultaneously, students benefit by gaining hands-on experience applying behavioral principles while providing a community service.

Our focus is to use positive behavioral interventions to increase adoptability. Of these interventions, one primary focus is to improve leash walking behavior as that is the first interaction potential adopters have with the canines. We also aim to teach general obedience and socialization. Other focuses include community education: we create and distribute informational handouts about learning principles and dog training methods to students, potential adopters, and shelter volunteers. As a part of our interventions, we collect data on treatments to determine efficiency of programs and to track the dogs' progress.



Sample Training Programs

Sit

Raise a treat up and over the dog's head using a "Treat-Lure Method" Slowly guide the treat towards their back. This motion will naturally prompt them to sit down (without you physically prompting them to do so)
As the dog moves back into a seated position, give a hand signal (a closed fist that moves up toward the trainer's shoulder) and say "sit"
Fade out the treat over nose lure after responding becomes consistent.

Down

While the dog is in a seated position, move a treat towards the ground. A visual cue should be used such as two fingers straight outward moving towards the ground (holding the treat in the hand so the dog can see it).
The dog should crouch to the ground, if you are having trouble getting the dog all the way to the floor you may shape approximations of the behavior by treating the dog for getting closer to the floor.
As soon as the dog lays with their butt touching the floor say the command "down" and immediately provide the treat.
Once the dog responds reliably, you may start fading the prompt by using just the visual cue while no longer moving your hand as close to the floor.

Stay

Trainer holds a reinforcer in one hand while holding their other hand in the stop position.
The trainer will then take a step back, and if the dog holds their position, will immediately return and reinforce. Continue and increase the distance.
Once the dog holds his position after going 3 paces back for 3 seconds, the trainer begins to fade out use of the reinforcer.
The trainer will begin to show the reinforcer and the visual cue for only 2 seconds, continually decrease until reinforcer is no longer present and the visual cue is only for a second at the beginning.

Walking Program

Begin the walk by saying "Let's go" once the dog has all four paws on the ground or is seated. Reinforce the dog with treats continuously while he is walking next to the trainer, this area is known as the "reinforcement zone." Be sure to reinforce every few steps that the dog remains inside the reinforcement zone. Do not reinforce if he errors and goes outside of the zone. If the dog starts pulling on the leash, hold your position and remain stationary until he returns to the trainer's side and immediately reinforce.

Future Directions

B.A.R.C. members are planning to conduct further research comparing different types of walking programs such that dogs can be placed in programs that fit best for their specific needs and issues. This study will help members predict which type of program (reinforcement zone, loose-leash, and start vs. stop) the dog may be most successful with. The B.A.R.C. team is also hoping to continue outreach education regarding best practices for obedience and socialization training. This will be done by creating volunteer folders for the Humane Association – providing information about reinforcement training, basic walking procedures, and how to best approach dogs in the kennel situation. B.A.R.C. members also are assisting with the creation of videos for the Eau Claire County Humane Association to be used for new volunteer training.