

The Levels of Dog Learning

Freshman

Understands what both a word and a hand signal mean (lots of small, frequent treats at this stage)

Sophomore

The dog can do the task, but not perfectly, and may get distracted during behavior. Use lots of reminders at this stage. At a sophomore level, when you give a “come” instruction, the dog may come to you but slowly (sniffs 3x on the way). I begin to vary my treats at this stage; sometimes giving a handful, sometimes just lots of love and acknowledgment, but there are always treats involved.

Junior

Dog’s performance is a little tighter; moves are smoother faster and cleaner; performing behaviors 80% of the time in different places and 100% of the time in familiar places. The dog is working more because it’s natural and because there’s food motivating them. Treats are infrequent and used to emphasize great behavior or behaviors in new situations.

Senior

Clean, smooth, and reliable. At this stage, a “come” is a dog running straight towards you no matter what’s going on around them. I bring treats with me for new situations or awesome behaviors but more often than not, the environment and attention are their rewards at this point.

As you can see, there's a terrific amount of practice needed to get dogs -and you -to the next level. Use these milestones to evaluate and train your pup to be the best dog they can be!