

The Three D's – Key Elements of Effective Dog Training

In the dog training world, you will often hear the term “the three D's”. Understanding and focusing on these three key training elements will help you be confident that your dog will, under almost all circumstances, consistently perform the behaviours they have been taught.

So, what are these Three D's?

Let's start with number one – **duration**. Your goal might be to increase the amount of time your dog is able to hold a certain behaviour, such as a sit or down. These are worthy training objectives from both behavioural and safety standpoints. When starting training with your dog, they might be excited (especially if a treat is involved) and it might not be easy to maintain the position you're working on. As you start to work on getting your dog to hold a position longer, start with your dog close to you, preferably right in front of you. Keep the duration really short and sweet, maybe a second, then build it up one second at a time as they become more comfortable holding that position. Minimize distractions when increasing the time, so they don't break the position. To help them focus on the task, start in a quiet room, maybe at home - perhaps in a bedroom or living room, somewhere where there are minimal distractions and where they can focus on the task. If you're having success, and then your dog gets it wrong and breaks the sit, go back to shorter periods, and start again.

When your dog can sit or perform a down and maintain it, then it's time to start working on the next D, which involves increasing the **distance** you are from your dog while they hold that position. As you increase the distance between you and your dog, you're also adding movement, which can be an added distraction. When you are starting to train for distance, start small and build it in small increments. Begin by moving away slowly from them when they're in front of you before you try moving beside them or behind them. One way to work on distance is to have your dog sit while you move just one step, then increase it to two, until you are getting the success that you want – e.g., maybe the length of the leash. Eventually, you can work up to walking around them while they maintain their sit. A bigger goal might have you leave the room while they remain in a sit. That's really challenging for all trainers, as the dog can't see us, and they love being with us. Again, start in a familiar, quiet room at home, to get them to stay while you are in their sight. Then you can increase distance as you achieve success.

The final D is **distraction**, which can be one of the hardest. And that covers whatever is going on in the room which might distract your dog while you're training. Distractions can be noises. At home it might be a TV, a knock at the door, a doorbell, or a person in another room. If you think about outside, the distractions become much greater because there could be cars, squirrels, or birds. When adding distractions, make sure your dog can maintain the position and you're still able to do work on distance. Again, you start off with small distractions and build slowly. One thing that can be a small distraction, is simply movement. It could be you clapping your hands or moving your hands up and down. Increase the value of the rewards when increasing the

distractions. Use low value rewards such as kibble when working in the house. When working with greater distractions, like in the outdoors, increase the value of the treat, e.g., a liver treat or a toy they love.

The three D's affect almost all behaviours. Dogs don't generalize. For example, if you have them in a sit in front of you, they don't know that sit in front of you is the same as when you're farther away from them and asking for a sit. When you increase each of the D's, it becomes more of a challenge for your dog to understand how to perform the behaviour successfully. If you increase all three D's without having trained and succeeded with your dog in each element individually, the chance of them getting multiple D's right simultaneously is very low.

When you are working on the three D's, the duration, the distance, and the distractions, you want to work on them one at a time, starting with just duration first and leaving the distractions for last.

Once your dog is successful at the duration goal you have set, you are ready to move on to distance. When you're adding the second D – distance – to your training, begin with a shorter duration, and keep all distractions to a minimum.

Once you have distance and duration solid, you can now move on to adding distractions, but keep the first two D's shorter to begin.

The goal is that you're going to set your dog up for success in any environment.

Remember, sometimes they may not get it right all the time.

If they're struggling to perform a behaviour, maybe you've moved ahead too fast in expecting them to maintain the position longer than they understand. Maybe the distractions are too high, and you've gone from your quiet household to a busy park. Maybe you've advanced too fast with the distance, or your body position has changed, and you've raised your hands.

Look at your three D's, the duration that you're expecting from them, the distance that you're going, and the distractions that you're adding. Maybe you need to go back and reinforce one of them and break it down and work on just duration again. Progress at a pace your dog can manage and positively reinforce when they do it right or make the effort. Reward and praise them when they succeed. When you do it consistently, you'll be surprised at the results that you can get wherever you are.



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