

‘Jibber Jabber’

We have all done it... chit chatting with our dogs.

“Can you sit?” “Sit your bum down.”

“No, not that way. *This* way. Come on now, you heard me.”

“Stay... stay... stay... stay.”

“Go get on your bed. Go on. Do it, I asked you already.”

“Come... come... come. Come here, come on, get over here!”

Does this sound familiar? Having conversations with your dog? Repeating yourself? Do you even notice you’re doing it? Or how often?

For many of us, it’s automatic. We don’t think about it — we just speak. Words fill the space, especially when things aren’t going the way we expect. If we’re in public, we can get nervous, maybe in a group training class, not wanting to be embarrassed by our dog’s lack of attention. Having unrealistic expectations can often lead to our stress levels rising and then the words flow out of us.

But here’s the real question: is your dog actually responding or tuning you out? And more importantly, does it matter when it comes to training?

This is something I see quite often when working with clients. When dogs don’t perform as expected, people naturally become flustered or stressed. That’s usually when the extra chatter begins.

Instead of pausing, assessing and adjusting, we try to talk our way through it. We repeat cues, we add words, we raise our tone, we push forward.

And before we know it, we’re no longer training. We’re *jibber jabbering*.

When Words Lose Meaning

This shows up a lot during recall and stay exercises.

A dog doesn’t respond immediately, so the cue is repeated:

“Come.”

“Come!”

“Come on, come here!”

“Why aren’t you coming? Come here right now!”

What started as a clear cue turns into a full sentence. Then multiple sentences. At that point, the Cue itself has lost all clarity. The dog isn’t being stubborn. They’re confused. Or worse. They’ve learned that the first cue doesn’t matter.

Attention Before Action

One of the biggest missing pieces in these moments is attention.

Before asking a dog to perform a skill, we need to ensure they're actually tuned in. If their focus is elsewhere — on smells, movement, sounds or other dogs — our words are just background noise.

Training gets rushed. The environment gets ignored. The dog doesn't get the time they need to process. And then we blame the dog for not responding.

Processing Time Matters

There is a window — often around 6–7 seconds — between when you give your dog a Cue and when a dog processes and executes it.

That pause? That's not disobedience. That's thinking.

My clients often hear me say the same thing: if your dog's head were transparent, you'd actually see the wheels turning. You'd watch the moment the Cue lands. You'd see the pause. And then you'd see the decision-making process begin.

They're not ignoring you. They're not being stubborn. They are processing. They're taking in the environment, filtering through distractions, recalling what they've learned and figuring out how to respond. That takes time.

When we jump in too quickly — repeating cues, adding extra words or increasing pressure — we interrupt that process. It's like asking someone a question and then repeating it over and over before they've had a chance to answer. Eventually, they stop trying.

Dogs often do the same. But when we allow that moment — when we give them the space to think and follow through and perhaps giving them a simpler task to keep them in the 'training game' — we start to see something different.

Clarity. Confidence. Understanding.

The behaviour becomes more intentional, not rushed.

And over time, as the dog gains experience and reinforcement and rewards for getting it right, those "wheels turning" moments become faster and smoother... until the response feels almost automatic.

That's where true learning lives — not in the rush, but in the process.

If we interrupt that process by repeating the cue, adding more words or escalating our tone, we're not helping — we're resetting the dog's processing every time. We leave them in limbo. And then we wonder why the behaviour never becomes smooth or reliable.

Slow is Smooth and Smooth is Fast

If we want speed, fluidity and precision, we have to train for it.

That means:

- Being clear.
- Being consistent.
- Being patient.

Because:

Slow is smooth.
Smooth becomes fast.

Cues versus Commands

This distinction matters more than most people realize.

A **Cue** is a recall of a learned skill. It asks the dog to perform a known behaviour, with the expectation of reinforcement. There is clarity, consistency and trust behind it.

A command, in many cases, carries pressure. It often comes after repeated cues, rising frustration or urgency.

When Cues are repeated over and over — or buried in extra language — they lose their meaning. They become noise. And sometimes, that noise becomes unintentionally reinforcing.

The Trap of “Jibber Jabber”

Dogs don't understand our sentences the way we think they do. But they do understand attention. They understand expression. They understand engagement and learn from Positive Reinforcement.

So when a dog is doing something we don't like — jumping up, pulling on leash, ignoring recall — and we start talking...

“Stop that.”

“Get down.”

“Don't do that.”

What the dog experiences is: “You’re engaging with me. This is rewarding.” Even if the words themselves mean nothing.

Inadvertently Reinforcing

This is one of the hardest habits to recognize and change. We often reinforce the very behaviours we want to eliminate — simply by giving them attention.

Take jumping, for example:

The dog jumps → we talk → the dog gets engagement → the behaviour is reinforced and rewarded by talking to them or touching them.

Instead, try this sequence:

- Remove attention (turn away, disengage).
- Ask for a known behaviour (sit, down, etc.), a skill that is incompatible with jumping.
- Keep feet on the ground.
- Mark with a click or a yes and reward.

Now the dog learns: calm behaviour gets attention. Not chaos.

Take It Beyond the Training Session

This doesn’t just happen in structured training — it shows up everywhere:

- On walks (“heel, no pulling, come on, let’s go!”).
- Greeting people (“don’t jump, stop it, get down!”).
- Daily routines at home.

Training isn’t a separate event; it’s happening all the time.

Saying Less has More Meaning

If there’s one takeaway from all of this, it’s simple: eliminate the extra words.

- Use clear, consistent cues that your dog understands.
- Give your dog time to respond.
- Set them up for success.

Because the more we talk, the less our dogs listen. And the more intentional we become with our words, the more powerful they are.

Train Everywhere

Every walk. Every interaction. Every moment. Train everywhere, for anything and everything.

And maybe — just maybe — leave a little less room for the Jibber Jabber. Happy training!

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