

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training
WholeDog Journal™

The Recall

**Teach your
dog to come
when called**



Table of Contents

3 Training the "Extra Fast" Reliable Recall

Here are tried-and-true tips (and new twists) for training your dog to come to you FAST when you call.

6 Beware the "Poisoned Cue"

Here's why a positively trained "come" must always result in positive reinforcement for the dog.

7 Teach the Rocket Recall

How to get your dog to come to you quickly whenever you give the "rocket recall" cue.

10 Clean Up Your Cues!

Be crystal clear about what you want your dog to do.

13 Why a Reliable Recall Is So Important

Here's how to teach your dog to come to you when you call him — quickly, and each and every time.

17 A Strong Recall is Critical During Your Dog's Water Play

This requires regular training, and could even be a matter of life or death.

18 Using Walks for Training

How to get more "mileage" out of your dog's regular walks — without going any further than usual.

20 Choose Healthy Training Treats

Make sure your training incentives are also good for your dog's health.



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Training the "Extra Fast" Reliable Recall

Here are tried-and-true tips (and new twists) for training your dog to come to you FAST when you call.

Teaching your dog to come when called is no longer the way it was many moons ago – when every obedience class taught it by leaving her on a sit-stay, walking across the room, and firmly commanding her to speed to a perfectly straight sit at the tips of your toes. Today's educated trainers and knowledgeable dog owners recognize the value of making "Come" the happiest word in their dogs' dictionary, and understand that truly reliable recalls can happen in the face of bouncing bunnies, dashing deer, cavorting cats, and flying squirrels.

There was a time when trainers warned clients that they had to be more interesting than

squirrels, cats, deer, and bunnies, if they wanted their dogs to come reliably when called. Good luck making yourself more interesting than a bounding Bambi!

In reality, the foundation for a solid recall starts long before Bambi makes an appearance, and doesn't rely on you being a one man (or woman) canine entertainment center to successfully compete with significant distractions. It starts when you first introduce your dog to the "Come" cue. Successful recalls rely on a strong, classically conditioned association with high-value reinforcers. In other words, your dog learns that coming when called is so much fun that when you call her she doesn't stop to weigh her options – she just automatically and gleefully comes flying to you.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

An enthusiastic automatic response to the recall cue requires that you lay a strong foundation from the very beginning, associating "Come!" (or whatever your recall cue) with really fun stuff. (See "Beware the Poisoned Cue," top right). We do this in our basic good manners classes by teaching a "Run-Away Recall!" which looks like this:

1. In a safely fenced or enclosed environment, stash a supply of high-value treats in a bowl on a counter or table next to you. With your dog in front of you, say "Come!" (or your chosen recall cue) in a cheerful "We're having a party!" voice and feed her a pea-size treat from the bowl.



WDJ's training editor Pat Miller demonstrates a speedy recall with her Cardigan Corgi, Lucy.

Repeat several times, until your “Come!” cue elicits a happy “Where’s the treat?” response from her. You’ve now “charged” the “Come” cue, and are ready to try it out.

(2) If you stand and face your dog when you call her (as done in old-fashioned training), you risk looking like an intimidating authority figure, which takes the fun out of “Come.” Instead, have your dog at your side (on- or off-leash), say “Come!” in a loud, cheerful, “We’re having a party” voice, and run away as fast as you can. The combination of your charged “Come” cue and your dog’s natural inclination to run after things that move should result in her following you as you run, hopefully at least at a trot, but preferably at a full gallop.

(3) As she’s running after you, click your clicker (or use a verbal marker, such as the word “Yes!”). After you’ve run at least 10 to 15 feet or more, stop running and feed her the treat. Repeat several times until it’s clear she understands the game.

If her first response was a lukewarm trot, it may take several repetitions until she gets happy and excited enough about the game to gallop after you. You may need to increase the distance you run to give her time to get in gear. You may also need to increase your excitement to get her more excited, or decrease your enthusiasm if you think you may be scaring her with your energy level, which can sometimes happen with “soft” dogs.

(4) Toss a few treats on the ground. While your dog is busy eating them, walk 10 feet away. As she finishes the last treat, call her and run away as fast as you can. Give her treats again when she reaches you. Repeat this exercise, gradually increasing the distance you walk away before calling her.

(5) Start looking for opportunities where your dog is mildly engaged in something of relatively low interest to do your Run-Away Recall. When you can easily call her away from low-level distractions, try it with distractions of gradually increasing value.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Make your dog's recall cue the best sound in her world by always associating it with exciting, fun, high-value reinforcers, whether food treats, toys, or some other beloved activities.
- ✓ Take care to ensure that others who interact with your dog consistently reinforce her recall.
- ✓ If you have poisoned your dog's recall cue, stop using it. Teach her a NEW cue — and be careful to keep that one consistently positive.

Add toys to the mix if you think it will help. Some dogs will romp to you more enthusiastically for a squeaky toy or a game of tug than a bit of chicken; try both and use what works best for your dog. You can mix it up for dogs who like all three – the unpredictability of the reward can make it more fun and exciting for your dog. If you use the squeak of a toy to elicit a gallop, be sure to toss the toy for your dog when she gets there!

That’s your foundation – but your fun with recalls has only just begun. Add more fun games to generalize her understanding of the “Come” behavior to higher and higher levels of distraction. In this way, you can eventually train your dog to a level that enables you to trust her off-leash in safe, open areas.

My personal favorite recall “add-on” is teaching an emergency “stop” cue. I use “Wait!” to pause my dogs in mid-step. Once their forward movement is stopped, it is much easier for them to hear and respond to their recall cue. I have also used a well-trained “Down!” as a stop cue. Again,

when the dog's forward motion is stopped, the recall happens more easily.

Clarissa Bergeman, CPDT-KA, of Canine Company, LLC, in Round Hill, Virginia, suggests this version of an old obedience competition technique to get faster recalls: "As your dog is running in, whip a tennis ball or other favorite toy out of your back pocket and toss the object between your legs as your dog runs through to get it. It's not just for small dogs. Coordinated handlers can lift one leg to let the dog run through and play this game with larger dogs, too!"

RECALLS WITH CLASS

Trainers are also finding ways to make recalls more fun in the classroom setting. My training center, Peaceable Paws LLC, in Fairplay, Maryland, offers a recall class that makes use of the entire 80-acre farm, giving owners an opportunity to generalize their dogs' recalls to the outdoors, in the presence of distractions such as horses, deer, squirrels, groundhogs, turkeys, and more.

Jessica Miller, PMCT1, one of our Peaceable Paws trainers, likes to demonstrate the "Run Away Recall," to show owners how silly they can be. She says, "When we give a big over-the-top performance, it seems that the class does better! It also helps everyone loosen up and give themselves permission to act silly. I like to give a prize for the person who gives the most exciting recall performance."

Susie Daily, CPDT-KA, holds recall races in her classes. "I like doing recall races at the end of Manners 1, as long as all dogs are friendly and can tolerate it. Instructors/assistants run with the dogs on-leash to prevent any incidents. "Two dogs are restrained by assistants at one end of the room. A finish line is marked at the other. Owners go across the finish line and wait to be told: 'Ready, set, call your dog!' Both call their dogs, and the one to get their dog across the finish line and into a sit first, wins. Then we race two more, until everyone has raced, then winners race each other. We do heats until we find the fastest recaller!"

Diana Foley, CPDT-KA, of Progressive Pet Training in Maryland, also holds friendly competitions in

her classes, but instead of speed, she's looking for the most enthusiastic recalls. "I like to have the dogs line up with their owners, and one at a time, the owners go across the room (I hold their dogs at the starting line) and call their dogs. We have a friendly competition for who can get their dog to come with the most enthusiasm. It helps the owners lighten up and be more silly and fun when calling their dogs, and the other owners observe and cheer them on. It makes for a fun environment where owners are having fun with their dogs rather than the stern and commanding "COME" that I'm sure we've all seen!"

I especially like the "Hidden Treasure" recall. Leave your dog in the house and set up a "treasure area" by hiding high-value reinforcers in your fenced yard, or along a hiking path. Hide some of your dog's favorite toys as well as extra-tasty treats. With the treats hidden, bring your dog out to the treasure-laced area, off-leash if she's ready for that, or on a long line if necessary. Call her. When she gets to you, run with her to the nearest hiding place and reveal the treasure. The combination of the run, followed by the appearance and delivery of the treats, will make this an irresistible game for your dog. She'll be amazed that you can make marvelous reinforcers appear out of thin air! 🐾



Trainer Clarissa Bergeman uses a tennis ball or other favorite toy as an exciting reward for a fast recall.

BEWARE THE "POISONED CUE"

A cue becomes "poisoned" when the dog's association with the cue is ambiguous – meaning that it's sometimes associated with positive reinforcement, and sometimes associated with punishment. When the association is ambiguous, the dog becomes confused and doesn't know what to expect. Poisoning your "Come!" cue is the best way to ensure that she'll stop and weigh her choices, then take off after the bounding deer, rather than come galloping to you when you call.

A positively trained "Come" cue always "opens the door" to positive reinforcement. If the behavior does not occur, the only result is that no reinforcement occurs. When the behavior occurs, reinforcement is guaranteed. As soon as the dog understands what "Come" means, the cue itself becomes a positive secondary reinforcer because of its consistent association with a high-value reward.

A recall trained by correction/punishment also creates an association in the dog's mind – but the association is not positive. If the dog doesn't come when called, or doesn't do it quickly enough, the cue leads to punishment such as a "leash pop" or verbal reprimand (often called a "correction"). The cue is now a conditioned positive punisher (the dog's behavior makes a bad thing happen) and/or negative reinforcer (the dog's behavior makes a bad thing go away; the punishment stops when the dog finally comes). The dog works to avoid bad stuff rather than to get good stuff. The dog's emotional response to the "Come" cue is negative/avoidance, not positive.

Even if the behavior was initially trained with positive reinforcement, if a cue is followed by an aversive correction (leash pop, verbal reprimand) for incorrect behavior, the cue immediately loses its positive association and its value as a positive reinforcer. It is, at best, ambiguous. It no longer automatically triggers the positive emotions associated with conditioned positive reinforcers. This often occurs with trainers who use positive reinforcement to train a behavior, but then use

"corrections" to "proof" the behavior – that is, once they believe the dog "knows" the behavior, they feel they are justified in using punishment if the dog doesn't do it when asked. This, too, will quickly poison a cue.

Even if primary reinforcers, such as approval, toys, and treats are used during or after training, the poisoned "Come" cue has become a threat as well as a promise. The dog's willingness to respond diminishes because behavior that might be punished tends to be avoided. The dog's attitude often switches from attentive eagerness to reluctance and avoidance, frequently with manifestations of stress. Even though an appropriate behavioral response to the "Come" cue is still followed by reward, if failure is followed by punishment, the cue has become ambiguous in terms of predictable outcome. It is no longer "safe." You have poisoned your recall cue.

"Come" is one of the cues that are most frequently poisoned by dog owners – if not THE most. Owners often inadvertently poison the recall cue by following it with a consequence the dog perceives as undesirable, even though the owner isn't intentionally punishing the dog. It can happen to anyone. Before I realized that coming into the house was aversive to our Corgi, I often called her to "Come!" and then took her inside. By the time I realized she was avoiding me when I said "Come," it was too late – the damage to the cue had been done.

Now I use "Let's go!" and make sure it's frequently associated with fun stuff – even when we're going into the house. On the way to the house we often play targeting games or "Chase the Cuz," her all-time favorite toy. Sometimes I don't call her, but go into the house without her. Because she hates being outside alone, she soon appears at the back door, waiting to be let in. I can get away with temporarily leaving her outside unattended because we live smack dab in the middle of our 80-acre farm, almost a half-mile from the road, and I know she won't leave. Problem solved. 🐾

Teach Your Dog the Rocket Recall

*How to get your dog
to come to you quickly
whenever you give the
"rocket recall" cue.*

At a recent outdoor social for our clients and their off-leash dogs, my own dog, Willow, joined in the fun. In addition to helping her continue to enjoy the company of a variety of other dogs, I also use times like this to practice recall. Over the course of 45 minutes, I called her to me six or eight times and each recall was met with this success: Willow leaving the action and returning to me immediately, enthusiastically and with rocket-like speed. One client asked, "How in the world do you do that?" My simple answer was, "You train it."

In our two-day Rocket Recall workshops, I tell participants that an indoor, off-leash recall is like a high school diploma – pretty easy to get – but an off-leash, outdoor recall is like a PhD. Admittedly, that's an exaggeration, but it gets the point across. A reliable rocket recall just doesn't miraculously happen.

Having worked with hundreds of dogs and clients over the years, we've created a systematic way of training recall that includes The Rules of Rocket Recall, a list of very important things to remember.

WAYS TO FAIL AT TRAINING A RECALL

Before I discuss the training steps, though, let's consider a few common training mistakes:

Recall is a learned behavior, just like anything else you teach your dog. It's not hard to teach and it's not hard to train, but you do have to do the work. Unfortunately, dogs don't come with an English software package installed, so it's up to us to teach



**The goal: An
instantaneous,
joyous fast recall
without a trace of
ambivalence.**

them the behavior, then add the cue and then practice the recall so that the dog truly learns the behavior.

Practice should take place through all four stages of learning: acquisition, fluency, generalization, and maintenance. First, the dog has to begin to acquire the skill of returning to you. Then you continue to practice so that the behavior is fluent and is occurring with regularity. Next, generalize the behavior of coming to you in a variety of places and settings, always beginning in a low-distraction environment, and as your dog makes progress, moving to a slightly more distracting environment.

Do all of this before ever practicing in a highly distracting environment (such as off-leash play with other dogs). Eventually you reach the maintenance phase of learning, where you continue to practice recall so that the behavior stays solid.

Here's a common scenario: People train their dog to come to them when they say "Come" – but almost as soon as that is accomplished, they begin using the word very casually and taking the (formerly much sought-after) behavior for granted, and failing to even acknowledge, much less reward it.

As an example, say you use the word “Come” to call your dog when she’s outside enjoying herself; she returns to you the first time you call because you’re nice to her and you feed her; there’s a bit of reinforcement history between the two of you. But then you bring her inside the house, you pick up your car keys, and you go to work.

From your dog’s perspective, you’ve just taken the “good stuff” away (the outdoors with all those awesome smells!) and ignored her (by locking her inside and going to work). In dog training, taking the good stuff away constitutes negative punishment, and punishment makes the behavior of coming to you less likely.

If there’s one sure way to ensure your dog never comes back to you, it’s yelling or screaming at (or heaven forbid, hitting) your dog when she doesn’t come back to you. If you do this, it cements in your dog’s brain that you’re unpredictable and the behavior you cherish and want so much is very likely to not happen again.



Allow your dog to “tell” you which treats are her absolute favorite reinforcements, and use these as rewards when training.

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO FOR A RECALL

Enough of what you don’t want to do! Here’s how I taught my own girl, Willow, and how you can to train an effective “rocket recall” for your dog: Dogs learn by association and by consequence. Learning by association means that dogs are always making decisions about what’s safe and what’s not in their world. Making the recall training process fun helps your dog develop a positive emotional response to the exercise.

Dogs also constantly make decisions based on consequence (i.e., “Is this good for me or is this bad for me?”). Reinforcing your dog each and every time she returns to you will increase the likelihood she’ll return to you again. The consequence of returning equals something awesome (with a high-value reinforcer such as an especially yummy treat or a game of tug).

Understand the value and timing of reinforcers; reinforcement for the behavior of returning to you should be immediate and must be of “high value” to your dog – something your dog loves. Don’t buy one box of treats and plan to use them exclusively as the reward; try a number of treats so you can determine which your dog likes the most. I’ve met dogs who would spit out a hot dog in a nanosecond and preferred carrots. That said, food is a primary reinforcer for dogs and a good choice, though for some dogs a game of tug or the opportunity to chase a toy is more reinforcing.

Timing of the reinforcement is also very important; it must be immediate. If you call your dog from the back porch and she comes running toward you, but she doesn’t get a reward for this until you go back inside the house and enter the kitchen, open a treat jar, and wait for her to sit before you pop it into her mouth – in reality you’re reinforcing her for sitting in the kitchen, not for coming when you called her.

Think of reinforcement as your dog’s paycheck. I like to pay my dog well for succeeding with challenging work. Because each dog values a specific reinforcer differently, experiment to find out which foods or other reinforcers your dog likes and which ones she really likes. Be creative! Build a written reinforcement hierarchy. Identify 10 to 20 reinforcers (food, toys, and other things your dog

loves) and rank those as low-, medium-, or high-value reinforcers. Then identify 10 to 20 distractions (another dog, a squirrel, a fire truck roaring by with siren blaring) and rank those as being worthy of low-, medium-, or high-value rewards if ignored by your dog. This helps you understand how your dog views her world; what's important to her?

Your next step is to look at each list and pair the distractions and reinforcers wisely. Use high-value reinforcers for high-value distractions. If paired inappropriately, your dog's focus and your training suffer, but if paired suitably, everyone succeeds. For example, I use something Willow will do backflips over (steak) if I plan to do training in a new, outdoor environment where there may be squirrels running about. Choose wisely!

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

We learn by repetition and so do dogs. Training doesn't have to be laborious. In fact, it shouldn't be. Practicing recall with your dog in short 3- to 5-minute sessions is much better than a long session. Keep it interesting for your dog and remember to set her up for success. You want her to get it right the first time. Getting it right means she earns reinforcement, and reinforcement makes a behavior happen again.

Don't forget those four stages of learning: Your dog first has to acquire the skill and generalize it to a variety of situations and locations before it becomes fluent. Then you'll need to continue to train the skill periodically to maintain the behavior so it's strong.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here's an example of how I set up Willow for success in the early days of our training together: During multi-dog, off-leash play groups, I waited until Willow had been running around for 5 or 10 minutes and was beginning to tire from playing with the other dogs. As she began to disengage from a play group, I'd position myself a few feet away from her (my body facing away from her), and call her name.

As she immediately looked at me, I'd say her recall cue (in a very happy tone of voice), and then run away from her. As she began to follow me, I'd mark that behavior with a verbal Yes!, praise her as if she

THE RULES OF ROCKET RECALL

- ◆ Train it! Practice it! Maintain it!
- ◆ Use the reinforcers that have the highest value for your dog for recall practice.
- ◆ Reward ALL check-ins during other times of the day (a check-in is any time your dog chooses to visit you of his own accord).
- ◆ Don't call a dog for anything he doesn't or won't like (such as trimming nails).
- ◆ Don't call your dog if you don't think he will come (i.e., if your dog is riveted by a twitching squirrel).
- ◆ If you make a mistake on #5, "save" the recall by going to get your dog, encouraging her to move with you, and then rewarding her.
- ◆ Don't repeat the cue! Say it only once, then try to make yourself as interesting as possible, "squeaking" in a high-pitched voice, clapping, jogging away, etc.
- ◆ Never, ever, punish your dog if she doesn't come to you.
- ◆ HUGE payoff – always give lots of treats or something novel and special when your dog returns to you.

were the best dog in the whole wide world (she is, of course), and reinforce her with her favorite treat.

Practicing this way, over time, now allows me to call her away from other dogs when she's still engaged in play. Pretty amazing!

There's an incredible peace of mind that comes with knowing your dog will reliably return to you anywhere and anytime when you call. It will help you enjoy more fun, off-leash activities and it can also save your dog's life. So get up, get going, start training, and you'll be on your way to getting that coveted rocket recall from your dog, every time. 🐾

Clean Up Your Cues!

Be crystal clear about what you want your dog to do.

It's important to know what your cues are for your dog. Yes, I bet you think you know, but in reality your dog may think your cues are very different than what you think they are.

As a professional trainer, I'm pretty good at adding cues that are clear to me and clear for the dog. However, I've recently had a bit more time to work with my own dog, Willow, a 3-year-old Australian Shepherd. It's been a blast teaching her a few new tricks, adding humorous cues to those behaviors and even changing some cues to a few tricks she's already learned. But I've seen that puzzled look on her face a few times, as if she's saying, "Hey, Mom, I just don't get it. Can you be more clear?" I guess it's time to clean up my cues.

WHAT IS A CUE?

From the handler's perspective, a cue is the word or action we attach to a specific behavior the animal has learned so that we can elicit that behavior again. In the dog-friendly and humane training I use (and hope you use, too), the word "cue" is used instead of "command." Command implies "You do it or else!" In the world of positive training, if the dog doesn't respond to my cue, it's my job as the trainer to assess what just occurred and tweak my own actions to help the dog succeed. If the dog succeeds, the dog earns reinforcement, and reinforcement makes the behavior more likely to happen again.

In reality, a cue is anything your dog can perceive. It's also a chance to earn reinforcement. Our dogs see, hear, smell, touch, and taste, just as we do, so anything a dog is able to perceive by one of her

senses can be turned into a cue. In the companion dog world, most people use verbal cues, with hand signals coming in a close second. In canine sports and service dog work, handlers may use a number of other types of cues, including olfactory cues.

REMEMBER YOUR ABC'S

Keep in mind the ABC's: **A**ntecedent. **B**ehavior. **C**onsequence.

It's important to understand that the cue (an antecedent) isn't what causes the behavior to happen. The consequence of the behavior is what



One way to confuse your dog is to assume he will automatically understand your language. Be sure that you're communicating in a way that works for both of you!

makes the specific behavior more likely to increase or decrease. If you like that specific behavior (the sit, down, etc.) and want your dog to do it again, reinforce the heck out of it! Reinforcement drives behavior.

HOW TO ADD A CUE

If you want to teach your dog a new behavior, you must first “show” the dog what to do and make sure the behavior is reliable before adding a cue. For example, if I’m attempting to teach a dog to sit, I would help to elicit the behavior by first luring, capturing, or shaping the movement. Our dogs know how to sit, right? They just don’t know how to sit when we say “sit.”

To ***lure*** the dog into a sit, hold a piece of food in your hand, place it at the dog’s nose and move it up and back over the dog’s head. This causes the dog to look up, rock back a bit, and as she does so, her bottom goes down. When the dog’s bottom hits the floor, you’d mark the desired behavior with the click of a clicker (or a verbal marker, such as the word “Yes!”) and give the dog a yummy piece of food.

To ***capture*** a sit, merely wait patiently and observe the dog. When the dog happens to move into the sit position, click/treat.

To ***shape*** a sit, consider all the tiny parts of the entire sit position (looking up, rocking back, rear end begins to move closer to the floor), and reinforce each of those tiny parts toward the final behavior of sitting.

Once the dog is reliably (at least 80 to 90 percent of the time) performing the behavior, you can begin to incorporate whatever cue you wish by using your desired cue as the dog performs the behavior.

After the dog is successful a few times, use the cue before the dog performs the behavior. Example: Say “Sit!” (always in a happy tone of voice). Pause one second, and then lure the dog into the sit position. By pausing, you’re giving the dog an opportunity to associate the sound of your verbal cue, “Sit!” with the behavior of sitting. Pay close attention to your dog when you say

the cue; if you see even the slightest movement that gives you an indication she’s about to sit, praise her (Good girl!) and lure her the rest of the way into the sit position, then click/treat. By encouraging even her slightest movements, you can help increase her response to the verbal cue. With each successive repetition, slowly fade out the lure, and voila!, your dog will respond to your verbal “Sit!” cue.

CHANGE OR ADD AN ADDITIONAL CUE

Dogs can learn multiple cues for a single behavior. I have three different cues for Willow’s sit: a verbal cue (an auditory cue I can use if my hands are busy); a hand signal (a visual cue I can use if I’m talking); and the sight of car keys (another visual cue I trained just for the fun of it). I must continue to use and reinforce each cue periodically if I want Willow’s response to these cues to be reliable. If you want to change a cue, use the “new” cue, pause, then give the “known” cue, and click/treat the correct response. Repeat several times. Next, give the new cue, pause a little bit longer, give the known cue, then click/treat the desired behavior. This gives the dog time to associate the new cue with the old cue.

As you continue to repeat this exercise, before long, your dog will hear the new cue and move into the desired behavior before you have a chance to give the known cue. You’ll be excited so don’t forget to click and treat! Good job! You’ve just changed a cue (or added a new one).

Every dog learns at a different rate, just as we each do. I’ve seen dogs who can learn a new cue in as few as three or four clicks and others take longer. If you’re doing a good job of minimizing your own body language, it will help your dog achieve success in a shorter amount of time.

HOW WE CAN CONFUSE OUR DOGS

So often in training, when a dog doesn’t perform the desired behavior in response to the given cue, we blame the dog. I often hear, “He’s blowing me off!” or “She’s being stubborn!” In reality, the handler just didn’t make it clear enough for the dog to fully understand what the person was trying to teach. Here are ways we confuse our dogs:

■ **DON'T EXPECT YOUR DOG TO AUTOMATICALLY KNOW OUR LANGUAGE.** Dogs don't come with an English software package installed. We must patiently teach them our language, one cue at a time.

■ **NOT TAKING THE TIME TO DEFINE THE CUE'S GOAL BEHAVIOR.** Have in mind the specific definition of what you expect. I suggest you create a cue dictionary. Write down every cue you currently use, then define the goal behavior for each cue. Do you want a straight sit with square hips or a sidesaddle sit? A speedy down or a slow down? Defining your cues and the goal behavior for each in writing will help you be clear in your own mind about what you expect, and that will make it more clear for your dog.

■ **AVOID ADDING CUES TOO EARLY.** It's important to teach your dog the behavior and make sure she can perform it reliably before adding the cue.

■ **DON'T USE TWO CUES SIMULTANEOUSLY.** For example, a verbal cue and a body cue (hand signal): Dogs are keen observers. They pick up on our body language before they pick up on our words. If you use a verbal cue, but also a body movement with it (such as the word "sit" and then the hand signal for "sit"), I'd bet that if you said the word and didn't use the body movement, the dog probably wouldn't understand what you meant and might not give you the behavior you expect.

■ **POOR REINFORCEMENT.** Don't fail to reinforce the newly learned behavior enough for it to become



Remember that consequences (not cues) drive behavior.

fluent. Some dogs catch on very quickly; others more slowly, but they all can learn if we're patient and reinforce the desired behavior appropriately.

■ **DON'T CHOOSE CUES THAT LOOK SIMILAR OR SOUND SIMILAR.** Choosing the verbal cues such as Down and Bow for two different behaviors can be confusing for your dog. Instead of Bow, I suggest Bravo or TaDa!

There are other reasons a dog doesn't respond to a cue: the dog didn't see or hear the cue; the dog didn't recognize the cue because it's too similar to another cue; the dog was distracted by the environment (another dog, person, squirrel); the dog felt unsafe.

So, repeat after me: "Don't blame the dog." Take a look at your training techniques and find a way to tweak the process so you can help your dog be successful. When your dog is successful, she earns reinforcement and that behavior you worked diligently to install and put on cue works perfectly. The result is clear communication with your favorite furry friend. Happy dog. Happy trainer! 🐾

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Why a Reliable Recall is So Important

Here's how to teach your dog to come to you when you call him — quickly, and each and every time.

Caper was a Spuds McKenzie-style Bull Terrier mix – white with a rakish black eye. She spent the first 18 months of her life running free in the small California coastal community of Bolinas, where resident dog owners eschewed leashes and threw bottles at trucks driven by animal services officers. As happens all too often with dogs who are given too much freedom, the energetic terrier got into trouble – she nipped a small child who tried to play with her on the beach. I adopted Caper upon her release from bite quarantine at the Marin Humane Society more than 20 years ago, and immediately enrolled her in an obedience class.

Caper excelled in class despite the fact that in those days I was still using compulsion-based methods. It seemed to me at the time that the vigorous yanks that I applied to her leash and choke collar didn't dampen her enthusiasm for training in the slightest. When we ventured into the obedience competition ring she was always in the ribbons. Her recall in the ring was superb. On the judge's instructions, I would leave her in a sit-stay, march to the opposite side of the ring, wait for the judge's signal, and then issue the clarion call, "Caper, come!"

Caper would rocket across the ring and slam her compact, muscled body into an unerringly straight sit at my feet, gazing into my eyes with adoration and anticipation. My next command invariably



A long line is a valuable tool to safely teach your dog to come when called, and is also a good alternative when you are in places where you're not allowed to unleash your dog.

sent her into another faultlessly straight sit at heel position to complete the exercise – a picture-perfect show-ring recall.

Outside of the ring, however, the picture wasn't quite so perfect. If Caper was within 40 to 50 feet of me, my "Caper, come!" command worked – a good 98 percent of the time. If she was farther away, however, the word "come" more often than not served to lend wings to her heels as she fled directly away from me on some compelling Bull Terrier mission. Was it a coincidence that our show-ring recall was also performed at a distance of about 40 to 50 feet? I doubt it.

I stumbled over a solution to Caper's recall problem totally by accident. I acquired an Australian Kelpie – a breed with intensely strong herding behaviors. Whenever Keli the Kelpie heard the note of hysteria in my "Come!" command that meant Caper was running off again, she would charge after the errant terrier on her lightning-fast Kelpie legs and assertively herd her back to me. Problem solved.

This, however, is not the solution I would use now, and it's certainly not the one that I can offer my

clients today for teaching their dogs a reliable “Come.”

STILL A FOUR-LETTER WORD

“Come” is perhaps the most important behavior we can teach our dogs – and the most difficult one. The average dog owner spends far too little time teaching “Come” as an exercise. We tend to use it mainly in real life, in situations when we really need the dog to respond, and then we get upset if he doesn’t. When does the average dog owner usually call her dog? When the dog is doing something he’s not supposed to do – something that is infinitely more fun and rewarding than returning to his human.

“Let me see,” ponders Rover for a tenth of a gigasecond. “Chase the deer or go back to my person, who sounds like she’s mad at me, and who is probably going to put me in the car and take me home? Roll in the dead squirrel or go back to my person? Eat horse poop or go back to my person?” The person loses every time! To make matters worse, she starts to use an angry tone of voice when she calls Rover, and “Come” quickly becomes a four-letter word. Rover learns, like Caper did, to run away from people when they use the bad “Come” word.

There is a much better way. If we condition Rover respond to a “Come” cue that means



Create excitement about the cue by pairing it with an animated game of "Chase me!" For best results, choose a safely-fenced area with low distractions.

“wonderful things are happening here!,” even if the “wonderful thing” isn’t really as good as eating horse poop, prior positive conditioning can triumph over the allure of tasty horse poop, chasing deer, and perfuming oneself with dead squirrels.

We want our dogs to think that “Come!” is the best thing in the whole world. We do this by teaching a positive association with the come cue, and by making sure that the consequences of coming are ALWAYS positive. We NEVER punish Rover for coming to us, and we never resort to intimidation and threats to make Rover come to us.

Punishment is anything that Rover doesn’t like. This means that if Rover doesn’t like having his nails trimmed, don’t call him to you, evil nail clippers in hand, then nab him for a manicure when he arrives. If you do, you’ve punished him for coming, and he will be a bit more leery about coming to you the next time he is called. If Rover stays in the back yard while you are gone all day at work, but he’d really rather be in the house, calling him to you and tossing him in the back yard just before you leave for work is punishment.

Of course, you do need to trim his nails, and perhaps you do need to put him in the yard when you leave, so what are you supposed to do? You have several choices. You can call him to you, do something very fun for 10 to 15 minutes, and then say, “Oh, by the way, as long as you’re here, let’s trim your nails.” This way, the “bad thing” is far enough removed from being called that he won’t make the association between the two. If you do this too often, however, there is a danger that he may start to realize that bad things often follow being called, especially in a certain context, such as your preparations to leave for work.

You can also walk up to Rover, wherever he happens to be, feed him a treat, take hold of his collar and proceed to trim nails – although if you do this too often with negative things he will learn to move away when you approach. The most elegant solution is to convince him that nail trimming and going in the back yard are wonderful things, so that calling him to you to do those things is a good thing, not a bad thing. If

you make it a point to go out in the yard and play with Rover before you leave, he will think going in the yard is wonderful. If you gradually desensitize Rover to the nail clippers with yummy treats, he may never love having his nails trimmed, but at least it will seem more good to him than bad. Meanwhile, you need to teach Rover to come on cue as a fun game, totally separate from doing negative things. Here's how:

SHORT-DISTANCE, LOW-DISTRACTION COME

Start with short-distance recalls in a low-distraction environment – a quiet room in the house – where you are by far the most exciting thing happening. Have a handful of over-the-top tasty treats that Rover doesn't get during regular training sessions, such as squeeze cheese, string cheese, bits of ham or roast beef, baby food, or anything else that will really make Rover's eyes light up. With Rover just a few feet away from you, say his name in a cheerful tone of voice. When he looks at you in response to his name, turn and run away 10 to 15 feet as you say the word "Come!" – also in a very happy voice. The message implied by your tone should be, "Hey, we're having a party over here, and you're invited!" Be sure to turn and run away fast. Running triggers a dog's predatory chase response and increases your attraction potential to Rover severalfold over standing boringly still.

As soon as Rover starts moving toward you, use a reward marker that has already been paired with food, such as the Click! of a clicker, or the word "Yes!" You are marking the behavior of coming toward you, and letting Rover know that moving toward you has earned him a reward. This will also enhance the "Come," since Rover is likely to hurry faster toward you to get his treat after he hears the clicker.

As Rover approaches, stop moving, and tell him what a wonderful dog he is. If he sits easily for you, lift the treat as he arrives at your feet. (Do not ask him to sit.) If he sits, great! Feed him the treat and tell him he's fantastic. If not, go ahead and give him the treat anyway, and tell him he's wonderful. It's nice if our dogs sit when they come to us. It parks them briefly, so we can restrain them if necessary, and it is also much better than coming



In a Round-Robin game, several people stand around an enclosed area, each armed with a supply of tasty treats. Each person takes a turn calling the dog with the same cue, and rewarding him when he comes.

to us and jumping up. If sitting is a challenge for Rover, however, and we get into a sit-struggle when he comes, then we are punishing him for coming, and come is no longer positive and fun. If Rover doesn't sit easily, give him the treat just for coming, and make a mental note to work on sit as a separate exercise.

Medium to long distance, low-distraction come When Rover is happily playing the short-distance come game with you, gradually start increasing the distance between you and Rover when you call him. Remember to mark the desired behavior – coming toward you – with a Click! or "Yes!" as he is coming toward you, to encourage him to keep coming for his treat reward. Be sure to use lots of enthusiastic praise as well, to keep the party attitude.

THE ROUND-ROBIN "COME"

Now that Rover thinks that "Come" is a fun thing, you can include friends and family in the training game. Have several people in the room, each with a clicker and a handful of equally tasty treats. Take turns calling Rover, in no particular order. Each person Clicks! and treats Rover as he arrives, then another person calls him.

Note: If one person in a group calls Rover, the other people must ignore him if he comes to them instead. No eye contact, no petting, no treats, no talking to him. He'll quickly learn that only the person who called him will give him a reward.

ADDING MILD DISTRACTIONS

Here's where most people start to lose the training game. Rover comes beautifully in the house, therefore, he knows what "Come" means and he is trained to come when called – right? Wrong! He is trained to come when he is called, in the house, if there is nothing more interesting around. Now we have to teach him to come in other places, even when there's other good stuff happening.

For this exercise, put Rover's leash on. You are not going to jerk him with it, you are just going to use it to prevent him from being rewarded for going somewhere else when you call him. Start small. Have a friend moving around in the room while you practice short-distance recalls. (Each time you change the rules of the game, go back to short recalls and gradually increase the distance.) Instruct your friend to ignore your dog if he approaches her instead of coming to you.

When Rover responds to your "Come" cue even with mild distractions, drop his leash and start increasing the distance, until he will romp to you across the room, even with another person, a ball, a cat, or a child in his path. When he will do this, you're ready to take the show on the road.

ADDING MAJOR DISTRACTIONS

Until now, we've been working indoors. Outdoors is a whole new ballgame. There are all kinds of wonderfully enticing things for Rover to pursue outdoors – great things to smell, eat, see, chase, roll in – you are going to have to work very hard to make yourself more interesting than the nearest dead squirrel. Arm yourself with your tastiest treats, and go back to square one – short distance recalls on-leash. If you've done your homework well in less distracting environments, Rover will catch on quickly, and your progression to longer distance and Round-Robin recalls will happen much faster than your initial training. As you increase the distance, use a long-line to prevent Rover from getting rewarded by running off to enjoy an unanticipated distraction.

ADVANCED RECALL CHALLENGE

The greatest challenge of "coming-when-called" is the reality that there will always be something out there that is more enticing than whatever we can

offer Rover. In order to overcome this challenge, we use the Premack Principle, which teaches Rover that in order to get the wonderful thing at location "B," he has to come to us first at location "A". That is, if he wants to chase the squirrel up a tree, he comes to us first when we call him, then we let him go chase the squirrel.

You can teach your dog the Premack concept through controlled exercises. Start by having a friend stand with Rover, 20 feet away from you. The friend has a handful of yummy treats, and lets Rover sniff and lick her hands, but does not give him any treats. Call Rover to you. It may take a while for him to decide that he's not going to get any treats from your friend. That's okay – just keep calling him in your happiest party voice. If necessary, squeak a squeaky toy, jump up and down – do whatever you need to do to get Rover interested in you.

When he starts to come to you, click and feed him treats when he arrives. Then turn and run fast with him back to your friend, who also gives him a treat or two. He gets a double reward for coming to you – your treats and her treats. When he will do this exercise easily, he's ready for the advanced Premack challenge.

Put a spoonful of canned cat food (or something yummy), and set it off to the side. Have your friend stand behind the plate with a bowl that she can use to cover the plate. Show Rover the plate of cat food, then put him on a sit-stay about 20 feet from the plate. Walk 20 feet away from Rover in a different direction so that you, the plate (and your friend) and Rover form the points of an equilateral triangle. Now call Rover. If he comes to you, great! Good boy, Rover! Mark that behavior (Click! or "Yes!"), give him a treat, and then run with him over to the bowl of special food and let him eat it.

But if he heads for the plate first, have your friend quickly cover the plate with the bowl to prevent him from eating the food. Keep calling him until he gives up on the cat food and comes to you. Say "Good boy, Rover!" and run back with him to the plate for a mouthful of food. Keep practicing until he figures out that the only way to get the cat food is to come to you first. Now you and Rover are starting to achieve a really reliable recall! 🐾

A Strong Recall is Critical During Your Dog's Water Play

This requires regular training, and could even be a matter of life or death.

No matter how strong your dog's recall may be (and we recommend it be quite strong if you're considering letting your dog off-leash at the beach, lake, or river), it's important to remember that the excitement of being in the water, coupled with the potential desire to swim out for a toy or chase a flock of ducks, could result in your recall falling on deaf ears. Prior to water play, consider brushing up on your dog's recall with the following:

Remember that coming when called is a skill that requires maintenance for the life of your dog. It's easy to find yourself feeling "too busy" to train,



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Make sure your training includes teaching your dog to purposefully turn away from distractions in favor of coming to you.

but designating just 10 minutes a day to recall training can go a long way toward bolstering the skill.

Make sure your training includes teaching your dog to purposefully turn away from distractions in favor of coming to you. Avoid static recalls where the dog sits and waits as you leave, then call him to you. A "real life" recall rarely looks like that.

Reward generously every time your dog comes to you. Really invest quality time in the process of rewarding your dog. Combine genuine praise with the types of petting, play, and treats your dog loves best. Imagine that the process of rewarding your dog is the like making a deposit in the bank. You want to make hefty deposits because challenging recalls (especially away from distractions) are expensive. Make sure you can afford it!

Consider working your dog on a long line when you first get to the water and aren't sure how your land training will carry over. Long lines are also a good alternative when local laws prohibit off-leash dogs.

If you're struggling with teaching a reliable recall, consult a qualified trainer who can help you use positive reinforcement methods to strengthen your dog's ability to come when called. 🐾

Using Walks to Train Your Dog

How to get more mileage out of your dog's walks — without going any further than usual.

We've all heard the saying, "a tired dog is a good dog," but more isn't always better when it comes to physical activity. If you're trying to use exercise to help your dog relax the rest of the day, walking smarter, not farther, can help you meet your goal. It also creates wonderful opportunities for strengthening dog-owner relationships.



Even a regular walk can be used as an opportunity to brush up on your dog's training.

There's one question I'd like you to consider every time you snap on your dog's leash and head out for a walk: What kind of walk are you taking?

I have various goals for my dog walks at different times. Sometimes my walk is more about meeting an exercise goal for myself, or an opportunity to socialize with a friend, and I bring my dog along so he can benefit from the exercise as well. For those walks, my focus is mostly self-centered, as I will myself to push farther up an inclined trail or enthusiastically chat with a friend.

OPPORTUNITIES GALORE!

Even a simple walk around the block is full of plenty of opportunities to have fun while asking your dog to think through some simple training challenges. When I head out for a training walk, I still give my dog some "personal time" where he's allowed to sniff and explore on a loose leash. That's important, too. Roughly one-third of a dog's brain is dedicated to olfaction; it feels unfair to deny them a good sniff-fest!

When you're ready, there are lots of ways to throw some training into the mix, while keeping the walk light-hearted and enjoyable for the animals on both ends of the leash.

Make the fundamentals fun! Incorporate basic skills practice into the walk:

Practice a quick response to your dog's name.

When he turns and looks at you, sometimes mark and reward on the fly as you keep moving, and sometimes mark and back up a few steps, encouraging your dog toward you, then deliver several small treats (one after another, rather than a handful at once), paired with praise and petting.

Recall Challenges. People often assume they need an extra-long leash in order to practice what looks like a real-life recall, but all of my recall training is done on a regular six-foot leash. The hardest part of coming when called is not the distance the dog travels back to the handler. The hardest part of coming when called is choosing to leave an exciting distraction in favor

of returning to the handler – whether he’s six feet or 60 feet away.

After I’ve spent time teaching my dog to associate his recall word with an amazing party of treats, praise, petting, and play, and have spent a fair amount of time practicing at home (where it’s easiest to do), I start challenging my dog to come away from distractions while exploring on a walk.

The first few times I introduce this challenge, I warm up the recall behavior with a few practice sessions that closely match how I trained the behavior at home. Then I walk my dog up to what I think will be a relatively easy distraction, for example, the base of a tree (as opposed to a tree full of dog-mocking squirrels). While he’s sniffing, I quietly move behind him, backing up to the end of the leash. Once in position, I call my dog using his name (which I teach to mean, “Quick! Pay attention!”) and his recall word.

If he turns toward me, I immediately mark the correct choice (with the “Click!” of a clicker or a verbal marker, such as the word “Yes!”) and cheer him on as I run away, encouraging him to chase me for several steps. Then we stop and enjoy a full 30 to 60 seconds of praise, petting, and several rapid-fire treats delivered one at a time.

If the dog doesn’t immediately turn away from the distraction when I call him, I’ll quickly step in and make a funny noise to get his attention and/or lightly and playfully goose him. The instant I have his attention, I excitedly repeat the recall word as I run off and invite him to chase me. This sequence ends in an even bigger reinforcement routine than if he’d done it right all on his own.

This often puzzles people who think, “If I had to help him, why should he be rewarded?” The reason? If you had to help him, your dog is telling you he doesn’t believe you’re willing to be as much fun as he was having with the distraction. In other words, he didn’t think it was worth it to leave the distraction. Over time, the magnificence of your reinforcement is what teaches your dog that coming when called is definitely worth it. Be sure to pay well!



Try to find recall distraction trials during your walks because they provide great opportunities to practice. Call your dog away from a prolonged sniff of a tree, for example.

Note: If you find your dog frequently needs help leaving distractions, choose less-exciting distractions and revisit your early recall training in a distraction-free environment.

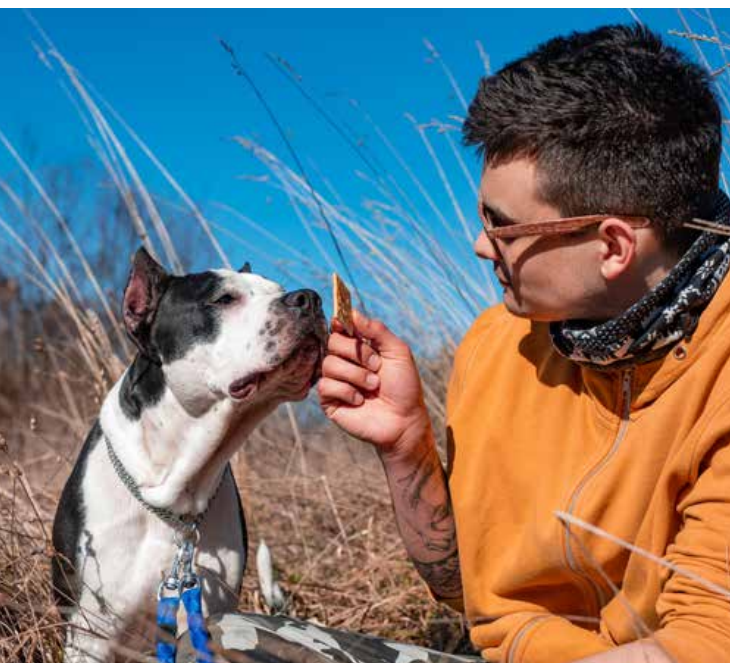
I try to fit at least five recall distraction trials into every walk. Walks are full of myriad opportunities for practice: Call your dog away from a prolonged sniff of a tree. Call your dog away from staring at other dogs across the park. Call your dog away from the neighbor after a quick “Hello.” You can even call your dog during the walk itself. If you’re cruising along and your dog’s focus is fully forward, surprise him with a quick recall trial.

Be creative! In my opinion, learning to turn away from distractions is the single most important skill needed for developing a reliable recall – and a reliable recall might save your dog’s life some day! 🐾

Choose Healthy Training Treats

Make sure your training incentives are also good for your dog's health.

There are nearly as many types of dog treats on the market as treats for humans: sweet, salty, crunchy, chewy, meaty, fruity, fatty, savory, and so on. Despite the variety, top-quality dog treats should share the following two traits: They should pose zero risk of killing your dog. And they should be appealing to dogs by virtue of the quality of their food ingredients — not as a result of chemistry experiments with 20 or 30 different food by-products and a host of artificial flavors, colors, and preservatives.



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If you want a fit, long-lived canine companion, then everything you feed him should support his health, including treats.

DOMESTIC SOURCES AND MANUFACTURE

Currently, the only dog treats that have been implicated in dog deaths and dog illnesses have been either made in China, or made primarily with ingredients that were imported from China. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and many other parties are searching for an explanation — an agent that could cause the illnesses that have been reported in thousands of dogs who were fed treats containing ingredients from China. We think it's only prudent, then, to avoid buying any product that is either made in China or contains ingredients from China, until the specific causative agent is identified and can be avoided. In our opinion, there simply is no point in risking the life of your canine family member for a cheap treat.

You may ask: What is a quality food ingredient? In our opinion, foods that you feed your canine family member should contain only ingredients that are:

Unadulterated, unprocessed or lightly processed, wholesome foods that are . . .
. . . procured from local, traceable, reputable, inspected/audited sources.

These latter two criteria eliminate almost every commercial dog treat you will find in chain grocery stores or big-box megastores. That's one of the reasons we strongly recommend that you shop for treats in independent pet supply stores with educated staffers — stores that refuse to carry low-quality products. Just as in the human food industry, the titans of the pet food industry (who make the products found in grocery and big-box stores) put a lot of "junk" into their junk foods.

As always, you have to scrutinize those ingredients lists — and be discriminating! Remember that your dog depends on you to make healthy choices for him. Don't be the pet parent who gives his kid the canine equivalent of sodas and Fritos every day. If you want a fit, long-lived canine companion, then everything you feed him should support his health, not undermine it. There's no reason that treats can't be good for your dog — in moderation, of course.

Unsure that you can identify healthy ingredients? See the chart on the next page for tips. 📊

MEATY TREATS	TRAITS OF A GOOD TREAT	TREAT TRAITS TO AVOID
Meaty treats may be 100 percent meat, or contain just one or two other ingredients. Animal muscle and organ meat ingredients are much more expensive than grain- or vegetable-based products, so meaty treats will generally cost more. Products may be quite dry (with a moisture content around 5 percent); or chewy, with as much moisture as 25 percent. The moist products necessarily contain ingredients known as “humectants” – substances that promote the retention of moisture in the product. The low-moisture treats may be dried, freeze-dried, or dehydrated. In general, the fewer ingredients used in these products, the better.	Meaty products should contain as much animal protein as possible! The animal product should be first on the list of ingredients and there should be few (or even no) other ingredients. The source of any animal protein or fat <u>must</u> be named, whether it’s a muscle tissue (in which case it will appear as chicken, beef, buffalo, etc.) or an organ (it should specify which species it came from, i.e., chicken heart, beef liver, lamb lung, etc.). Products that are certified by reliable third parties as containing organic, grass-fed, humanely raised/humanely slaughtered, domestic meat animals or sustainably sourced fish trump other animal protein sources. Preservatives, if used, should be natural, such as mixed tocopherols. The package should contain either a “best by” date and/or a date of manufacture.	No animal by-products or unnamed animal sources (i.e., meat and bone meal, chicken by-products, “animal fat”). Treats should contain no artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives. Artificial humectants (i.e., propylene glycol) should be avoided. Imported meats should be avoided. No ingredients from China; treats manufactured in China are also to be avoided.
“COOKIE” OR BISCUIT-STYLE TREATS	TRAITS OF A GOOD TREAT	TREAT TRAITS TO AVOID
In general, cookie- or biscuit-style treats are made with grain or another carbohydrate and baked. That said, this is a wide category of treats, and there are many grain-free products on the market. Some biscuits use animal products (such as muscle meat, organ meat, fat, dairy products) as the principle palatant (ingredient used to appeal to dogs), but others use sweeteners or salt. This style of product generally has the same range of moisture content found in dry dog foods – about 10 to 12 percent. “Chewy” treats may contain as much as 30 percent moisture. In general, the fewer number of least-processed ingredients used in these products, the better.	The source of any animal protein or fat <u>must</u> be named. All grain, fruit, or vegetable ingredients should be whole or lightly processed. Certified organic ingredients and local, sustainably farmed ingredients trump ingredients for which no claims are made. “Chewy,” high-moisture cookies should contain natural humectants, such as maple syrup, honey, or vegetable glycerin. Only natural preservatives should be used. A “best by” date and/or date of manufacture should be on the package.	No animal by-products or unnamed animal sources (i.e., meat and bone meal, chicken by-products, “animal fat”). Low-quality grain by-products should also be avoided; if the label does not simply say the name of a grain or grain flour, it’s a by-product. Avoid treats containing propylene glycol, an artificial humectant. Treats should contain no artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives. Imported ingredients should be avoided. No ingredients from China; treats manufactured in China are also to be avoided.