

## Notes from DSA Class

### The Dog Scout test is not just for dogs:

The test is for the handlers too! DSA strives to expand the understanding between dogs and humans, thus increasing their bond. The less miscommunication you have with your dog, the better your relationship can be. We also want you to be good ambassadors of responsible dog ownership and that takes education. Please feel free to share this knowledge with everyone you meet! The following pages are intended to cover the owner's requirements for the Dog Scout test along with some of the things you need to know to better understand the "[Dog Scout Way](#)". These pages assume you have a basic understanding of how positive training works. If that is not the case, please first read "[How Dogs Learn](#)" and "[Operant Conditioning Explained](#)" or find a local clicker training class that you can attend.



### Training doesn't happen overnight:

While the use of positive training can help dogs learn behaviors at an amazing rate, it doesn't happen overnight. This is especially true at the beginning of the training process when the dog is still learning to learn.

**Keep it Short and Fun-** Training sessions don't have to be formal and long and tedious. You can practice a behavior a few times throughout the day or as situations for practice present themselves. Training should always be fun for both you and the dog. As you spend time with your dog, make mental notes about what his favorite things are in life, his favorite foods, toys and activities. All of these things can be used as rewards. Praise is OK, but don't rely on it too heavily. Dogs do what works for *them*, not what makes *you* happy. If they don't see any benefit to doing something, most will abandon the behavior.

**Have patience** and if your dog doesn't seem to be "getting it," perhaps you need to change the puzzle or try a different approach. It's also possible you progressed too quickly and just need to back up a few steps in the learning process. As long as things are presented clearly for the dog and the dog has positive motivation to learn, he will learn quickly and retain the knowledge much more easily.

### Eye Contact is key:



Getting your dog to look at you can solve many problems. You also need to have your dog's attention before you can teach him anything! The problem we run into is that in dog language, direct eye contact is a threat. They have to learn to accept it from humans as a non-threatening gesture. You also want them to be comfortable giving you direct eye contact and you should never use direct eye contact if you choose to scold your dog.

**Teaching Eye Contact-** There are a number of ways to teach your dog that looking you in the eyes is a good thing. My favorite method also teaches the dog the concept of indirect access (which is covered in more detail in a section below). By teaching your dog eye contact as the first clicker exercise, it will become the dog's "default" behavior. This means that if he's not sure what you want him to do, he'll try the first thing he learned. If you have already taught other clicker behaviors, that's OK too.

**Set up:** Start by holding a treat or favorite toy in your hand. Hold your hand away from you to your side. With some persistent dogs, you might want to rest your hand on the edge of a table or chair so your arm doesn't get tired ☺. Have your dog on a leash to keep him in the general area (you can step on the lead or attach it to your belt to keep your hands free). In the hand that doesn't have the treat/toy, you will have a clicker. Keep telling yourself that you are not going to say ANYTHING to the dog! It's a puzzle that the dog has to figure out on his own. The more you talk, the more his brain has to stop thinking about the puzzle to process your words. The reward you have in your hand should be something the dog wants. If it's not rewarding enough to keep the dog interested in how to get it, try a higher value item. Now you are ready to start training.

**Timing is the key here.** What you are watching is the dog's eyes. It doesn't matter at this point what the rest of his body is doing. You are going to be watching for that half of a second glance in your direction, when the dog takes his eyes off the prize. When his eyes move away from the prize and toward you, click and give him the prize. What you are trying to teach him is that it is looking at **you** that gets him the reward, not looking at the toy or treat. This is called indirect access and teaches the dog some self-control.



If it has been several minutes and your dog has excellent focus on only the reward, try making a noise with your mouth (not a word, but maybe a kissing sound) to try to get the dog's attention toward you.

Be ready to click and quickly reward if he takes his attention away from the prize. Now repeat the exercise, but try not to make any sound if you can. Again, watch the dog's eyes for a quick glance in your direction and click when it happens. Try to time the click so that you click *during* the look at you instead of as the dog is looking back at the reward.

**Little Bit Longer-** As you continue to repeat this exercise and reward the dog for the glances, you will very gradually require the dog to look at you for a bit longer before you click and reward. At first, click the quick glances, but as the dog starts to look at you faster (stays focused on the reward for less time when it is presented), you can start to wait with your clicks until the dog keeps his attention on you for an extra half second. You will be building the behavior slowly, gradually waiting for longer and longer looks at you.



**Adding the cue-** When the dog won't look at the reward object, but instead stares intently at you, then you can add a name to the eye contact. You will need to say the verbal cue just BEFORE you present the old cue (reward held to the side). It is important to get it before the old cue because you want the dog to start to use it to anticipate the old behavior. He will start to say, "Hey, I know this one! She's about to hold that treat out again. If I look at her fast, I can get it!" And as a result, you will be able to start getting the behavior simply by giving the new cue and won't need to hold food out to your side. Anytime your dog makes the choice to look at you rather than "surfing his surroundings" for something better, be sure to reward the "look at you" choice.

### Tight Leash = Look at me



Another helpful behavior is to train the dog that tension on the leash is a cue to look at you. This can get you out of numerous "sticky" situations and will result in a much better behaved dog. This training is often a side effect of the method sometimes used to teach a dog not to pull on the lead or to "leave it". But here, we will be focusing on a specific reaction to a tight leash.

**The set up:** Put the dog on a leash, have either an exciting environment or a favorite toy or food some distance away. The distance will be determined by the dog's focus on the attention-getting item or activity. For really exciting things, you might have to start in a location where the dog can barely see it. Less exciting things could be just a few feet away. The object is to create a situation where the dog wants to pull on the lead to strain toward the object or activity but not be so focused that he is not be able to take his eyes off of it. Again, you are not going to say anything to the dog.

**The Cue-** For this exercise, the tight leash will become the cue. Once you have the set up ready, let the dog pull on the leash and you are going to be just a "post" that holds the leash. Anytime the dog chooses to look *in your direction*, click and reward with several tiny treats in quick succession.

**Little Bit Longer-** After a few repetitions of that criterion, you will now require that the dog look *directly at you* before you click and give a reward. This is a variation on the eye contact game; it just has a different cue (a tight leash instead of the reward held out to your side). As the dog starts to figure out the game, move closer and closer to the desired object or activity. You can also practice this when you are out for a walk. If the leash goes tight, just stop and wait for the dog to look at you before you click. You can use resuming the walk as the reward. Be sure to vary the amount of time you require the dog to maintain the look before you click.

### Watch me – even if I'm not paying attention to you

Many dogs, once they learn the above behaviors are willing to give you eye contact if you return the favor.

However, we can't always be focused on the dog, but we might still like the dog to be focused on us. This is a learned behavior that is fairly easy to teach (especially behaviors).



**Create Motivation-** Basically, you have to give the dog a reason to look at you, even when you are not looking at them. Up to this point, from the dog's point of view, if you are not paying attention to them, the likelihood of rewards from you is probably zero. Why would the dog pay attention to you with these odds? What you need to do is learn to be aware of where your dog's attention is even if you are not looking directly at him.

if you have already worked on the above

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**To practice** put your dog on lead and sit in front of a boring TV show. Be sure the dog is positioned so that you can see out of “the corner of your eye” where he is looking. Now simply go back to the first eye contact game, but instead of intently watching your dog’s eyes, you will be noticing him from your peripheral vision. You can also practice it while you are talking with friends, on the phone, walking down the street, etc.

**The Verbal Click-** A “verbal clicker” such as “Yes!” is helpful in these situations so that you don’t always need to have your clicker ready to click. Just say “Yes!” in place of the click. You can also choose a foreign word instead of “yes”, so the dog is less likely to hear it everyday conversation and get confused. In fact, it doesn’t even need to be a word. It could be a certain sound: “Psst”, a click noise, a whistle, whatever.

### **Do I always have to have a clicker?**

Keep in mind that for many reasons, using a clicker to teach new behaviors is more effective than using a verbal “click”, but the verbal click of your choice (listed above) can be used to easily reinforce any behaviors your dog already knows. In other words, you can teach behaviors with the clicker, then switch to a verbal “click” for everyday life.

### **Do I always need treats?**

It is also recommended that when your dog is learning a new behavior, you use rewards that are of very high value to the dog (preferably ones you can deliver rapidly and in quick repetitions). For most dogs, this means food. The good news is that once the dog fully understands a behavior and will do it on cue, regardless of the situation, then you can start to use lower value rewards.



This could mean play time with a toy, praise, or “life rewards” like opening a door to let the dog go outside or going for a ride. Be sure to mix in some of the high value rewards on occasion to keep motivation high. You will also be able to get many different behaviors (like a full Obedience routine) for a single reward once the dog is taught that it may take multiple behaviors to get a reward. You need to work up to that point slowly so the dog doesn’t quit trying.

**Note:** The following section titles are listed on the Dog Scout test check off sheet. This test requires that the handler understand or be able to demonstrate their portions of the test. If you take a dog through that test, you may be asked to tell the Scoutmaster what is meant by the underlined titles that follow.

### **Owner manages the dog’s environment and keeps the dog out of trouble:**



By this, we mean that the owner understands that they are responsible for watching the environment around the dog for signs of trouble and taking any steps necessary to keep the dog safe and in a calm state of mind. If you know your dog is afraid of kids, then it is your job to be sure that kids don’t get close enough to make your dog feel he has to react defensively. If your dog can’t handle the exuberance of puppies, it is your job to be on the lookout for puppies and to be sure they don’t get in your dog’s comfort zone. The dog should feel you are in control of every situation so that he doesn’t get into trouble by dealing with things the only way that dogs know (barking, growling, biting, etc.).

**Awareness:** To do this, you will need to practice being aware of what is happening around your dog. People and dogs should not be able to “sneak up”, you should see them approach and if necessary, move your dog away or ask them to stop. Being able to read your dog’s body language properly can go a long way towards a better understanding on how he is feeling in a given situation. Especially since those feelings can change quickly based on a slight change in the dynamics of the situation.

**Be ready to act:** The dog might be fine with the child petting his shoulder, but when the child reaches for the dog’s ears, he gets frightened. Before the dog reacts any further (to get himself out of the frightening situation), you have to react to get the child away from the dog. See [Body Language 101](#) for more details.



**Kids and Dogs:** Children and dogs can be a lovely sight or it can be a nightmare waiting to happen. Kids are grossly inappropriate around dogs and seem to do all the things that make them more likely to get bitten. Sadly, it’s the dog that gets blamed for defending himself. You will need to be extra vigilant when children are around your dog. See the [Dog Bite Prevention For Parents page](#) for things you need to know about safe interactions. See also “proper greeting behavior between dogs” below so that you will know how and when to let your dog meet another dog.



### **Owner has mastered the phrase “please get your dog back”:**

You should understand that these are not fighting words and you should not take offense if someone says them to you. Using this phrase (or anything similar) is part of your contract with your dog that says you will handle all situations. No one should have to use this phrase with you, because you should be aware of where your dog is and what your dog is doing at all times when they are in public with you. You should understand how to encourage proper dog greetings and will ask permission from other dog owners prior to letting the dogs meet.

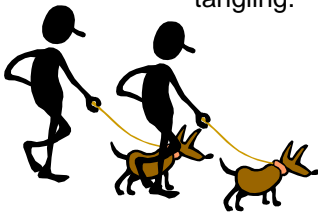


**Don't Wait-** Don't be hesitant to use this phrase if a dog is getting “in your dog's space”. By using these words before the other dog gets in your dog's comfort zone, your dog won't feel pressured to use defensive tactics to get the dog away. For more detailed information on this subject, please read the article called: “[He Just Wants to say Hi](http://www.flyingdogpress.com/sayhi.html)” by Suzanne Clothier found at: <http://www.flyingdogpress.com/sayhi.html>

### **Owner knows how to encourage proper greeting behavior between dogs:**

Dogs communicate a tremendous amount by body language before they get close enough to touch or sniff each other. By allowing or encouraging your dog to display non-confrontational body language, you can avoid conflicts when two dogs meet. You should understand how to encourage proper dog greetings.

- Always ask permission from the other dog's owner prior to letting the dogs meet.
- Allow the dogs to perform an arching approach (or help them to do so).
- Don't tighten the leash anytime that two dogs are within (or approaching) bite range of each other. Tightening the leash can cause your dog to say things with body language that they probably don't mean. A tight leash can cause stiffness or a raised posture. Both of these body language signals can trigger aggression. An alternative is to teach the dog that tension on the leash is a cue to look at you mentioned in the first section.
- The dogs should spend very little time nose to nose (a confrontational posture) and should move to the “doggie handshake” (nose to butt) position quickly. It's OK if they circle a bit; just keep the leads from tangling.



- They should not stay in this position more than a few seconds (about the time it takes for a human handshake). It's a greeting, not a full exam.
- If tension or stillness develops in either dog, it is a pre-aggression signal.
- Don't panic, but get the dogs apart peacefully as quickly as possible.
- Inform the other owner that they need to call their dog and as the person does, call your dog to come to you.
- If one dog “turns tail” to leave or is called away from the other dog, the remaining dog may see it as an opportunity for a “cheap shot” (bite) at the rear of the dog that is leaving. If you need to move your dog away from another dog, call him... don't use the leash.

### **Recall (Come) Practice**

Your dog should have a strong recall (“come”) response. This is taught through practice. See the page on “[Teaching the Dog Scout Certification behaviors](#)”. Practice calling your dog away from things that catch his interest. The best reward for these situations is a small treat before allowing the dog to go back to the item he's interested in (if it's safe). This teaches him that coming to you does not mean an end to his fun, but rather a reward and a return to the fun. If you have to (and your dog is not food aggressive) you can “lure” him away from a dog by putting food right in front of his nose and using it to lure him to you. If you have called the dog and he ignores you, try a call-lure-reward-return sequence a few times.

### **Owner knows proper leash handling techniques to discourage aggression:**

By keeping your leash slack and using your voice to call your dog away from another dog, you can avoid forcing your dog to display aggressive body posture. A dog straining/pulling on a leash tends to be “up on it's toes” and this is a very confrontational posture. They also are stiff and tense rather than relaxed because of leash tension. A tense body in your dog, along with other signals, can tell an approaching dog that your dog is ready to fight (even if he is not).



## **Fighting “words” = Aggressive Cycle**

Causing your dog to display body language that says they are ready to fight, will cause other dogs to be on guard and much more likely to react aggressively. This causes a bad behavior loop. Your dog is giving improper signals without knowing it, which causes almost every dog it meets to act aggressively or defensively, so they start to act defensive because they are anticipating the other dog's reactions. Before long, you have a dog that is “dog aggressive” on lead. Teaching your dog a strong recall response or that leash tension means to look at you can go a long way toward breaking this cycle of aggression.

**Get Positive Help-** If your dog has aggression issues, practice getting your dog to look at you (and reward that choice) when he is in the presence of whatever “sets him off”. Please seek the help of aggression experts that use positive methods. The use of punishers to “correct” aggression can make it much worse.

## **The Other Handler**

By asking for permission before your dog meets another dog, you avoid surprising other handlers. You can also assess their competence by observing their reactions. If a person significantly shortens his or her dog's lead, don't let your dog greet. If they let their dog's lead go slack, you do the same and let the dogs communicate.

**Ending the meeting-** A greeting should only take a few seconds. If both dogs want to play, fine, keep the leads loose. If either dog decides the meeting is over, both dogs should be called away from each other at the same time.

**Your mission, should you choose to accept:** Learn to read your dog's signals and then take the initiative to react to them before situations get out of hand.

## **Owner understands that aggression is normal dog “language”, but also understands how to encourage the dog to make other choices:**

People are not expected to love every other human being on the planet, but for some reason people expect their dog to love all other dogs. We have to realize that dogs are individuals and are allowed to dislike another dog's behavior.



**Pests and Punks-** Most commonly, dogs have little tolerance for pests and punks. If we are bothered by a pest or punk, we will usually try to leave, or try to get the other person to leave. Your dog will do the same. If he is on a leash or confined by a room or yard, he knows he cannot leave. His only other option is to try to get the pest or punk dog to leave him alone.

**Normal dog Language-** He does this by showing teeth, growling, barking, snapping or biting.

This is normal dog behavior and should not be punished. If your dog does this to another dog, ask yourself:

- Why you were not paying attention to the situations developing around your dog
- Why you didn't take actions to prevent your dog from feeling the need to defend himself.

## **Punishment = No Ticker in the Bomb**

If these warning signals are punished, you are telling the dog that bad things happen to him if he gives warning signals. He will likely associate the punishment with the signals he was giving (or with the presence of other dogs). This essentially takes the ticker out of the time bomb. His feelings in those situations and about the other dog won't change (and may get more defensive). He just won't let you know until he “snaps” for “no apparent reason”. He would have given you plenty of warnings about his intentions and feelings if he hadn't been punished for showing them. It's a very bad cycle that dogs and owners get into simply because of miscommunication between two very different species (dogs and humans).

**A Better Way-** Instead of punishing the dog for being a dog, you will need to take a proactive role in keeping your dog from feeling like he has to defend himself, his space, his toys or you. This is where you can use the phrase “please get your dog back” if the other dog continues to be a pest or punk.

If your dog is on the receiving end of the “please get your dog back” request, call him away from the dog he was pestering so that the communication (signals) from the dog he's bothering don't have to escalate to a stronger level. By watching your dog's interaction with other dogs and calling him back BEFORE it gets out of hand, you can teach your dog to recognize signals that mean it is time to move away from another dog. You can also help him show calming signals (see below).



## Dogs can be good teachers

If your dog just doesn't seem to be "getting it", don't be afraid to let other dogs teach your dog "manners" using normal dog language such as growling or snapping. The key to picking the right dog as a "teacher" is to pick a dog that has had lots of experience playing off lead with other dogs.

**Bite Inhibition-** It is during these off lead play times that dogs learn "bite inhibition". This means they learn just how powerful their jaws are and they learn to control (inhibit) their bites so they don't do any damage. It is very rare for any injury to occur during these "lessons" unless the "teacher" dog has not had the opportunity to learn bite inhibition by playing off lead with other dogs.

## Off lead play needs proper supervision

Off lead play between dogs that is supervised by someone who is good at reading dog body language is a great way for your dog to learn to understand "dog language". Dog daycare is perfect for this; dog parks are the worst for this.



**Dog Daycares** have staff that is experienced in reading dogs' body language as it changes during play and interaction with others. Daycare dogs are also screened for temperament (or should be) prior to their entry.



**At dog parks**, you likely have owners who, if they are even paying attention to their dogs, do not have a clue what they are seeing. They correct the dog for normal behavior and let rude or obnoxious behavior go unchecked.

**Choose playmates carefully:** Your dog can have one bad experience with another dog and take years of work to get over it-- if ever. Choose your dog's playmates very carefully and always watch what they are saying to each other through vocalizations and body language.

**Stop problems before they start:** If two off lead dogs stiffen or lock eye contact that is your signal to break them up. The most effective way to do that is to firmly say to them "knock it off" as you physically walk between them. You are then using body language they can understand without causing improper body language in the dog (as you would by grabbing a collar). If the staring continues, you will want to separate the dogs till they can "play nice" without "cussing" at each other with eye contact. The book "Aggression in Dogs" by Brenda Aloff (ISBN: 1-59196-073-8) is a fantastic, "must have" book that will teach you everything you would want to know (and more) about handling all types of aggression issues.

**Resource Guarding-** Be aware of whether or not your dog sees you as an object to keep away from the other dogs. If your dog stands by your side and dares another dog to approach, or as another dog is approaching you, your dog "cuts them off" by walking or standing between you and that dog, you might have an issue. In that case, your dog is also likely to be a "resource guarder" that gets into fights over toys, food or personal space. This situation is covered in the book by Brenda Aloff that was just mentioned or you could read the book "Mine!" by Jean Donaldson. (ISBN: 0-970629-4-2) for information that is specific to resource guarding.

## Owner understands the use of calming signals:

Calming signals is a fancy name for the body language that dogs use to tell other dogs that they are not a threat. In a sense, they are saying "calm down, I mean you no harm".

Examples of calming signals are:

- Arching approaches (putting a slight curve in their approach)
- Averting gaze (Looking away)
- Relaxed body posture with the tail in a neutral, mid-level position or wagging normally
- Crouching or rolling on the back



**Improper body language** that needs to be interrupted, changed or redirected to an acceptable behavior includes:

- A direct, strait line approach of one dog to another (this is very assertive behavior)
- Direct eye contact with another dog held for more than 3 seconds (this is similar to a human that gives another human an inappropriate hand gesture. If the dog that is being stared at gives it back, a fight will start when the dogs get close enough)
- Stiff or tense body posture with the tail held high (Assertive body language)
- Standing "tall on the toes" is very assertive and can be caused unintentionally by a tight leash

## You can affect or cause your dog's signals

The previous signals can be aided or inhibited by you and your leash handling. Other calming signals that your dog may exhibit are: licking his lips, scratching his neck, yawning, and sniffing the ground. These signals might be given to you if your dog is nervous or feeling confused. This is especially true in dogs that have been punished by a human.

## Owner understands the value of making dogs “choose”, using indirect access:



Helping your dog learn that charging toward or leaping on everything they want is not necessarily the best way to get it, will teach the dog self-control. Indirect access means that the dog has to do something that *indirectly* gets the dog what it wants.

### **Indirect Access = Self Control**

Using indirect access exercises have the value of teaching dogs self-control. They will exhibit less “out of control” behavior. This behavior can be expanded to many areas of the dog's learning. The more *self-control* the dog has, the better behaved he will be and the less *you* have to do to control his behavior. An example of this is when a dog looks at the handler to get food that is being held out to the handler's side (direct access would be getting food for staring at the food). Dogs that learn that they have to sit to get attention from humans have learned self-control through indirect access (direct access would be jumping up on people).



### **Self controlled greeting of a human**

To teach a dog to sit for a greeting, the person holding the leash acts as a “post” that doesn't let the dog past a certain line. Anyone that approaches has to follow one simple rule; If the dog is sitting, it can have all the attention it wants-- If the dog jumps up, the person has to walk away till the dog sits again (this is where having the “post” helps by letting the greeting person know where “out of the dog's reach” is).

**More self control-** Additional examples of having the dog “choose” to behave (rather than being forced to do something) include the “Choose to heel” exercise and the “Leave it” where the dog chooses to look or move away from the food or other tempting item. These are more fully explained on the [training pages](#) for the dog's Dog Scout test requirements.

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