

Phodography Badge requirements explained

The idea behind this badge is to help people understand how to take better photos of their dogs and help their dogs be easier subjects for photos. It's not an easy badge to get!

The Training (prerequisite: Art of Shaping Badge)

The dog/handler do need to have earned the Art of Shaping badge before getting the Phodography badge. This insures they understand clicker training and shaping and that the dog is "operant".

____ Dog has learned to target on a touch stick

This is a training step. It makes the target focus training easier if the dog has learned to target an object with their nose. Often where the nose goes, the eyes follow.

____ Dog will "look" at target object (ball or toy) on cue, 1 foot in front

This is a training step.

How to teach the dog to focus on an object:

Teaching a dog to target something with his eyes is not hard. Why would you want to? Well, think of the photography possibilities! You can get the shot of the dog's profile, or have the dog sitting one direction and his eyes looking in another direction (appearing to be looking at anything you desire) when in reality he is looking at the target object.

Note: You're dog will need to know how to 'stay' with distractions before you start this.

With the dog in a stay, teach the "look", starting with the dog's favorite thing is easiest. This usually means food or a favorite toy. Click the dog for following the object with his eyes without moving his body. Then set the object near by, but out of reach and click the dog for looking at it. Gradually require more of a head turn while the dog maintains his body position. And gradually require longer and longer duration of the look before you click.

It helps if the dog's reward IS the object he desires and is staring at. You want to build the amount of time the dog looks at the favorite object (so later you have time to set up the rest of the photo shot.) Once you have a nice long "look" behavior, you can add the cue just before you place the object. Be sure you are varying the placement of the object to get the dog to look in different directions with more and less head turn. You can even place the dog up on a surface like a bed or chair or agility table and place the object below the dog so he has to look down. Great for editing in other items below the dog in the photo :-)

Once you have the duration, which you have built up gradually (or get automatically if it's a Golden retriever LOL) then you're ready to transfer the behavior to another object (required for the badge.) Start by putting the other object beside the first target object and do a few repetitions.

Then hide the first object behind or inside the new object (as much as possible.) Since the dog will still be getting the desired object, he shouldn't lose the behavior at this step. The next step is to only place the new object (you can fake placing the first object if it's small.) This time, the desired object will come from you, not the target location. Be careful that after a few repetitions of this, the dog isn't looking at you because you have the reward. If you work through these steps gradually so the dog understands the behavior, this shouldn't be a problem. You can go through these steps with various objects so the dog understands the "look" means stare at what I place till I tell you to stop. Possible objects include anything that can be placed and is not seen as a toy by the dog.

Things like post-it notes, folded paper, a bell (which could also be the look cue), a box, etc.

_____ **Dog will “look” at target object on cue and maintain the look for at least 5 sec., object placed on ground 2 feet in front then to each side**

This (and all following steps) needs to be demonstrated for the badge. As mentioned above, you should have transferred to “look” cue to something other than the dog’s favorite treat or toy. Most dogs will look at their favorite toy, but that doesn’t require much training on your part or learning on the dog’s part. The dog should demonstrate that he understands the “look” cue (any cue can be used) and will maintain the look at the object until given another cue or the behavior is ended.

By placing the object near the dog in various positions, you can demonstrate that you are able to set-up photos that allow you to choose where the dog is looking and the dog will maintain that look behavior long enough to get the camera ready and take the photo. You’ll want the object out of your hands so you can use your hands to operate the camera. :-)

_____ **Dog will “look” at target object on cue and maintain the look for at least 5 sec., object placed on raised surface to each side (for profile)**

This step shows that the dog will not only perform the behavior with the object on the ground, but also if you would like the dog to be looking up or have his nose parallel to the floor. By having the dog focus to his side, it’s also easier to observe that the dog understands the behavior when demonstrating for check-out by video (dog’s body facing camera with head turned to the side).

_____ **Dog will maintain “look” position (freeze) for several seconds regardless of target object position**

This is somewhat of a repeat of the above steps. It clarifies that the look behavior is not just a glance at the object, but instead a trained behavior with duration. This is best demonstrated if the target object is to the side of the dog so they are clearly looking away from the handler and camera (for a “profile” photo of the dog’s head for example.) By having the dog focus to his side, it’s also easier to observe that the dog understands the behavior when demonstrating the behaviors for check-out by video.

_____ **Dog will perform a stay/freeze for 20 seconds with minimal or no body/head movement when placed in an “odd” position/location**

Any Dog Scout should be able to stay for longer than 20 seconds, but what if you want the dog to hold a pose? Perhaps you’d like the dog to sit on a small platform or hold a play-bow position or have their paws up on something or stay on a boulder or horizontal tree trunk. These non-standard positions and locations will test your dog’s understanding of the stay cue and make for much more interesting photos. If you can also combine it with the maintained look, that’s excellent!

Photo to the right shows dog on horizontal tree about 3’ in the air (not shown) focusing on an object for a profile shot.



_____ **Dog will maintain a stay while handler says “attention” words and makes exciting noises that cause the dog’s ears to come forward**

The goal of these attention words and sounds is to get the dog’s ears up. Dogs look happier and more expressive when their ears are up, but they still need to stay while they are hearing exciting sounds.

An optional behavior is to clearly demonstrate that you have taught the dog to put his ears forward on cue. The cue should be said in a way that is not overly exciting. For example, certain words are naturally interesting to a dog because of their pairing with exciting objects or activities. Many dogs

learn to pop their ears up when they hear words like squirrel or walk or cookie. That's not the intent here. You should be able to say something like "ears" or "focus" in a neutral tone and have the dog put his ears forward. Dogs don't consciously think about their ears (or tail) position, but through clicker training and shaping, you can teach them to do so. This is NOT easy and it's much easier to teach the dog to stay while you make exciting noises! :-)

_____ **Dog will stay while handler throws toys or other objects in the air and that land to the side of the dog**

Many professional photographers have learned the value of tossing things into the air to get the attention of a dog. This toss should be something you can do while looking through a camera lens (this means you are probably NOT going to catch the tossed item). It's so nice when the dog isn't diving out of the well planned posed shot to get the tossed toy/object!

The Photographic Skills: Handler must provide photos she/he has taken, to the evaluator that demonstrate the handlers understanding of the following items.

Each DSA badge has components for both the dog to learn and the handler to learn. This badge is no different. The following outlines the handler's part of the badge.

Knowing how to operate your camera is a good first step! It is recommended that you actually READ the manual that came with it to learn about the various features and functions. Take some time to play around with those various features and settings to see how they affect your photos. Understanding how to use the given features correctly will greatly enhance the quality of your photos!

A good acronym to remember for photography is **C.L.I.C.K.S.**

C is for COMPOSITION

Before you even point your camera, think about WHAT you want to show with the photo... and what you don't. Is it a formal portrait, an action photo that tells a story or just a candid shot?

Background: As you are trying to decide the best spot from which to take the photo, be aware of what will be behind the subject. Try to minimize or ideally eliminate clutter (unless that's your subject!) Remove anything that is not part of the story you are telling with the photo (the garden hose, the old lawn chairs, weeds that might get in front of the subjects face or look like they are growing from his head!)

Fill the frame: When you are composing the photo, try to zoom in or move close enough to the subject to crop out/eliminate the stuff around him that's not important to the photo. But be sure not to cut off important parts like the tops of heads or tails or feet! With digital photography, a lot can be done in the editing of the photos, but if the subject is not filling the majority of the frame, the cropped photo will be much smaller in size than possibly intended, making it harder to enlarge without pixilation (showing the dots that make the photo.) Try holding the camera both horizontally and vertically to see which orientation better fills the frame.

Details: Watch the dog's ears and tail, try to get them up when you click the shutter. Look for light reflected in the dog's eyes. That "sparkle" will add life and character to the dog's expression. Also watch for light reflecting off undesired surfaces.

Contrast and color: Select a background that is a contrast to your dog's color. You don't want the dog blending in unless that's the intent of the photo. The photo to the right used a lack of contrast to highlight the pup's intent to hide. He was focused on ducks in the pond and a



better photo composition would have included those ducks. Greens (trees/grass) and blues (sky/water) are good contrasting colors for the majority of dogs. But play around with what works best for your dog.

L is for LIGHTING:

Lighting is what photography is all about! Light, or the lack of it, is what is recorded by the camera. Using the right lighting can make or break the photos you take.

Location/Time of day: Will you be inside or outside? Will you be using a flash? How close will the subject be to the flash or other light source? What time of day is it? All of these things can enhance or cause problems with your photos.

Indoor photos have the challenge of the effects caused by artificial lights. Some cast odd colors in photos others don't provide enough light. Artificial lights can also enhance a photo when properly placed and filtered. Bouncing a bright light off a white ceiling or wall can provide good "filtering" that helps minimize dark shadows. A flash can also cause "red eye". This is the light being reflected off the retinas and back to the camera. In dog's it's not usually red, so editing programs designed to remove red eye may not recognize it. Usually the red eye effect can be minimized or eliminated by having the dog's eyes looking away from the flash or bouncing the flash off another surface. Flashes can also be used to fill in shadows caused by backlighting.

Outdoor light is usually best and a bright, overcast day is ideal! The clouds provide the filter of the sunlight and minimize shadows while still allowing contrast and proper colors. The worst time to photograph outside is mid-day on a sunny day. The bright sun from directly above will cause troublesome shadows on the subject and surrounding objects. It also causes most subjects to squint or close their eyes against the glare. You could work in the shade during a bright sunny day, but be aware of blotchy shadows caused by trees and how it looks on the subject. Often the parts where the shadows fall are too dark and the parts that have sun on them are too bright.

I is for IMPRESSION:

What impression or feeling do you want the photo to cause for the observer? Does it cause laughter, contentment, excitement, sadness, amazement? Does it convey a formal setting or candid feel? Think about your dog's personality. How would you best capture that in a photo? How do you convey that your dog is happy, affectionate, relaxed, high strung, goofy or sleepy? Using settings, backdrops, props and poses may help.



C is for CHOOSE:

Making the right choices in advance of pressing the shutter button will make a great impact on the end result.

Choose correct body posture: Get down on eye level with the dog. This might involve laying on the floor or ground! You can also get dramatic shots of regal or powerful dogs by shooting from below their eye level up toward the dog. Stay relaxed- if standing, bend your knees a bit. Keep your arms tucked in close to your body and/or lean against a solid object to minimize shake that can blur the photo. Using a tri-pod can also help greatly with posed photos. Keep the camera level so the dog doesn't appear to be in the land that defies gravity!

Choose the right time: If you have an active puppy, you might want to wait till he's a bit tired and more likely to sit still, or at least slow down! If you have a dog that likes to sleep, try to catch him when he's more alert. Choose a time when you have patience. You may need to wait or re-attempt or re-groom or chase after or get more treats or clean muddy paws- anything can happen! If you are not calm and patient, your dog will sense it and get more stressed and agitated. If the time is not right, try again another time.

Choose the right attention getters: Find the way that makes your dogs ears go up, the head to tilt or gets the reaction you desire. Click and reinforce your dog for these cute reactions! If you have an extremely active dog, give them something to do. If you give two active puppies a stick, you're just about guaranteed to get some adorable photos!

Choose the right equipment: Knowing how different features work, you'll be able to select the camera and equipment you will use the most. This also applies to editing photos. Learn the various tools and play around with it. Sometimes that not so great photo can be turned into a photo worthy of an award!

K is for KNOW your dog:

Having a strong bond with your dog and knowing what times, motivators and locations are best for him can make taking pictures much easier.

Know your dog's habits: Is there something he does that really cute right before dinner each day? Have your camera ready! Does he make spectacular leaps after thrown toys? Have your camera ready!

Know your dog's limits: Does your dog have a short attention span? If so, don't plan an all day photo shoot! If you know your dog doesn't like to sit still, then set-up a timer shot and get in the photo with him so you can hold him! Or even better, have someone take the photo for you. Learn to recognize when your dog has reached his limit of whatever you are doing.

Know your dog is prepared: If your dog gets treats and toys whenever the camera comes out, he will look forward to seeing it! If he's put in position and told to stay every time, it might not be as much fun. The more training your dog has, the easier it will be to get that "perfect" photo with minimal stress on you or the dog.

S is for SOMETHING to do with your photos:

Once you have a nice collection of photos, what do you DO with them? There are many free and low cost photo sharing sites now. Often they offer options for putting your photos on various products like shirts, mugs and mouse pads. You could also set-up a website or blog to chronicle your dog's life or your photography. Using photos to create one of a kind cards and posters is also fun. Most importantly, send in your best action shots for the DSA calendar!

_____ Handler understands use of their camera and how light affects the photos (both in good ways and bad- demo with example photos.)

Using the info above, the handler needs to take some good photos and bad photos showing how various kinds of light can affect the quality or effect desired for the photo. These should be shared with the evaluator or sent in with the video for evaluation. Be sure to put notes on each photo explaining what went right, what went wrong and how it could be corrected. Examples are shown on the photo examples page.

_____ Handler can take a good photo and bad photo of their dog using natural light & explain why it's a good/bad shot & what went wrong

For this requirement, you'll need to show some of the good effects and bad effects of using natural light (sunlight) and explain what went right, what went wrong and how it could be corrected.

_____ Handler can take a good photo and bad photo of their dog using a flash and explain why it's a good/bad photo & what went wrong

Using a flash correctly can be tricky. You'll need to show some of the good effects and bad effects of using a flash and explain what went right, what went wrong and how it could be corrected.

_____ **Handler can take a good action photo and bad action photo and explain why it's a good/bad photo & what went wrong**

Action photos are those in which the dog is moving and doing something. They should clearly show what the activity is. You'll need to show some examples of photos (good and bad) you have taken of your dog in action and explain what went right, what went wrong and how it could be corrected.

_____ **Handler can take a good "posed" photo of their dog**

Get creative here! Most people can take a photo of a dog sitting or lying down. Try a new pose or prop or location.

_____ **Handler can take a timed (or set up) photo of self and dog**

The timer on a camera is very under-utilized by most people. Play around with this one to see if you can get a photo that looks candid, but was actually a timed photo. Explain the steps you took to make it happen and you can toss in some examples of tries that didn't go as well :-)

Photos submitted do NOT need to be printed on photo quality paper, but should be high enough quality printing to clearly show what needs to be shown. If printed individually, put your comments and explanations on the back of each photo. If pasted into a Word doc, put the text next to, or just above the photo it relates to. Use larger photos than what is used on the "Photography Example Photos" page.