

Retrieve Merit Badge Information

The retrieve merit badge was developed to establish a foundation behavior that is necessary for many activities that Dog Scouts are involved in. A number of the specialty merit badges such as Flyball, water rescue, Scent hurdle racing, IMPROV, and panhandling, require your dog to hold an object in his/her mouth. Many dogs do well at chasing and holding toys, but that behavior doesn't necessarily carry over to retrieving objects on cue. This badge provides an opportunity for you to teach your dog that skill. Retrieving can also come in handy at home for those occasions when you drop your keys, or just don't feel like getting off the couch to get the TV remote!

You will be teaching your dog using Operant Conditioning. With this method your training is based on the scientific principle that behavior that is rewarded will be repeated. Your job is to control the environment by increasing the likelihood that the behaviors you want will happen so that you can reward them. When training any behavior, the sequence of actions is the same; think of the alphabet!

A= antecedent (ask for the behavior)

B=get the behavior

C=consequences of behavior:

desired behavior is rewarded

undesired behavior is ignored or managed

The retrieve is actually a chain of behaviors.

Before you begin training, it is wise to picture the final behavior in your mind, and outline the steps you might take to get there.

You will need to "shape" each behavior in the chain by rewarding each successive approximation of the behavior. There are several methods you can use to accomplish this. The most frequently used methods are;

Free shaping

Back chaining/modeling

Extend dog's play retrieve behavior into a formal retrieve

The inductive retrieve

Choose the method that works for your dog. Refer to the handouts for the specifics.

Required behaviors for Retrieve Badge Level I

These exercises are done off leash. Handler will use standard plastic or wooden dumbbell as used in Obedience Competition for the check off. Dumbbell type toys are allowed in practice/training sessions.

Retrieve from Hand

Dog will take dumbbell from handler's hand when cued, hold it until asked to release, and release dumbbell to handler's hand on cue.

Retrieve Thrown Dumbbell

Handler will cue the dog to stay, throw the dumbbell at least six feet away. The handler will send the dog to retrieve the dumbbell. The dog will go directly to the dumbbell, pick it up by the center bar and return to stand or sit in front of the handler. The dog should be close enough that the handler is able to touch the dumbbell without taking a step. The dog may sit or stand upon return, and will hold the dumbbell in his mouth until cued to release. The handler will cue the dog to give the dumbbell, dog will release the dumbbell into handler's hand.

Retrieve Placed Dumbbell

Handler will cue the dog to stay. The tester will place the dumbbell on the floor/ground six to eight feet away from the dog/handler team. The handler will send the dog to retrieve the dumbbell. . The dog will go directly to the dumbbell, pick it up by the center bar and return to stand or sit in front of the handler. The dog should be close enough that the handler is able to touch the dumbbell without taking a step. The dog may sit or stand upon return, and will hold the dumbbell in his mouth . The handler will cue the dog to give the dumbbell, dog will release the dumbbell into handler's hand.

The handler may repeat cues, and encourage dog during the exercises, may not physically force or restrain the dog. Food treats are not allowed during the check-off. The dog may sit or stand while delivering the dumbbell to hand, but must be close enough for handler to touch dumbbell.

Required Criteria

Dog will come directly back to owner after picking up dumbbell

Dog will hold dumbbell firmly in mouth by center bar without dropping, tossing, or chewing

The check off session is NOT intended to be a practice/training session.

At the time of badge check off, your dog will be expected to reliably perform all the required behaviors.

If your dog is unsuccessful at the first attempt of a behavior, you will be allowed a repeat attempt. If the second attempt is unsuccessful, you will be asked to repeat the check off at another session.

Resources

Shaping the Retrieve by Lonnie Olson

Balloon Training by Lonnie Olson

Sue Sternberg Presents a Guide to The Inducive Retrieve

Clicker Fun by Deborah Jones PhD

Clicking with Your Dog by Peggy Tillman

The "Bad Dog" retrieve handout by Beth Duman