

Dog Scouts of America

IMPROV Obedience Training Instructions

IMPROV is an acronym for Impromptu Multifarious Performance Requiring Obedience and Versatility. It is exactly that. It is a test, whereby the handler is able to get the dog to perform new and novel behaviors on request, using the skills and cues the dog **already knows**. It shows the handler's ability to control the dog at a distance, and the dog's willingness to retrieve ANY object. It demonstrates the handler's ability to use "lateral thinking" to work his way out of a problem, and shows that the dog and handler work together as a team, to accomplish a goal. Each handler must show a unique and potentially useful behavior that he has taught his dog to perform.

Most of the exercises in IMPROV are "borrowed" from obedience training. Many dogs already have a good foundation in obedience training, and this will be a test of: "Will this dog actually perform as directed with these extreme context changes?" Sure, the dog can retrieve a dumbbell, but will he retrieve an aluminum lawn chair? If he TRULY understands the retrieve exercise, he should. The problem is that many trainers practice only for the obedience ring where there are (boring) standard exercises, and they are never required to use their obedience skills for everyday tasks which might actually come in handy in REAL LIFE SITUATIONS!

So, IMPROV is basically an exercise in increasing the contexts in which your dog will successfully perform required tasks, to include the very unusual. We want the dog to be able to do whatever we ask, in a non-pattern-trained manner.

You THINK your dog knows a retrieve--in how many contexts? Will he retrieve a glass bottle? A metal crutch? A raw egg? Will he take it from a table? A bucket? A Bag? Will he take it if it is not thrown by you? If it's hidden? If it is trapped beneath something? Will he deliver it on request to your hand? To someone else? To the table top? To a toy box? Will he try to retrieve it, even if it is so large, the best he can do is drag it to you? If so, then this dog TRULY understands the retrieve. If not, then it's your job to enlighten him, by increasing his contexts.

For the distance control needed for some of the IMPROV exercises, you must teach your dog to "go out." You can do this with a target and a clicker in about 5 minutes. From the go out, your dog may be asked to perform other behaviors (like sit, down, stand, walk around something), so it would be a good idea to teach your dog to perform all position changes at a distance. This is especially important for the "Not So Straight Recall" exercise, where the dog must perform up to 10 behaviors on the way back to his handler over a 60+ foot distance. Pattern-trained dogs just race in and do a front (oops!). They're not stupid, their owners have just never bothered to increase the contexts under which the dog already understands simple commands like sit and speak!