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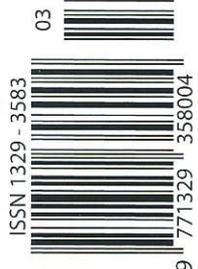
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Fido fundamentals

Sit, stay, come — **Tim Falk** examines the seven training commands every dog should know.

1. SIT AND STAY

As far as dog training commands go, they don't come any more basic than sit and stay. "Commands such as sit, down and stay are basic instructions that should be learnt to facilitate everyday life and activities," says Katie Catherwood from Heads & Tails Pet Care Services. "For example, it is useful for a dog to lie down and stay on his bed while the family is busy cooking dinner in the kitchen. This is just one of many applications."

According to Alisa Sannikova, animal behaviour scientist from Sydney dog walking and training service Perfect Dog, a dog that will listen to you when you ask it to sit can be prevented from doing or interrupted during all sorts of problem behaviours. "A jumping dog that sits is no longer jumping. A dog about to run across

the road that sits is no longer moving forward into danger," she says. "It's also a good barometer for overexcitement or anxiety; a dog that won't listen to a sit request may be too bothered to comply with anything at all, and that can be your cue to get it out of that situation any way you can until the dog calms down."

2. COME

A reliable recall is an indispensable part of being a responsible dog owner. We all know recall is important when you let your dog off-leash, but even dogs that you never intend to release can get away from you anyway — fences can be jumped or damaged, collars and leashes can snap, doors and gates can be left ajar. "Having a dog that is willing and happy to come back to you is very important for peace of mind in these situations," Alisa says.

3. LEAVE IT (AND DROP IT)

Although this command can be a difficult command to teach, Katie says it is hugely important. "If a dog is drawn towards a tempting but potentially hazardous object at the park (such as discarded food scraps), it's vital that he can be told to 'leave it' and respond accordingly," she says. Regardless of whether you're at home or out and about, your dog is going to come across things you definitely don't want her picking up.

"I also like to teach dogs to 'leave' by using default objects that are dropped on the floor at home, unless explicitly told to grab them," Alisa says. "This prevents dogs from running towards careless toddlers with snacks, or thinking that the pill bottle overturned by an elderly family member is something edible."

AGE DOESN'T MATTER

It doesn't matter what age your dog is when you start teaching — no dog is too old to learn. "Puppies do experience an accelerated learning period up to 16 weeks so it's a great idea to take advantage and train while they are highly receptive," says Katie Catherwood. "However, you can achieve just as much with an adult or senior rescue dog — the key is being patient, persistent and positive."

4. FOCUS (OR WATCH ME)

If you want your dog to do what you want in any situation and at any given time, it's vital you are able to command its full attention. However, Alisa explains that dogs can find it hard to look at people's faces for long periods of time because in dog body language this is a bit confrontational.

"A dog that learns to 'watch' your face when you ask it to, or point to your eyes, gets so many benefits: they are definitely focused on you and ready for further commands, they're actively ignoring other distractions, and they're learning to increase their attention span and self-control. Asking your dog to keep his eyes on you for several seconds can help you get past something without your dog noticing, particularly if your dog is reactive to other dogs on-leash," she says.

5. TOUCH MY HAND

Not all of the essential canine commands are based on safety; tricks are an important inclusion in every dog's repertoire. Learning to touch a target such as your hand with its nose is a trick every dog should know. Alisa Sannikova explains why.

"It's very easy to get a dog to change position or go to a different location using this trick without manhandling him, especially if the dog doesn't like being touched or if it's too big for you to push around. Just hold your hand where you want the dog's head to be, ask him to 'touch', and see him move himself to get to your hand," she says.

This is a great method for helping dogs understand that you want them to get onto car seats or into crates, turn around on the vet's table, or even get off your bed and into their own. It's also useful for shy

dogs who hate being touched on the head.

"Teaching shy dogs that they can just 'touch' a stranger and then come back without being touched themselves as a greeting is a good confidence boost and can defuse those stressful situations if the stranger is willing to just stay still for you," Alisa explains.

6. RELAX WHEN TOUCHED

Although this behaviour isn't usually given a name, it's an absolute necessity for any dog to be happy about being handled. Dogs should be able to allow vets, groomers and daycare workers to touch them without becoming stressed, on any part of their body.

"So many dogs are happy to have their front legs picked up for nail clipping but not their back legs, for example," Alisa explains. "And a dog that lets you touch it inside its mouth is one that can have its teeth cleaned and throat checked for obstructions. It's of great importance that the dog is happy and looking forward to being touched everywhere, not merely tolerating it, so make sure all of these interactions are fun and rewarding for the dog."

7. FREE

The last command on the list is one that's often overlooked but also one that Katie says is critical. "A frequently forgotten

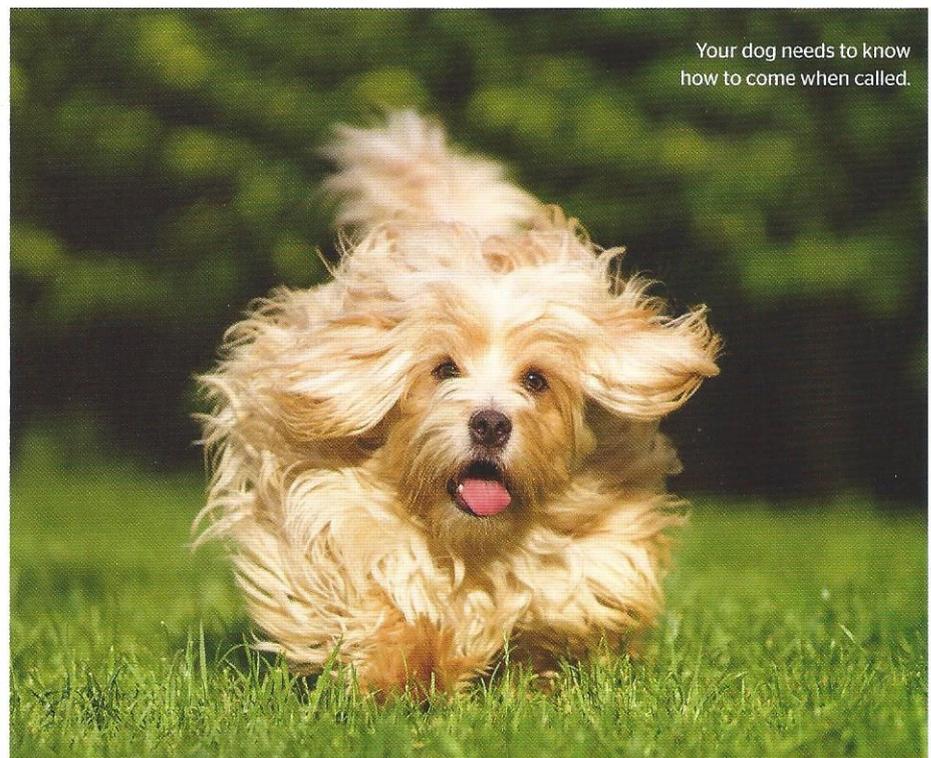
but equally important command that should be viewed as a bookend to the others: the release word," she explains. "A release word, such as 'free', tells the dog when the previous command ends. Using a release word ensures your dog will be more responsive to training overall as he will learn to hold commands until you give the green light."

TRAINING FOR SUCCESS

It's never too early (or too late) to start training these essential commands. In an ideal world, you can start training sessions as soon as you bring your new puppy home. But if you're adopting an older dog or you simply have an adult pet who has developed a lifetime of bad behaviours, dogs of all ages can always learn new things.

However, it's important to remember that you need to do a thorough job — going part of the way to training a particular command or trick isn't going to produce the desired results. "If you need to use any sort of skill in a stressful or emergency situation, that skill should already be well practised ahead of time. Half-taught or non-rewarded behaviours tend to be forgotten," Alisa says.

And once you start teaching these behaviours, remember to keep reinforcing them throughout your dog's life. Depending on your canine's motivation,



Your dog needs to know how to come when called.