

PETS

6 Ways to Make Your Dog Smarter

BY *Dr Katrina Warren*

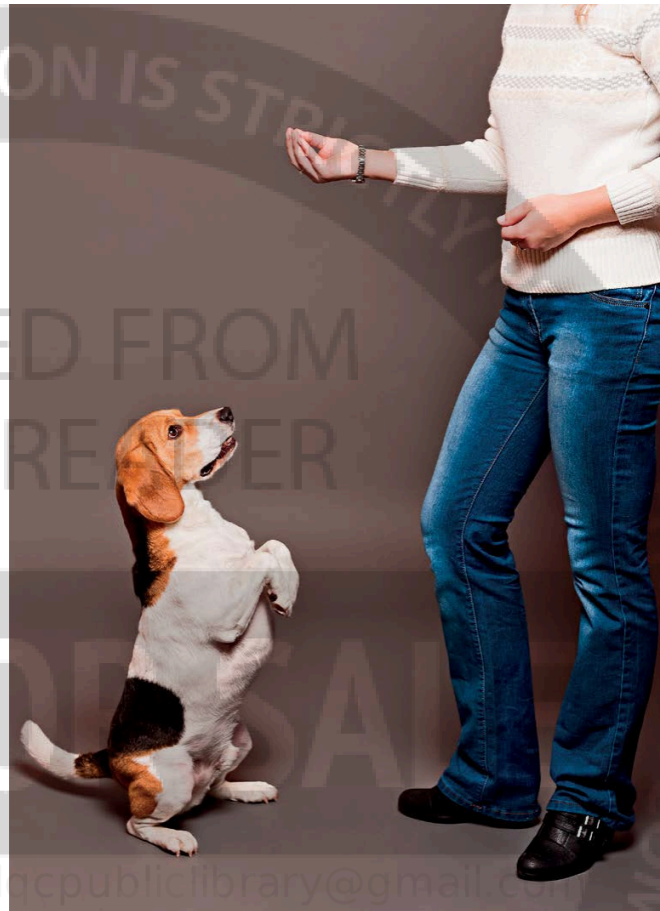
JUST LIKE HUMANS, a dog's intelligence can be increased through education and training. Well-trained dogs are smarter, better behaved and more fun. In reality, seeming 'smart' often simply reflects 'training' so you'll need to invest time in training and communicating with your dog. These tips will help make your dog a clever canine.

1 Early training

The earlier you start training your puppy, the more likely you are to achieve results. A little bit of training, several times a day, will make a big difference. Don't forget to keep it informal and fun. Contrary to popular belief, you can teach an old dog new tricks, so if you have an older dog, it's still worth investing the time.

2 Associate words with rewards

It's possible for dogs to understand a range of vocabulary similar to



that of a two-year-old child. You can teach your dog to associate words with behaviours, activities and items by using positive reinforcement and rewards. It's not surprising that most dogs clearly understand words like 'treat', 'toy' and 'walk', because whenever they hear those words they are rewarded with food, a game or an outing. Your dog will constantly pick up on words and signals, so use this to your advantage and increase the effect with suitable rewards.

3 Use hand signals

Dogs by nature enjoy responding to visual cues, and seem to have adapted to comprehend human visual communication. Pointing is a

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great example, as you can point to a toy and your dog will pick it up. Dogs are one of the few animals that understand that gesture. Back up your voice commands with hand signals and you will find your dog responds quickly and enthusiastically.

4 Regular training

Short bursts of regular training throughout your dog's life will give great results. Training can be brief and spontaneous—what's important is that it's regular. Run through a few simple commands with your dog before you give them their dinner. It's a time when they'll be keen to respond.

5 Make your dog work for food

Dogs love to eat, so get them to work for their food by using a portion for games. You can make treasure hunts, use food-dispensing toys or play hide and seek with treats. These will keep them stimulated, entertained and their brains active.

6 Trick training

Dogs that learn to perform tricks always look smart. Apart from being entertaining, trick training will help take your relationship with your dog to a new level. Start with simple tricks such as 'roll over' and gradually increase the repertoire. **R**

INTERACTIVE BRAIN GAMES

A game of fetch is fun, but there's not much thinking involved. These games will tire your dog out, decrease boredom and strengthen your bond.

Nurture his prey drive

Tie a string to the end of a long stick, then tie a soft toy onto the string. Get your dog's attention by dangling it in front of him. Move it slowly, stopping and starting. This encourages the dog to focus. The slower you go, the more you challenge your dog's mind.

Then give him the release cue to go find the toy. Reward your dog when he finds the hidden treasure. Once your dog understands the game, ramp up the difficulty by hiding the treasure in another room or have someone in your household hide it.

Treasure hunt

Stimulate your dog by getting him to use his nose to find hidden treasure. Begin by putting your dog in a sit-stay position, then hide a treat or favourite toy where it is obvious. You can even let him watch you hide it.

Cup game

Have your dog watch while you place a treat under one of two opaque cups. Give your dog the cue to turn over the cup to get the treat. When he understands, make it challenging by alternating the cup under which you place the treat.

—Diane Godley