



Article Reprint

*South Coast Agility Team's Newsletter, The Scribe, Aug/Sept 2001
"On the Seminar Trail with Susan Garrett, Part III: Games & Targeting"
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*In the April/May and June/July newsletters I reported on Susan Garrett's training philosophy as well as some foundation skills she teaches. First, I'll recap briefly for those of you who are new to *The Scribe*.*

Training Philosophy

- *Work is play and play is work*
- *Being positive doesn't mean permissive*
- *Dogs don't make decisions (we do)*
- *Punishment is only fair when there is a history of positive reinforcement*

Some Guidelines

- *A high rate of reinforcement is critical in teaching new skills*
- *"Ah-ah" and other non-words are the square root nothing in terms of training*
- *Teach your pup to be play- and food-motivated*
- *Use shaping instead of luring*

DASH

- *Desire*
- *Accuracy*
- *Speed*
- *Habitat*

Okay, now that we have a pretty good foundation behind us, we can get to some of the games and handling skills that Garrett teaches.

Games

Garrett stresses the value of games in terms of building a relationship with our dogs, as well as building motivation and speed. Some games also teach specific skills such as stay, come, attention, etc. Something I found of particular interest is that she focuses on games that are completely interactive with the dog. She says she does not throw balls or Frisbees for her dogs as games. Her reasoning is that she wants the games to be fun because she is there and an active participant, and she wants her dogs to be with her instead of running away from her. Interesting, eh?

Teaching Toy Motivation—I first saw Garrett describe this process when I went to one of her workshops a few years ago at Stars and Stripes Agility in China. I thought I'd die laughing then, and I still laugh every time I hear her do this routine. This exercise is for dogs who have regretfully never been taught to play.

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1. When your dog isn't looking, hide a toy in a drawer in the kitchen.
2. Close all your shades and blinds so your neighbor's won't have you committed.
3. With your dog in the room, suddenly perk up, stare at the drawer with the toy in it, and start to creep up on the drawer, acting as if you have seen something completely irresistible.
4. Jerk open the drawer, suck in your breath in exclamation, put your hand to your chest in an "Oh, my!" and slowly reach into the drawer.
5. Pull out the toy and play with it with wanton abandon. Leap! Giggle! Toss it in the air! Pounce on it! Do NOT let the dog have it.
6. Put the toy back in the drawer and close the drawer and go about your business.
7. Repeat #1-7 over several days until your dog shows interest in the toy. When she does, let her get near it and sniff it, but don't let her have it.
8. When your dog is showing a lot of interest in playing with the toy, let her grab it briefly, but don't let go. Play with her with the toy. Keep it brief! Keep the anticipation high!
9. Repeat this game until your dog will play with you for longer and longer periods of time, but always quit before she does.
10. Introduce new toys to the game.

1-2-3 — This game teaches fast response to the cue of "sit" as well as enthusiasm to be with you for whatever game you determine.

1. Get out a fun tug toy. (If your dog isn't toy-motivated, see "Teaching Toy Motivation.")
2. Stand perpendicular (facing the side of your dog) to your dog so that you can eventually twist away into a run. Get into a slightly crouching position. If your dog looks away, straighten up and ignore the dog until she looks back at you; get back into the crouching "Game On!" position.
3. Say, "Ready!" Then immediately cue "Sit." As soon as your dog sits, click (or say "Yes!") and run a short distance (2-3') away with toy, enticing your dog to follow you to get the reward. The reward is a fun game of tug with the toy and you.
4. Repeat #1-3 until you have added more distance that the dog follows you to get the reward. Don't go on to the next stages of the game until you have a very high level of enthusiasm at this stage. More than likely, by this point, your dog is also sitting as soon as you say "Ready!"
5. Next, you are going to build in a stay after the sit. So after you say "Ready" and "Sit," (you may get an automatic sit by this point), say "t-h-r-e-e," as you move away from the dog. If your dog maintains the sit, click/Yes!, and take off and reward. If the dog gets up, straighten up, return, and start over. (What you are teaching in this step is for the dog to wait for you to give her permission (the click or Yes!) to break the sit. Think of the anticipation on the start line in a trial, and you'll see how this game can really come in handy.)
6. Once you've built a stay up to "three," add the next number, "two." Crouch, "Ready," dog sits, "t-h-r-e-e, t-w-o," click/Yes!, and reward.
7. Once you've built a stay up to "three, two," add the final number, one. "t-h-r-e-e, t-w-o, o-n-e," etc. Then, call them out in order, "1-2-3."
8. Next, start "ping-ponging" around which number you use to release your dog. Sometimes, say, "1, 2, 3," Yes!" and other times say "1, 2," Yes!" so that your dog doesn't predict when she will be released.
9. Any time your dog breaks the sit, simply straighten up (which is the cue that the game is off) and start over. If your dog breaks the sit more than a couple times in a row, you've probably made the game too difficult for your dog. Go back and make it easier, and then build back up. This is supposed to be fun, not a stressful exercise of STAY! NO I SAID STAY, etc.

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10. Finally, once you've built up great drive and enthusiasm with this game, set a tunnel in front of you and the dog. Now release the dog and race to the tunnel. When the dog comes out of the end of the tunnel, whip out that toy and have a rousing game of tug!

Get Dat Ting—This is Garrett's language for "Get That Thing," which is a race to a toy. It is a very simple, fun game that builds speed and motivation.

1. Toss or place a toy out at a distance from you and your dog.
2. Hold your dog's collar and crouch down, building anticipation of the race to the toy.
3. Exclaim "Get Dat Ting" and release your dog's collar and race to the toy. You should win sometimes and the dog should win sometimes, but in either case there should be a rousing game of tug at the end.
4. After you've built great enthusiasm for this game, place the toy at the end of the weave poles and race to it. If your dog pops out, restart the game. (This assumes you have not inadvertently taught your dog that playing with a toy by herself is more rewarding than playing any game, i.e., weaves, with you. If your dog pops out and takes off with the toy, leave the area. You have some remedial work to do!)

Smoke Ya—This is a game of tag and keep-away. It can be played in the house or in a yard, wherever there are barriers or obstacles you can run around with your dog chasing you.

1. Grab a toy, and tiptoe away from your dog as you deeply huff and puff your breath in and out.
2. When your dog notices this, yell "I'm gonna smoke ya!" and take off running, dodging around furniture and acting completely irresistible so your dog chases you. When your dog catches up (don't make it too hard in the beginning), squeal in delight and whip out the tug toy and play with her.
3. Work on making your dog recognize the huffing and puffing as the "Game On!" cue, and spontaneously launch into this game at odd times. This makes you incredibly fun and irresistible—how could your dog choose to do anything other than engage with you in this game!
4. Gradually make finding and catching you harder and harder and the game last longer and longer.

Puppy Handling Exercises

Now that your dog finds you the funnest, most irresistible animal around, here are some handling skills you can teach your puppy.

Hand targeting—Anyone who has been doing agility for any period of time has seen or used hand targeting, i.e., training your dog to follow your hand for direction.

1. Stand next to your dog. This may not be as easy as it sounds because many dogs have been highly reinforced for coming to front for recalls or sits. But, for agility, we want our dogs on our sides. The last thing we want is a dog in front of us to trip over. We've all seen dogs, especially very fast dogs, spinning doughnuts in front of their handlers, while the handler is desperately trying to get them out of the way to one side or the other!
2. Present a flat hand to your dog with the hand closest to the dog. (Do not reach across with the opposite hand.) When the dog looks at or touches your hand with her nose, click and treat. Be sure to treat right where the dog touched your hand. In other words, don't treat with your opposite hand because that might pull your dog to your front.
3. Repeat three or four times until your dog is quickly touching her nose to your outstretched hand.

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4. Now move your hand a few inches from your dog so that your dog has to follow your hand to touch it. Click and treat. Repeat several times.
5. Switch hands so that your dog can do this exercise on either side of you.
6. Take a step and click and treat when your dog follows at your side to catch up to your hand to touch it. Click and treat. Repeat several times, working both sides.
7. Take two or three steps and click and treat when your dog catches up and touches your hand. Repeat several times, working both sides, gradually adding more steps and walking faster so that your dog has to take several steps before getting clicked and treated.
8. Walk in different directions, e.g., an arc, a circle, a large U.
9. Change directions by walking in a straight line with the dog following your hand on the left (click and treating), and then turn in toward the dog, dropping your left hand and switching to your right hand.
10. Put it all together by trotting and making changes in directions from both sides.

Front Crosses—I refer to this as the "crotch shot." It helps to image that you are doing a front cross with your experienced dog. Imagine the point where the dog is on your left, going over a jump, and you stay on the right side of that jump and call the dog to turn sharply toward you upon landing, coming into your opposite hand. You have just executed a front cross without having to follow the dog past the jump. This cuts off yards for you and the dog. This is SO difficult to describe on paper, but I'll try.

1. With your dog following on your left (hand targeting to your left hand), all of a sudden simultaneously a) call your dog's name, b) take a step forward with your right foot and pivot on that foot toward your dog, c) bring your right hand around and point it at the ground right below your dog's nose. Click and treat for the dog looking at your right hand or at the ground.
2. Repeat the above maneuver until you can fluidly walk along at a brisk pace, call your dog's name, and point straight down from your belly button to a point between your knees, and have the dog zip around to that spot. Click and treat.
3. Next, we want to complete the U-turn in toward your dog. You will be walking along with the dog hand targeting on the left, take the step that will place your right foot down, pivot toward the dog, point, and complete the U-turn in toward your dog.
4. Gradually add a step after the crotch shot, bringing your right hand up into a hand-targeting position. You have just executed a nice, tight, front cross.
5. Eventually, as your puppy matures, you can add a jump in, calling and pivoting as the dog takes the jump.

Rear Cross, aka "Turn"—This maneuver has been dubbed by one of Garrett's students as "the Vanna arm," describing the back-flip hand motion used. The "Turn" has been taught at many agility schools in the last couple of years, but I was still in the habit of using the outside/opposite arm to signal to my dog that I was crossing behind.

Maki Jo and I had a lot of fun learning this one. You must break it down into several different training exercises before putting it all together for it to work. This exercise also assumes you and your dog are proficient with hand targeting. Note: If your dog does "Spin" as a trick, it's sometimes easier for the dog to figure it out because what you will be doing is turning in toward the dog at the same time as flipping your hand (the one you are targeting with) away from you to get the dog to turn (or spin) away from you.

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1. Start with an imaginary dog standing on your right side. Take a step with your right foot and right arm moving out together. Your right hand should be hanging straight down your leg with the palm toward you. You will curve your hand out away from you, toward the dog's head. At the same time, your right foot will turn at a 90-degree angle toward the dog, and your shoulders will turn toward the dog as well. Practice this with your imaginary dog several times.

The hardest part of this exercise is to make all the physical parts of your body move in unison: leg and arm/hand, foot and shoulder. Once you are comfortable with that, imagine that as you put it all together and turn in toward the dog, the dog turns her head away from you toward her right shoulder. (If your dog has personal space issues and moves away from you when you turn toward her, you may want to resort to luring her head around.) When your dog turns her head away from you, click and treat—and you finish the maneuver by carrying through with your body. When you do so, your dog ends up on your left. In actuality, you are moving your body in a tight U-turn toward your dog. When you do, she should turn away from you in her own tight U-turn. She can now target to your left hand.

2. Still with your imaginary dog, you practice this exercise without any jump. Practice walking more quickly before the pivot in toward the dog. Practice working this from both sides. Practice trotting and then pivoting. Practice trotting and pivoting and then continue trotting and pivot on the opposite side. I have one student whom I tease that this is much like some of the canine freestyle moves she practices with her dog.
3. Once you can do this maneuver fluidly and quickly, place a jump (or just the bar on the ground) about 10-12' in front of you and, still with your imaginary dog on the right, run toward the center of the jump and execute your pivot and carry through. Imagine that as you pivot toward your dog, your dog jumps over the jump and turns to the right. You carry through by crossing behind where the dog was and picking her up with your left hand. Voila!
4. When you are very fluid with your own footwork, start over with #1 above with your real-life puppy. Remember that your puppy will need a lot of practice learning the muscle memory of turning away from you before you can add additional steps such as switching to the left-hand target.
5. Add the cue, "Turn," only after you are both fluid together with the maneuver.

Clear as mud? If you can't visualize this, find someone at a practice, class, or trial to demonstrate it. I'm thinking of having my students bring their video cameras to class so we can break this maneuver down into the separate exercises. It's hard to remember them all! Once you master this, however, it's an incredibly useful move. I call it the dog's "early warning system," i.e., you will be crossing behind and that the dog should change leads in mid-air over the jump so that she lands on the right lead without spinning or "doing a doughnut." Using the inside hand makes it so much clearer to the dog what your intent is, and the movement of your foot and shoulders toward the dog speak volumes to these animals who are so clued in to body language.

These games and handling exercises for puppies are just a few of the many things Garrett teaches in her seminars. If you ever get the chance to go to one, GO!