

Choosing an Obedience Training Program

When you are looking for a respected, successful obedience program for your dog, the best thing you can do is to conduct extensive research. Just because a program claims to be run by a "trainer" or "behaviorist," or has a catchy advertisement, does not mean it will be effective. This is a crucial decision that will shape the rest of your dog's life, so don't take it lightly! Keep the following criteria in mind:

1. Class size. In a smaller class, your dog will get more individualized attention. Look for programs that cap classes at 6 - 8 dogs.
2. Observation. Will the instructor allow you to sit in on a class before you enroll your dog? You deserve the opportunity to see what you're paying for, so if the instructor refuses, take your business elsewhere.
3. Class conduct. Does the instructor conduct the class responsibly? He or she should not act like a drill sergeant; instead, he or she should explain and show each step to you, instead of expecting you to figure it out for yourself. The instructor should also emphasize positive developments, no matter how small.
4. Technique. The instructor should alter his technique to fit the dog, not expect the dog to change to fit the technique. Make sure your instructor is experienced and flexible enough to choose alternative programs if a certain technique isn't working for your pet.
5. Information. You deserve written instructions that will show you how to continue training your dog. Your instructor should also be available to meet with you outside of class time, and should always be available for contact - even after the training program is over.
6. Accreditation. Your instructor should have certain credentials. Is he or she a member of a nationally-recognized association, like the Association of Pet Dog Trainers? He or she might also have an independent accreditation, like the ones given by the Certification Council for Pet Dog Trainers.
7. Instinct. Trust your gut: how do you really feel about the instructor? If you're not comfortable, choose someone else. This is a lot to remember - but there's more! Don't allow yourself to get caught up in a litany of credentials. Awards or experience don't necessarily mean that a trainer is going to be effective. It only means that he or she has devoted a lot of time to going to shows, or has been in the field for a long time. In fact, this might indicate that his or her training methods are antiquated. Make sure you do your research, no matter how good the trainer looks on paper. Your trainer should be able to deal effectively with aggressive dogs that may compromise the safety of the class, even if that means admitting his own limitations or weaknesses. A responsible trainer will acknowledge what he or she can't safely do, but should also help to rectify the problem. This can often mean contacting and working with a pet behavior specialist and vet.

Finally, remember that obedience training has to translate outside the classroom, so your instructor should give you strategies for applying class lessons in your day-to-day life. You should choose a trainer who fits your needs, whether that's to prepare dogs for normal social interaction or for competition. Your trainer should strike a good balance between commands and "good manners" more generally, because those are crucial to having a happy, healthy life with your pet. Remember that this is the goal: living together happily, not just making your pet obey your commands. The best trainer will be able to help you meet this goal.

About the Author

Ian Spellfield, an occasionally frustrated pet owner, tests and reviews cat urine removal products at his blog [Urine Off Reviews](http://www.urineoffreviews.com). You can follow his reviews and occasional heartache at <http://www.urineoffreviews.com>

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