

## Choosing a dog trainer

In Australia there is no legislation to regulate the qualifications, experience and training of people offering obedience lessons, and as a result there are a variety of methods taught by people with varying degrees of expertise. Not all methods may be appropriate for your dog, not all you will be comfortable with, and sometimes the trainer will not have the necessary skills to help you.

### What to look for?

1. Many trainers can only train dogs with food or toys, clickers, or a throw or check chain, whereas others will quickly recommend aids such as the head collar without showing you how to stop the dog pulling on the lead. A good trainer can use a variety of methods, and teach you to walk a dog on an ordinary collar and lead.
2. Whilst food is an acceptable positive reinforcement training aid, a good trainer will be able to show you how to train a dog without food (if you prefer this or if it is not necessary) by using your voice as praise. Positive training does not always equate to food training and praise is an appropriate reward.
3. Conversely a trainer should not refuse to allow the use of treats if they cannot demonstrate that the dog can be trained without them, or they have to use harsh or cruel methods.
4. Decide whether you want individual (at home or at the training grounds) or group training and find a trainer that can offer all options and is prepared to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each
5. Avoid dominance focused trainers who see everything as you being “the boss”, “the alpha animal” or “the leader of the pack” as many dogs are not dominant. Nervous or anxious dogs will require the opposite approach
6. Seek out a trainer or training group that uses an enclosed area, has dogs of a similar age and allows them to socialise off lead. Young dogs should not be in the same class as poorly socialised older and larger dogs
7. Avoid trainers that undertake to treat serious behavioural problems without being appropriately qualified in animal behaviour. Such trainers often fail to recognise their own limitations, do not refer the client a qualified person when this point is reached, resulting in the problem persisting or the owner having the dog relocated or destroyed as they feel they have done everything possible after following the trainers advice.
8. A dog trainer is not qualified in animal behaviour, so if you are given any advice on a behavioural problem, verify it with an appropriately qualified person before carrying it out
9. “Certified or accredited” does not always equate to qualified, experienced or guarantees the standard of training. The source of certification and accreditation, and the standards applied should always be verified
10. Question your trainers experience in training your type of dog, and where and how they obtained their training in dog obedience.
11. Visit the training grounds and watch a class prior to enrolling to ensure that you are comfortable with the methods used, the trainers personality and the manner in which the class is conducted. Well behaved family members should be encouraged to attend.

12. If a trainer guarantees their results ensure that you are familiar with the terms and conditions of the guarantee, its limitations and what is required of you
13. Avoid trainers who insist on having a “set” number of individual lessons, or insist on taking the dog away and training it for you. There is not a “set” number of lessons required to train a dog, as each owner and dog is different, and training a dog does require the participation of the owner.
14. A responsible trainer will require a vaccination prior to commencing class, have public liability insurance and ensure that the welfare of your dog is paramount throughout the training class.
15. Lessons should be explained clearly by the instructor, followed by a demonstration and sufficient time given for the participants practise the exercise. Individual attention should be given relatively evenly to all attendees.
16. A basic obedience training class should consist of no more than ten participants and include training exercises such as: sit, stay, come, getting the dogs attention and walking on a lead

By choosing the most appropriate trainer for yourself and your dog you will find the training sessions enjoyable and beneficial, resulting in a more obedient and better behaved dog.