



## Contrast

In order to develop a dog that responds reliably to commands and cues, both rewards and punishments are necessary. If the balance scale is unrealistically weighted with “atta boys” and undesirable behaviors are not met with a negative consequence, a happy dog that is out of control will be the result. On the other hand, when the dog is only punished for unwanted behaviors and does not receive rewards when he offers the desired ones, the dog will be left in limbo without any solutions for success. Through sound training, the dog should know what behaviors result in a paycheck as well as what behaviors will result in getting “written up.”

The application of “contrast” is important in order to develop a canine partner that will respond to a handler’s commands/cues with tail-wagging

enthusiasm. Let’s take the example of teaching a recall command to illustrate contrast. The recall command, “Here” should first be taught in yard training. A golden rule of dog training is that the dog must understand what the command means and know what behavior is expected before any punishment for non-compliance is administered. A trainer will achieve higher success if the command/cue is first taught with positive reinforcements. Excellence, later on, is taught through both punishment when the dog blows off the command with flagrant disobedience, and through reward when he responds to the command as he should. Also remember that the training goal is not to get the dog to eventually recall by repeating the command multiple times; the goal is to develop a dog that responds with style to commands/cues

the first time he receives the commands/cues.

In short, contrast is rewarding the dog for exhibiting the desired behavior and correcting the dog for offering the undesired behavior. In the case of teaching the dog the recall command, we will reward the dog for coming to us; once the dog understands the command, we will administer a negative consequence for non-compliance. It’s important to understand the reward and the consequence must be perceived by the dog as meaningful in order to motivate the dog to avoid the negative consequence associated with non-compliance, and receive the praise associated with responding to a known command with excellence.

By consistently rewarding the desired behavior of recalling upon command and consistently administering a correction

for non-compliance, the trainer will provide the dog a clear choice by giving the dog an understanding of contrast. When a dog is always rewarded for offering the desired behavior and always corrected for offering non-compliance, the dog will choose obeying as the only road to success. If the dog is only corrected for non-compliance and never rewarded for exhibiting the desired behavior, the outcome is not guaranteed. It is important to note that once the dog responds reliably to a command, a reward for complying does not have to be dealt out every time; but if he is never rewarded, he will lose incentive. A correction for non-compliance can never be phased out.

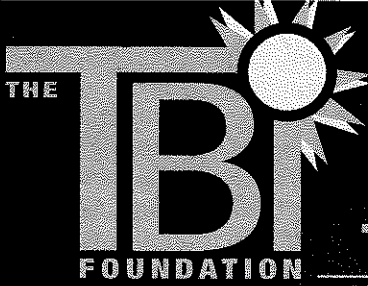
Suppose a dog blew off a command. For this particular dog, a correction worth 10 "units" had to be administered in order for the dog to respond to the command the next time the command was given. In other words, whatever the correction was (the e-collar, a

jerk with a pinch collar, etc.), a correction level of 10 was required in order for the correction to be meaningful to this particular dog. This contrast of 10 is what this dog needs. For example, if a reward worth 5 units was delivered to the dog for exhibiting the desired behavior and a correction worth 5 units was the consequence for non-compliance, the contrast would be 10. By employing rewards for success, the consequences for non-compliance will be more meaningful. If the consequences are more meaningful, the punishment will have to be dealt out less often. If the dog is punished less because he knows how to succeed, he will make the right choice. The right choice, in this case, is obeying with style to the "here" command.

When a command is being generalized in the field, it is important to give the dog contrast also. Far too many novice trainers are good at correcting the dog when the dog does








not respond in the field and neglect to reward the dog when he does the job right. In the excitement of the hunt, many owners are only focused on putting the bird in the bag and forget about rewarding the dog for good behaviors. Correction alone will not develop a top-tier performer. On the flip side, only rewarding a dog for exhibiting desired behaviors will not develop a dog that will respond with excellence and handle in control. It requires contrast to develop the bragging rights retriever. ●

Check out George's video training series (see ad in this issue), which covers everything you need to know to take your retriever from a pup to a finished upland hunter. For more information on The George Hickox School of Dog Training for Owners and their Dogs, and Stonecreek pointers and Labrador retrievers, check out [www.georgehickox.com](http://www.georgehickox.com).



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