

Just as with us humans, practice makes perfect when teaching your dog his new skills. Dogs don't tend to generalize very well from situation to situation – it's just not how their brains are built. Even one change (like practicing in a new place or on a different surface) could be like a whole new lesson to your dog. So how do you help your dog build up a skill to be performed consistently across the board? By practicing that skill in various situations and environments, and gradually building up various levels of distance, duration and distraction.

Let's take the example of "sit." Does your really understand how to "sit" when asked? Here are some examples of where and when to practice. If your dog is not successful, try again at a greater distance, for a shorter duration, or with less distraction. See how creative you can get!...

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Around the House: | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| In the living room | | | | While you make the bed | | | |
| In the kitchen | | | | While you empty dishwasher | | | |
| On the bathroom mat | | | | While you fold laundry | | | |
| To go out the back door | | | | While you make a snack | | | |
| While you open the closet | | | | While you check your email | | | |
| While you sweep the floor | | | | While you're watching TV | | | |
| While you chop vegetables | | | | While you make a phone call | | | |
| At the top of the stairs | | | | While you set the table | | | |
| At the bottom of the stairs | | | | While you clean up toys | | | |
| While you're on the couch | | | | While you pull weeds | | | |
| While you're laying in bed | | | | While you shovel snow | | | |
| While the kids eat breakfast | | | | While you feed the other dog | | | |
| While you brush your teeth | | | | While you get dressed | | | |
| While you brush your hair | | | | While you take off your coat | | | |
| While you take off your shoes | | | | While you open the cabinet | | | |
| While you're tucking the kids into bed | | | | While you're cleaning out the garage | | | |
| While you are carrying groceries | | | | While you are putting groceries away | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Situations: | | | | | | | |
| If your back is turned | | | | In a sandbox | | | |
| While you tie your shoe | | | | On gravel | | | |
| While you sing a song | | | | In the rain | | | |
| As your guest enters the door | | | | On a grate | | | |
| To earn playtime | | | | If someone else asks him | | | |
| To earn food (meal time) | | | | If asked by a child | | | |
| If you're sitting on the floor | | | | In the back yard | | | |
| To get into the car | | | | In the front yard | | | |
| While you hold an umbrella | | | | If you're swimming in a pool | | | |
| While hiking in the woods | | | | While walking in town | | | |
| While you pay the parking meter | | | | While you window shop | | | |

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| Adding Other Distractions: | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| As the cat walks by | | | | While your cell phone rings | | | |
| As a plane flies overhead | | | | When the doorbell rings | | | |
| While you toss a ball up | | | | While you hang ornaments | | | |
| While you jump up & down | | | | While you squeak a toy | | | |
| As another dog barks | | | | As you knock on a door | | | |
| As another dog passes by | | | | As you whistle | | | |
| While you play an instrument | | | | In the back yard | | | |
| While your kids play outside | | | | To throw the ball | | | |
| While the wind blows a flag or other piece of material | | | | When he sees a goose in the pond | | | |
| As a person passes by | | | | While a skateboarder rides by | | | |
| While a bicycle passes by | | | | While the chimes ring | | | |
| While the tea kettle whistles | | | | As a car passes on the street | | | |

Do you get the idea? There are SO many ways we can help our dog practice his skills so he can really understand how to do them here, there, and anywhere you ask. Each dog is different and will have different triggers, so if you notice him having a particularly hard time with one of these, break the lesson down into smaller slices (for an example of small slices, see my article [Small Slices – What Do These Really Look Like?](#))

This checklist is ONLY meant to be a guideline – I’m sure you can think of many more opportunities to add!

For more help on building your dog’s skills and working through problem areas, contact Maria at (845) 549-0896 or maria@mghcanineconsulting.com– together we can discuss your goals, break lessons into the slices that your particular dog needs, and help you both meet success!