

# TRAINING SESSION LENGTH

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Helping pets live happy, healthy, full lives



Many people new to training believe the longer you work with the pet, the better. But actually, it's just the opposite! Working in many short sessions is far more beneficial. Your pet will learn much faster, have more fun, and look forward to the next training session.

## **Training is hard work!**

Even though positive training is fun, it is hard work for your pet. It's mentally stimulating and enriching (which is one reason why it's a great activity to do with him or her). But it is most effective when done in short chunks of time. If you train for too long, you risk frustrating and exhausting your dog. Just as many of us would prefer to listen to several short lectures (think TED talks) than one long one, it is much easier and more fun for pets to train in short sessions.

## **How long is best?**

As a general guideline, three minutes is plenty long for most dogs. Dogs new to training should be given even shorter sessions. Puppies might only be able to train for 1 minute at a time. (Yes, really.) Although their little brains are quite capable of learning quickly, they have very short attention spans, so they need frequent breaks. Many dogs (especially experienced dogs) are capable of training for longer, but three minutes is a good guideline. It is always best to end with your dog wanting more, rather than working them to the point of fatigue or frustration.

## **How do I keep track of time?**

There are a couple of options here. One is to set a timer for 2 to 3 minutes. When the timer goes off (perhaps put your phone on vibrate), your training session is over. Another option is to pre-count a set number of treats (say 10 to 20). Once the treats are gone, it's time to end your training session.

## **End training sessions thoughtfully.**

Ending a fun training session abruptly (for example, simply because you've run out of treats or your timer went off) can feel very unfair to the pet. Always keep that in mind, and either toss him a few treats for free, offer a chew toy, play a quick game of fetch or tug, give him a belly rub if he enjoys that, invite him outside for a walk, or do something else he enjoys.

## **When in doubt, shorter is better!**

While it's easy to ruin a good training session by training too long, it's almost impossible to have a training session that's too short. Some training sessions are just one repetition long. For example, if you're working on having the puppy not jump up on people who come through the door, a "training session" might consist of a friend coming to the door, greeting the puppy by scattering a handful of treats on the ground (therefore providing an alternative for the jumping up), and loving on the puppy a bit.

## **What about cats?**

Generally speaking, most cats do better with shorter training sessions than dogs. As a general guide, cut training time in half for a cat. Especially if the cat is just starting out, it is not unusual for them to be "done" after 4 or 5 treats worth. They might even walk away from the training session to let you know they are done. Try to end before this happens. Also, be prepared for cats to perform behaviors more slowly and eat their treats more slowly than dogs, sometimes pausing in between repetitions.