

Why teach fetch?

Fetch is terrific exercise—and a tired dog is a better behaved and happier dog. It's also an easy way to exercise your dog if your time or personal mobility is limited. Think of it as lawn-chair exercise: It can be done sitting down.

How to train it.

Start at your dog's starting point, whatever that may be. When you throw a ball (stick, etc.), does she show interest? Chase it? Pick it up? Pick it up and move? It's okay if she doesn't chase the ball, pick it up, and bring it right back; fetching isn't innate for all dogs. Whatever your dog does, build from there.

Step 1. Mark your dog's starting point with a "Yes" or click and treat. Do this until she seems to get the game and begins looking for her reward.

Step 2. Now hold off and wait to say yes and treat (or click and treat) until she does just a bit more. If she was previously picking up the ball but then dropping it, wait until she takes at least one step before dropping it.

Step 3. Reward each new level of progress until you get it consistently—at least 4 out of 5 trials—before you move to a new level.

Fetch can be broken down into the following steps:

- Showing interest in the ball (or other object)
- Chasing the ball
- Nosing or mouthing the ball
- Picking up the ball
- Picking up the ball and moving
- Picking up the ball and moving toward you
- Picking up the ball and bringing it to you
- Picking up the ball, bringing it to you, and dropping it for you

Over for Troubleshooting & Training Tips

Troubleshooting: If your dog is dropping the ball early on the way back to you, shorten the distance of the retrieve until it's short enough that your dog brings the ball all the way back to you. If need be, start with a 2-foot mini retrieve and build from there.

Troubleshooting: If your dog decides that playing keep-away is more fun than fetch, don't ever chase her. Simply end the game and try again later. Eventually she will learn that running off with the ball doesn't work out well.

Training Tip: Wait to treat your dog until she is all the way back to you, and always give the treat right in front of yourself, at knee level. This will encourage her to come all the way and drop the ball in front of you.

Training Tip: If your dog isn't particularly interested in the ball (stick, etc.), try playing peek-a-boo with it, shaking it, or moving it to make it more interesting.