

Balanced Training Variety in Training

Developing a well-balanced retriever requires variety in the training experience. Variety is essential for the dog to learn to perform in various locations and under varied conditions. Variety prevents stagnation of the learning process due to boredom. Repetitious drills conducted on familiar ground often lead to a sour dog. Intelligent retrievers respond well to changes in the game and in the playing field once fundamental skills are established. Variety keeps things interesting and meaningful.

Once a skill is well established in field training areas, the training sessions should become mobile. Move the sessions to woodlands, grass fields, cropland and involve water. Variety is also applicable in structuring the training lesson itself. Extremely redundant drills or exercises can lead to reduced enthusiasm and retention from the dog. Stimulate the learning process by incorporating variables with the training sessions.

Variety should also include:

- The type of object being retrieved. Switch the type, size, and texture of bumpers occasionally. Incorporate deadfowl trainers, feather-covered bumpers and cold game. These provide a bit of interest.
- Train at different times of the day and in different types of weather. This offers a new prospective to the training.
- Occasionally incorporate duck calls, gunfire, bumper launchers, etc. to spice up a normal day's training.

Handlers often create problems by poorly structuring the training sessions with little logical progression or by overemphasizing particular skills, drills or exercises.

- Too much or too little obedience
- Not balancing use of eyes with use of nose
- Overemphasizing marking drills at the expense of hunting and memory skills
- Over control, too many controlled whistle stops and handling at the expense of the dog's hunting confidence
- Skipping about between unrelated lessons and drills as opposed to establishing a learning chain (too much variety).

Lack of variety and overemphasis of one particular area in training will likely result in diminished performance in other areas of development. Handlers must assess their dog's attitude and progression while continuously assuring balance and variety in the structure of lessons.

As a final overview of the series, “Balance in Training,” let’s review the main points. Effective training is a continuous, cyclical progress involving planning, activities, ongoing assessment and planning. A proper training loop always includes counter skills to achieve balance in the dog's daily sessions. Training sessions should begin and end with the familiar, pre-established skills which promote confidence in the young pup. Balanced learning involves variety to avoid the overemphasis of a singular skill at the expense of other important skills. The ability to assess a dog's development and apply flexible training principles to create a balanced progressive learning chain remains the hallmark of effective retriever training.