

**Wildrose Kennel
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**Balance in Training
The Process**

A well-rounded hunter retriever is best developed when provided a balanced diet, not only in the food they consume but in the training experiences they encounter. Striking a productive, logical, progressive balance in a dog's training regiment is among the "arts" of retriever training. To dwell exclusively on just one skill for extended periods can diminish other previously established skills. Further, this oversight will likely result in a bored dog displaying lackadaisical performance. Successful training methodology involves balance in its structure.

First, let's review a few of the previously established basic truths about dog training methodology.

- Dogs learn best through causal relationships established through consistent repetition (the learning chain--parts of the whole).
- Dogs have better retention through positive reinforcement, not force.
- Training should enhance/complement natural ability, not disguise it.
- Training is teaching, not testing. Dogs don't learn from failure.
- Dogs do learn through group dynamics.
- Training involves 4 phases: yard, field, transitional, hunting.

These assumptions have been established in many of our Wildrose Training articles. Now we shall add to the list with regard to balance in training structure.

- Training is not a program, it is a process.
- Dogs learn best when instruction is cyclical.
- Training sessions should involve both primary and counter skills.

Training as a Process

To establish balance in training a retriever, one should not subscribe to a mind set of a "training program." Successful retriever training methodology is best described as a process, not a program. Programs are straight continuums with a beginning and an end. Far too often this "training program" is universally applied to all dogs, despite the dog's maturity, aptitude, ability or progression. Programs move from step to step, seldom re-visiting previously established skills. Processes, on the other hand, are never-ending cycles of planning, teaching, re-visiting established skills and evaluation. The assessment phase provides direction for the next training session.

Daily evaluation causes the trainer to assess results, scrutinize methodology (is it working?), clarify desirable outcomes, assess the dog's attitude and as a result, modify training methods accordingly. The training process must remain flexible based on the individual dog's needs and abilities. No "fixed regiment" or off-the-shelf, canned training

program can replace a logical training process customized to fit your individual dog. In dog training, one size does not fit all.

When training your dog, remember to:

1. Evaluate your dog daily and periodically throughout the training session. Ask yourself these questions:

Is the learning progressing?

Are the methods working?

How is the dog's attitude?

2. Re-visit previously established skills continuously. Keep core skills entrenched. Avoid, "Okay, that's it for obedience, you got it, ole boy. Now it's on to marking." You can never stop reinforcing previously conditioned skills.

Next, Cyclical Training, another key ingredient to well-balanced, retriever training.