

The Rhythm Of Dog Training And How To End A Session

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG I'm going to start off today's podcast with an apology. I need to apologize to my students because over the years this question pops up not every day but every now and again. And I thought well that's a crazy question. Isn't it obvious? The question is, how do I end my training for my dog? And I had this epiphany. I get why people are asking this question.

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So, today's podcast is all about the beginning, the middle and the end to our training sessions with our dogs. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And when you're training in a system that is based in reinforcement and particularly one like ours, that everything that I train my dogs is in the form of a game.

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When that is your training then you know I've mentioned [here on the podcast](#) in the past that if in the midst of your training you turn your back on your dog, you're giving them a time out. You're punishing them. So, you have to be very present to what's going on and be prepared so that you flow through your training sessions and the transitions so that you keep that dog engaged until the end of it.

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"But then Susan, how do I end it and it not be a punishment? Because we're playing, we're playing, we're playing and now I'm leaving." And this is super important because what I see people doing is creating these little monster dogs who think you are there to entertain them all day long. "Yeah. Game on. Let's do it." And as I mentioned in [podcast episode number 109](#), our dogs have to understand what is dog time and what is not dog time. And so how you end the training is super important as is what I refer to the rhythm of your life with your dogs.

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And this is something that I don't think I've ever spoke about. I'm going to touch on it today and it might require a podcast entirely all of its own about that rhythm. Maybe leave me a comment. If you're watching this on YouTube, let me know if that's something you would like me to follow up on. And if you are watching this on YouTube, go ahead and leave a like on this video, would you? Because you know that's the way YouTube says this is a dog trainer that people should listen to. So, if you would, I'd be most grateful for that. And if you're listening to this podcast, be sure to jump over to YouTube because there are some great training videos over there.

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Okay, our training plan. I want to talk about the beginning, the middle, the end, and the rhythm. So, the beginning of training always starts with a plan. Now, if you just go "Ah, I'm just going to go train my dog." and you know very rarely that's going to end up as a massive success because training really needs to start with a plan. And the plan is going to have things like what equipment you need and what reinforcement are you going to be using, where will you be training and how can you control that dog's reinforcement so that it's very successful for them.



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I would refer to if you have not done a deep dive into [podcast episode number 44](#) where I break down the levels of training and how we need to change the environment based on that levels. I'd say that's one of my, I hate to say my most important podcast, I think there're a lot that are very important, but that podcast 44 explains my approach to training my own dog. How I create clarity for something which grows confidence and I do not add challenge or complexity until I get that clarity and confidence.

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Okay. So that is all going to happen because you've started with a plan. If you're one of my online students of course we give you that plan. We have a training plan you can look up on your tablet or your iPhone or whatever kind of phone you have. Are you Android users? I apologize. It could be something that you might want to print out.

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So, if you're in one of our programs you've got that plan. We give you that plan. For the rest of you I hope that you intentionally select a plan that is proven to give amazing outcomes. Don't just jump around and go "Yeah, I think that might work for my dog." No, no. Don't waste your dog's time. Don't waste your time.

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All right. So, the middle. Now let's get into the middle. The actual training. Training for me always starts with engagement and that's just so darn easy if you have a dog that tugs and it might look like something like this, it's not like a duration tug. It's like tug and then ask for behavior like sit, down, spin, back, whatever. And then another little tug. And then you know that tug session might last, I don't know 20, 30 seconds.

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If your dog doesn't tug what that beginning session looks like, it's a session of engagement with your dog, where we're getting their arousal state up. Talked about arousal state here on the program, [podcast episode number 57](#), you will see what I refer to as getting the dogs excitement in a peak state so they're ready to do their best in training. And so, if your dog doesn't yet find the joy in tugging, please don't use tugging. Because it's not of value. So, you're going to start your training off with a needle in the eye for the dog. "Ah, I really don't like this part." Right.

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So, start with something that will get the dog engaged, that they love, and will build a relationship between the two of you and initially it takes 20, 30 seconds. And then you transition immediately into exercise number one in your training session. And that will be a behavior that your dog knows incredibly well, and it is incredibly easy for your dog. So, whatever that is. Now, if I'm training my dog in agility, that would be their warmup exercises. And it will be warmup exercises it might be Back Up, it might be Side Stepping, it might be any number of fitness exercises that my dogs know incredibly well. They're high value to them. They know how to do them so easily and they love them. It keeps that flow from, remember the rhythm of training. We've just had a great engagement session. We go into something we really know.



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Then there's a little transition where you're not losing your dog. You're asking them to maybe hop it up on a Hot Zone while you prepare what your next training session is, or you keep them engaged on a tug toy if it's an easy transition. We go to the third behavior. We had our warmup engagement. Then we had our first behavior high rate of success.

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The third that's where I put the brand-new skill that I want to train my dog. Now it's brand new to both of us then I would have rehearsed it without my dog so that I'm not going to be clumsy and klutzy. And what do I do in referring to a page because that might be giving the dog a time out. I'm going to be ready to try this with my dog, the first step.

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So, it's brand new. So, guess what, cut yourself some slack. You might not be perfect and cut your dog some slack. It's highly unlikely they're going to be perfect. But if you're working from a really successful and proven training plan the correct answer for the dog will be very obvious. So even though it's new it might still be really easy because it's built up in layers. There won't be the dog being frustrated because they don't know what you want. Okay. That is the second session. How long are each of these sessions? We'll get to that at the end.

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Then there's a nice transition. Now we go into the next behavior and that's a behavior that is something that the dog, what I call we're brushing up. So, it's a skill that they know that we've trained, but I just want to refocus the dog on their criteria. So, it's not something new. It's not something difficult. It's something they've done before, but maybe I need some reminders. Right. So maybe my dog wasn't really going into a down the way I wanted them to so I have to, let's just brush them up and let them know "You have to wait until I say break before you can get out of that down".

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And so that's the rhythm of my training. And so, it starts with some engagement between the two of us and then an easy behavior, then the new behavior, then the brush up behavior. And depending how the brush up behavior went I might add a second or a final behavior that might be just something easy and fun that both of us really like. But that is optional at the end, because if my sessions gone on long and long, depends on the dog. That brings me to "Susan. How long are each of these sessions?"

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I remember training a rescue dog named Streaker. I actually wrote a journal about, the Streaker journal. I wrote a book about training this rescue dog, he was a little Jack Russell Terrier. My first few sessions I remember having a 10 second session and I remember having 90 seconds sessions. So how long your session should be is all dependent on this question. *How long will your dog stay engaged with you without a big piece of cookie or a favorite toy dangling in front of them?*

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How long will that dog stay engaged and say, "Okay, like you know, I've done the tugging. I've taken out of their mouth. Will they immediately disengage?" Well then you need to be strategically shaping behaviors, so they understand that reinforcement is earned. And that let's say if you're brand new, it might be like, [ItsYerChoice](#). It's one of our foundation games.



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That might be, if this is brand new that would be a perfect place to start with your dog. And so, you might do something that's engaging something they know really well and then ItsYerChoice. And so that once you have ItsYerChoice you'll find that that dog's tolerance to hanging around without reinforcement grows because we've taught them you have to earn reinforcement with us. We're not going to dangle it like a carrot in front of a mule. You have to earn reinforcement.

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So how long should your training sessions be? It should be as long as your dog is willing to hang around without you bribing them to stay there. So, if I have a brand-new rescue dog that will be a very, very short. With my own dogs, they would probably hang around and for like minutes or longer, but I wouldn't do that to them. So, my own dog, this is how I train with them. Depending on what we're working on the session might be probably 2-3 minutes. And if it's something like agility, it might be 30, maybe 40, 45 seconds. And then I swap them out.

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So, you can go into the Hot Zone and I'm going to bring in another dog and then I'll do 30 to 45 seconds with that dog. Now, if it's something that isn't requiring them to run as fast as they can, it's something more stationary and cognitively asking a tough question then it might be 3 minutes. It could be 5 minutes. I can't think of, maybe with some scent work I would work for 5 minutes. That's probably really long too. And then they just hop it up.

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I really like to break my sessions up. Three minutes is probably the average that I will work a dog outside of something that is sprint work-related. Okay. But that is dependent on your dog. If you try to take a dog whose attention and focus and engagement with you without the lure of food or a toy is really only 10 seconds and you try to go to an hour-long class, that's a recipe for utter disaster. Absolutely. And then what happens? The dog will then give you feedback, "I'm overwhelmed."

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And then instead of focusing on building [strategic layers of understanding](#) and clarity and confidence, the focus of your training turns to "Uh, get that dog." "Correct that dog." "Let that dog know he can't leave work." "Let that dog know he shouldn't be eating sheep poop." "Let that dog know he shouldn't be chasing other dogs." "Let that dog..." The focus moves away from what you should be working on until what the dog's trying to help you with. "I'm overwhelmed." Okay. But that again is another story.

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All right. So how long should it be? It really depends on each dog. But this is probably the most important thing about your beginning, your middle, your ending of your training. And this is the question that people have asked "Susan, how do we end that training?" So, after that last behavior is the end of the training.

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Now for my dogs, the reason why I thought this question was kind of crazy it's obvious. Because there's a rhythm to my training. And it starts when they're puppies. We get out of the crate, we go outside, we relieve ourselves. Well, when I say "we" I actually don't, the puppy does.



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And then we come inside, and I start the training session with the game of engagement I worked through depending on the age of the puppy, it might be that 10 second training. There won't be three behaviors there might only be one or two. And then when I've decided the training is over, I trigger that in the rhythm of the training by changing the environment. Most of the time, I'll take the puppy back outside and see if they want to relieve themselves. And then we might come back in, and I'll put the puppy in an ex-pen and, you know, they'll have their own toys in the ex-pen.

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I might, with young puppies I always throw a few cookies on the ground when I put them in an ex-pen or in a crate. I might, if it's their free time, we'll come back from outside and I'll take their leash off and they have free time running around wherever I am. But there's that rhythm. So, here's what my puppies grow up learning.

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That when we are in the midst of training and we move to a new location, like we go outside or I might just be training, let's say my puppy's six months old now we don't need to go outside after every training session. So, I might be training downstairs. And then after the last behavior that I've trained, I'll pick up my equipment and we'll go upstairs.

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I'll go to my office and my puppy chills. What I don't want is for the puppy to think that they can initiate the training. "Hey, I think it's time for a game!" Because then you become a babysitter with the energizer bunny that thinks that it needs to be entertained all day long. Okay. If I have a rescue dog, my rhythm is the same. Because my rescue dog likely is going to be in an ex-pen or crate. I'm not giving them that freedom without me supervising them until they've showed me that they're going to make really good choices.

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Think of Tater Salad who came in as a 15-month-old puppy who had I just said, "Okay, you're done. I'm going to go to work now." He would have re-wallpapered my house. And not in a really pleasant way. So, I don't ever give a new puppy or a rescue dog freedom. But what about, and this is where I had this epiphany. We have students coming into like Home School the Dog or Recallers with older dogs. 3 years old, 8 years old, 10 years old, 12 years old.

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They're starting these games from scratch. They don't need to go in a crate or an ex-pen after a training session. So how do you end a session without it being a punishment? I apologize. There would not be an established rhythm to your training or there may be, but there may not be. And so, what I want you to do is to start establishing a rhythm that you've trained your dog.

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Now you might consider using a phrase. I never have because that rhythm is established from the time my dogs come into my home. But I'm okay with you playing a game, your final game in your training plan and then gathering up your things and saying, "all done" or "that's all" to your dog and then walking to a new location.



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I think it's very unfair for you to, say you're playing in your living room and you're on the living room floor and then you put the stuff away and you say, "all done" and you stay on the living room floor. That's a little confusing. It might be a tad weird to like, what are you doing on the living room floor? That's a judgment. I apologize. That's three apologies in one podcast.

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So, if you're training on the living room floor just get up and go somewhere else. If you live in a one room apartment, that room is your bedroom, it's your living room and it's your kitchen, get up and take your dog to the bathroom. Say "All done. come on, let's go to the bathroom. Wash your hands and then come out."

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And it's a new day. Dogs have a very short attention span. But here's the most important thing. I want you to remember as I mentioned in [podcast number 83](#), the training that you do in that little 30 seconds, 3 minutes, 5-minute training session is either eroded or reinforced over the next 24 hours. So, what you do in that training session cannot compete with what happens outside of that training session.

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And so, I beg you to look at the habits that your dog is reinforcing in your everyday life and ask yourself, is this a rehearsal that I really want my dog to have? And start looking at your everyday life because that's far more important than the little bit of training that you do in an hour at class if you're going to a class or 5 minutes at home in a training session.

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And so, if you're doing those 5-minute training sessions, please try to get in three or four of them throughout the day. That would be ideal. I know unrealistic for a lot of you. If you can get in one or two, you are going to notice a massive change in your dog's behavior. If you couple that with being aware of what's going on outside of training. That's it for today. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice \(IYC\)](#)

[PDF Download: Stages of Learning Progressions Chart](#)

[Podcast Episode 35: Pro Dog Training Tip To Improve Your Dog's Focus](#)

[Podcast Episode 109: Project Calm Dog: Prevent Over Enthusiastic Greetings](#)

[Podcast Episode 44: Using Coincidences and Positive Associations in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 57: Why Balance Breaks Fast Track Your Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 97: Overwhelm in Dog Training: How to Take Action on Challenges](#)

[Podcast Episode 83: The Dog Training You Do When You're Not Dog Training](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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