



Houstraining

The process of houstraining is relatively simple. That being said, simple isn't always easy. I have outlined the most important aspects of houstraining with the assumption that your particular dog and circumstances will require some adjustments.

- 1) Scheduled Meals and Water:** The best rule of thumb for houstraining is "what goes in, must come out – when and where is up to you." Pups are often placed on a three-meals per day schedule. Most adolescents and adults adapt well to a two-meals per-day schedule. Regardless, if you have a houstraining problem, free-feeding is temporarily not an option. The problem with free-feeding is that eating stimulates drinking, which causes peeing and pooping. Most dogs have a particular lag-time between a meal and when they tend to eliminate. Without regular meals, this lag time is difficult to observe. Try to set up two times a day that you can offer food and water. Your dog/pup should have access to outdoors within a few minutes of feeding and drinking so you can have all your tools ready to go.
- 2) Confinement:** A crate, pen or small area, such as a bathroom are great tools for controlling elimination. It is widely suggested that dogs will not soil their own nest – this is merely a tendency and is neither instinctive nor reliable. (Consider that dogs are notorious as a species for consuming feces... if you would put it in your mouth, why would you object to stepping or sleeping in it?) A small pup (8-16 weeks) may not be able to hold it for more than about four hours. The time in the crate is usually spent napping or sleeping, which slows the process of producing urine or feces. This means that confinement areas are the least likely trigger elimination, but don't bet on it. Any puppy confined for a long period will have an accident.



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- 3) Tangible consequences for success:** The secret for creating a strong behavior of “houstraining” starts with getting your dog on the right surface at the right time, in the right place. Once you are there (normally this is outdoors, on grass or gravel) you must wait quietly while your puppy sniffs around awhile. Do not disturb this process with “encouragement.” If you do, you’ll merely cause the dog to focus on you rather than the urge to go. If you need a metaphor, consider yelling “ice cream truck” just as your child has settled down on the kiddy-potty seat. So, keep your lip zipped when Sparky is about to go to the bathroom. The other good reason for this is that you want the pup to start initiating the process himself. The more you are a part of the houstraining equation the less the dog must rely on his own knowledge of how to solve the problem. As you watch your pup or dog pee or poop, wait for the last drop to hit the ground. That is when you click. The click ends the behavior and tells the pup what he did to earn what comes next – a treat. Do not rely on praise to create this critical behavior. Actual, fancy, highly desirable food treats are the way to a pup’s bladder. So, be prepared to click and then treat for success. Put a Tupperware container outside with moist dog treats so that you are always prepared to reward good behavior. A good suggestion is to make sure your pup starts walking around with you as you go back and forth in the potty area. Young animals have little control over their bladder or bowel and a little exercise is a good stimulus for peeing and pooping. This means that you don’t want to stand there watching your pup standing there. For older dogs, a good game of fetch or chase helps stimulate elimination and cuts down on your time watching things unfold.
- 4) No punishment for errors:** No matter what anyone says, the use of punishment in houstraining is incredibly risky and almost impossible to use effectively, even if it occurs at the instant the pup starts peeing or pooping. The most common outcome is a pup who is afraid to eliminate in front of you.



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So, if you are indoors and your pup starts to pee, right in front of you, don't gasp, shout or do anything that might scare him. (That includes picking him up and running outside, spraying urine all the way.) Imagine if you were in a porta-potty and a bunch of thugs grabbed you dragged you a short distance away and the shoved you down in another port-potty. This isn't going to teach you to trust porta-potties or people who hang around when you need to pee or poop. So, if your dog pees or poops in front of you, smile – and go back to watching his schedule better so there won't be a recurrence. It's up to you – one accident in your presence punished will yield weeks of finding "presents" behind a couch, on a bed, or in a rarely used room.

- 5) Developing Potty Control– Commands and Cues:** Teaching any behavior starts with the behavior, not the command. That means that if you don't know how to speak Russian, no amount of yelling "Speak Russian!@#%#\$@#" is going to help you do it. If, on the other hand, you do speak Russian, a simple request is all it takes. Housetraining is no different. If the pup doesn't know how to pee and poop in a particular place and have a sufficient motivation to do it, no amount of saying "go potty" will help him learn. Instead, there is a perfect and simple way of teaching a phrase that will trigger elimination... if the dog actually has to go potty. One you start seeing a predictable pattern, it's time to attach your cue. That means that you are reasonably sure that if you let your pup outside he will pee within about 30 seconds after arriving at his potty area. The pattern is simple – head outside and say "Go Potty" or "Hurry Up" while you are on the way to the potty area, but before he starts to go. Once he finishes, stick to your rule – click as the last drop hits the ground and shove a treat in his face. At this point, after the click, the pup will be heading your way to get his treat. This will take a minimum of 20 correct repetitions to start to make a connection between the phrase and the act. This is a minimum!



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If you successfully catch your dog doing something right three times a day, this would mean at least a week before your dog starts to get the idea. In reality, you'll be lucky to get one or two a day and the process will take several weeks before "go potty" starts to trigger the action. It's important to remember that is someone commanded you to eliminate, you can only do so much. The phrase "pee in a cup" doesn't always instantly lead to a urine sample at the doctor's office. If you had to give a fecal sample, it might be a long wait, depending on when you last ate and how much exercise you've had in the last few minutes.

Other thoughts:

- If you have grass and simply must confine your dog indoors, get a brownie sheet (or an oil drip pan, depending on your dog's size) and get some fresh sod at the local nursery. Use the sod as an indoor "litter box." Periodically refresh the sod as it gets stinky. You can also wash it down outdoors and use it a bit longer. Caution – adult dogs who lift their legs would need some kind of surface that allows the urine to drip down the wall into the pan. Plastic wrap is superior to wax paper because it doesn't make noise. Just tape the wrap to the wall and tuck it underneath the sod. This is a temporary fix for leg-lifters, not a permanent solution. The danger is that Sparky will come to assume that the location in the house is acceptable for accidents.
- Female dogs are more susceptible to urinary tract infections than male dogs. If your dog has a medical reason for having accidents, you have to fix that as quickly as possible.
- Very young puppies have very little control over elimination. They will not have full control of their bladder until about six months of age. If a young pup has an accident, it may very well be an accident.
- Confine your play to right after a pup has eliminated or keep it outdoors. Playing helps cause peeing – see #3, above.



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- If you or an original owner have used punishment to punish indoor elimination, you can expect to wait and wait outdoors until your dog is almost ready to burst before you get what you want. Your crate is the best tool to deal with this. If your dog doesn't go within a few minutes of being let outside, put him back in his crate for 30 minutes. Take him outside after that for no more than five minutes. Continue this until he goes. Also, try to fade into the background so that he's not aware that he's being watched. As he becomes more predictable and starts to realize that peeing causes treats, you can become a bigger part of the process.
- When you are frustrated with the process of using clicks and treats to create a housetrained dog, do more of it. This whole process depends on your dog reaching a point where the overall reinforcement creates consistent behavior – much like learning any skill. So, the quickest way to a housetrained dog is practice, practice, practice.

This article was written by Gary Wilkes, cofounder of clicker training for dogs and creator of clicker training for dogs. Gary founded his company, Click & Treat, in Phoenix, AZ, and travels internationally to speak at conferences about training dogs. Gary and Kim have known each other for over 15 years. Gary says this about Kim Greco, owner of Paws and Possibilities, "I give her a big recommendation without reservations. If you select her services you won't be disappointed."

Paws and Possibilities specializes in teaching you how to train your dog. Unique training plans are created to meet your specific needs. Complicated training ideas are explained to you in a way that makes sense, and results are measurable. Call 410-424-0858 for more information or visit www.pawsandpossibilities.com.