

# On Being a Good Student

By Christy Gammage,  
Practice Makes Pawfect

People who are good students will progress more quickly than those who are not. And since we all want to succeed, save money and gain fame quickly (OK, maybe not that last one), it pays to be a 'good student'. But what, exactly, does that entail?

Be considerate. – This covers being punctual arriving for class and being ready for your turn so you don't waste other people's time. If you (or your dog) are disruptive or argumentative, not only will you not learn, but you are impacting other people. Everyone will learn better in an efficient and pleasant class environment.

Listen and watch keenly. When your instructor is talking or demonstrating, pay attention. Even when they are working with other students. The feedback meant for other students gives forewarning of mistakes you can then avoid.

Ask questions when you have questions. Be an active participant in your class. If something is not clear when the instructor finishes explaining, ask for more clarification. Others may have the same question. Even if they don't, you cannot successfully implement what you do not understand.

Physically implement what the instructor says. Once you think you understand, try a 'dry-run' through the skill to get instructor feedback before trying it for real. Example interaction with your instructor: "So you mean do

something like this?" as you walk through the skill. Their feedback will give you more clarity before you try it with your dog.

Analyze your failures, then run your thoughts by your instructor before trying to implement a solution. If something goes wrong during your turn: stop and think about probable reasons. Then ask your instructor "Did that happen because I xyz'd?" This mental process will make you a much better trainer/handler than if you just turn to your instructor to ask "Why did my dog do that?" without first thinking about it yourself. Even if you are wrong in your analysis, you are practicing your analytic skills and taking ownership of your learning.

Be 'coachable'. Listen to and apply the feedback you are given. Criticism is not personal; it is what you are paying for. If required, separate the way something is said with what is said. People who prefer to work with animals may not have the best interpersonal skills. That doesn't mean you can't learn from them. Whether you like your instructor or not, take their feedback and apply it.

Skip the excuses. If something goes wrong, giving an excuse is not going to move you forward. Recognize where you are in the moment and focus on improving your future performance.

Cultivate a Growth Mindset. A "growth mindset" means you view intelligence, abilities, and talents as learnable and capable of improvement through effort. A "fixed mindset" means you think these things cannot be improved. Basically, if you think you can, you can (if you try). If you think you can't, you will not try nor succeed. (Bonus tip:

watch your internal dialog. If you are thinking "I can't do that", change it to "This is my chance to learn to do that".)

Step out of your comfort zone. Really try the different or hard thing your instructor suggests. Be OK with failure in the process of learning. Be OK with 'looking bad' in front of people. To improve quickly you must be pushing your limits. Failures show the way forward. If you aren't failing, you aren't striving to learn.

Do your homework. Ask for homework if you aren't explicitly given any. One practice a week is not enough for rapid progress. Handling skills can be practiced with brooms on the ground. The same turn away from you coming off a A-Frame into the tunnel can be practiced on the flat without any equipment.

Be organized. Take notes. Plan practice sessions. Make time to train between lessons.

Finally (and importantly), be your dog's advocate.

Listen to your instructor but watch your dog. If they are stressed or struggling, it is up to you to alleviate what is causing it. Discuss ideas with your instructor, such as you running your 'invisible dog' instead. Always remember that taking the dog out of the situation is a valid option.

Happy Practicing!



"We Are A FULL SERVICE Garage"

**BRANDON**  
Auto  
Services Inc.



New & Used TIRES  
BRAKES • TUNE-UP  
BODY SHOP

Call Us 689-8131  
3159 E. S R 60 - Valrico, FL  
[www.brandonautoservices.com](http://www.brandonautoservices.com)

The place for dog sporting fun  
Orlando, FL



Agility Field Rentals  
Trials and Seminars  
Fun Runs  
Structured Practice

Christy Gammage  
@agility@gammage.org  
PracticeMakesPawfect.com



Hours:  
M-F 8-6 S 8-5  
Closed Sunday

941-371-6591  
Fax:  
941-378-9754



Specializing in Purina Feeds

We carry feed, ranch supplies, hardware,  
western wear, home & garden and pet supplies

[Stockyard84@verizon.net](mailto:Stockyard84@verizon.net)

1010 Cattlemen Road, Sarasota, Florida 34232