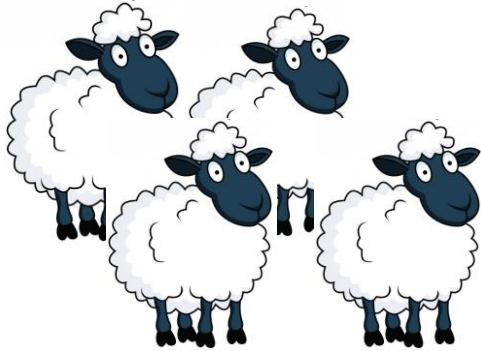




Introduction to Training the Herding Dog

by Victoria Long, The Dog Trainer at the Canine Communication Center

Thank You - to all the herding dogs - Past, Present, and Future

Notice: Training methods explained in this book are the recommendations and thoughts of Victoria Long, the dog trainer with The Wineglass Ranch Canine Communication Center. It is also her recommendation that any initial herding training is done under the supervision of an experienced trainer. The author and any of its agents disclaim any and all liability.

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Welcome to the World of Herding

Congratulations! You decided on a sport for you and your dog that will foster one of the deepest connections you will have in any dog sport. The reason is that this is the one sport that your dog already knows how to do. It is YOU that needs to catch up with your dog! This can be frustrating, humiliating, and humbling, but when you get through the tough part, it is deeply satisfying to have you and your dog working together to achieve a job.

Please don't be disarmed when I tell you that this is an extremely challenging sport to learn because it is not a linear process. There is no black and white answer for a lot of the circumstances you will encounter. Remember, you are dealing with not only yourself and your dog but other living breathing organisms that have a true mind of their own.

I know that when you first start training with a professional trainer, you will hear many words and commands that these particular individuals want you to do; walk-up, there, block, lie down, go the other direction, stop. None of this will make any sense to you at first. You'll hear these terms, and you'll mechanically do them, but you truly won't understand why. This is why you must start out herding with a professional trainer. If you have never done any herding before, or are relatively new to the sport, you have no idea what is right or what is wrong. And you cannot fix an issue if you don't know it is wrong. Trust me on this. I struggled for years before I learned to work with someone that could help me see where my dog or I was wrong. Once that was pointed out, and I understood what was right, we progressed much quicker.

If you can start out by using a trained dog, you can learn the sport in a way that is methodical and structured. You do not need to worry about the dog being correct because they will be. This gives you the ability to move and make mistakes without worrying that the dog will get frustrated. Many

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times, open handlers have dogs that they can no longer run in the upper division and look for individuals that would like to take the dog and learn to herd. If you are fortunate to run across this scenario, jump at the chance to start with a trained retired, open dog. You will start out with a fully trained dog with years of experience that will shorten your learning curve by light-years.

Most people don't have the luxury of starting with a trained dog. What I see most often is that a person wants to get a puppy to raise, and then they want to start herding once the pup is old enough. They want to train that puppy on their own, but unfortunately, this is like putting a green rider on a green horse and hoping everything works out. In the end, it will be nothing but chaos.

This is a sport that's based on the dog's ancient instincts for hunting. The dog is the predator, and the stock being the prey. You immediately start out by putting both of these animals in very close proximity, and it is your job as the handler to be aware of the overall dynamics of where you are, what the sheep are doing, and what the dog is thinking. **Whew!** That's a lot to think about all at one time. This becomes more difficult because the moment you think you understand the situation, it changes, and suddenly, you're in a new situation, and you have to rethink the scenario all over again. This will be pretty mentally draining not only on you but also on your dog. You have to remember that your dog is hard-wired to react in their natural hunting instinct. Working with a more experienced and knowledgeable herding trainer can help make control out of chaos. We as humans always want to be in control, but we have to remember that we do not know as much as our dogs when it comes to herding sheep or any other kind of livestock. Your dog comes genetically programmed to do that, and this is often the hardest thing to understand about the sport. As humans, we want to control everything and often only get in our dog's way. We get excited and say things or do things that the dog does not

understand, and that creates frustration with both you and the dog. Herding is about giving up control, which can be very hard for humans.

Feeling confused, frustrated, and humiliated are all normal states of mind when you first start herding. Be patient with yourself and your dog as you go through the process. With enough time, patience, and practice, you, too, can develop a great partnership with your dog and enjoy herding.

Here at the Canine Communication Center, we believe that not only do we use the dog's natural instinct, but also the connection and the teamwork that you will be building to create a successful team for herding. Your dog already knows how to herd as this is instinctive behavior expressed as chasing, barking, and biting and are all-natural. We cannot fight this instinct and get good results with our dogs. Instead, we have to hone that instinct. We have to let it flow freely and use it to help improve the dog's performance. Remember, your dog sees you as a partner in this game, and in their eyes, you are both working together.



The Basics

Information gets into a dog's mind through his sensory systems. The herding dog will need to have his prewired stalking and chasing tendencies modified so that they can be put under some degree of human control. These genetically predetermined behaviors are usually called instincts.

Biology has preordained a set of behaviors and abilities with which the animal begins life, and that may also limit how and what an animal can learn. Experience and learning will determine the specific skills that are learned and the final shape of behaviors. Biology or genetic programming makes it easier for us to create a dog that can-do particular things, through selective breeding, although it may also make it more difficult for us to eliminate particular behaviors.

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Probably the most spectacular success in breeding for useful behavior has been in the creation of herding dogs. Without herding dogs, the progress of human civilization would have been much slower because we would not have had the organized animal husbandry that provides us with meat, wool, leather, and many other needed products. When it comes to controlling a flock of sheep, a single shepherd and one dog do better than ten men without the assistance of a dog.

The herding ability of dogs is based on the same genes that control pack-hunting behaviors in wolves. Hunting large animals requires coordinated activity to control the movement of a group of potential prey animals so that eventually, a single animal may be isolated for the kill. This hunting behavior is genetically programmed and is the foundation of herding behaviors.

The first genetic instruction has the pack position itself around a herd of prey animals with each individual at approximately the same distance. Each wolf will try to remain equidistant from its hunting partners on its right and left encircling the prey, keeping them together. A single sheepdog performs this same function as if it were playing the position of every member of the pack. As the dog goes from one position to the next, he circles the flock in a wide casting motion, keeping the flock together.

Generally, one wolf will break away from the pack and hide in wait by crouching down while the rest of the pack drives the heard toward that location. This is why sheepdogs will run and then drop to the ground staring at a flock of sheep in a sense waiting in ambush.

It is a remarkable testimony to the stability of fixed action patterns that even with more than 14,000 years of domestication and despite concerted efforts

to alter dogs genetically, so few changes have occurred in the ancestral patterns of behavior.

Understanding how wolves in the wild hunt their prey will help you understand a lot of the behaviors in your own dog. One of the ways that a wolf stalks prey is to use its eyes to intimidate the prey. Border Collies are particularly adept at this method of intimidating their prey through the use of their eyes.

Another thing that you'll see a lot of dogs doing is a rolling of their shoulders. You will recognize this as a crouch, where they are in a low stocking stance, with their head and tail carried low and shoulders rolling as they move around their prey.

If you notice a pack of wolves and how they hunt, they'll split up. Some of the wolves will cast out around their prey far enough so as not to disturb them. Then once they get behind them, they will start walking up in a position of balance to keep the prey moving in a specific line toward the kill wolf. Sometimes this requires a little back and forth behind the prey, known as wearing. Wearing is a way to keep the prey from stopping while allowing them to move in a particular direction, toward the kill wolves. This is called fetching, where the prey is brought to the kill wolves.

Dogs perform these very maneuvers when they are herding. They will move out around the stock far enough away so as not to disturb them. They will balance their position in relation to the prey as well as to you the handler. When you watch a pack of wolves, this is not a chaotic free-for-all but a calm thought-out orchestration. Herding instincts come from this ancient hunting instinct. If you watch documentaries of wolves, they chase a bit, until the prey tires, then they will try to grip the prey. They will split a prey animal off from the herd and focus their efforts and energies on taking it down.

Dogs, like their ancestors, are predators. Over the years, humans have learned to harness these instincts to make dogs useful for their day to day lives. All of the behaviors, as mentioned earlier, are also in your dog. This is something to keep in mind. We don't want to remove these behaviors; we just want to harness them in a give and take mutual understanding. If we try to squash these instincts, the dog will become frustrated. This is one of the hardest things for beginners to understand. Your dog already knows how to herd through his genetic makeup. You are the one that must be taught to allow these instincts to emerge in a controlled manner.

It is your job to establish a leadership position with your dog. As the leader, you are the one that makes all of the decisions. Decisions such as when and where the stock will move, which animal is to be targeted, and when the time is to take it down. As the handler, you are the leader. You enforce the rules. This means that you establish a non-harassment policy of no biting and no chasing.

Rule Number One: The dog cannot hurt the livestock. Dogs want to have clearly established rules and guidelines. Over time and with consistency, your dog will enjoy herding as a team and will look to you as the leader of the pack.

Understanding the Dog

Dr. Richard F. Taflinger cites, "the difference between humans and other animals is that, unlike any other animal, humans can and do consciously respond or alter our response to a stimulus. Humans can alter rather than merely adapt our response to a stimulus. Humans can alter rather than merely adapt to the environments in which we find ourselves to enhance our chances for survival."

Other animal species respond and behave directly as a result of their instincts. Because of the complexity of the human brain, humans can choose to alter our response, behavior, and our environment.

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As a human, we also have the ability to live in the present, but remember the past and anticipate the future. All other species live in the present only. Dogs have some limited ability to coordinate past experiences with the “now,” but an inability to anticipate the future.

The human species’ basic instincts combined with our intelligence, ability to control our behaviors, ability to shape our environments, and ability to take past and present experiences and anticipate the future makes our species unique among other species.

These human characteristics also separate us from other animal species. It makes it difficult for us to interpret and communicate with other species who can only react honestly and directly to their instincts and who live in the now, in the present.

We are required to communicate and interpret the dog’s behavior in the now, in the present. We cannot and should not interpret a dog’s behavior with a human perspective. We need to work with the dog as its own distinct species.

According to Dr. Stanley Coren in his excellent book, *How Dogs Think*, he indicates that in comparison with humans, dogs have a mental ability to that of a 2-year-old child.

Your Job as a Handler

Your number one job is to protect the livestock. If it were not for the livestock, we would not need herding dogs. We start in a small confined area, where you can always be in a position to step between the dog and the stock if you feel that the dog is about to do harm. You allow your dog to work - keeping the livestock safe by being in motion. We don’t want to be between the dog and the stock - only to protect if necessary. As long as the dog is moving sideways, they are not going after the livestock.

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Your next job is to remain calm. If you are calm, it helps to keep your dog calm. If your dog is calm, the livestock remains calm. Screaming and yelling only tells your dog you are not in control and amps up the environment. If your dog feels you are not in control, they will step into that position. It's not that they want to be the one in control, but they are hardwired to fill a vacancy if you allow it. The best way you can retain your leadership position is to remain calm and use your physical positioning along with a low growl tone to correct your dog.

Herding Terminology

First, I want to preface this chapter with a warning: **DO NOT START USING THESE TERMS IF YOU ARE JUST GETTING STARTED WITH HERDING.** You need to be aware of each of these terms and what they mean as you will hear your instructor using them. You can begin to gain an idea of when and how each is used. The reason for the warning is that you are trying to learn so many new things that trying to remember the correct command to be used and when is overwhelming. You do need to know them well enough to understand what your instructor is talking about, but you do not need to know them well enough to teach them to your dog at this point. When you are ready to use the command with your dog - you will need to be consistent so as not to confuse them. When I got started with herding, it was very difficult to learn the commands. It was a foreign language to me. Although I had been training dogs all my life, this was something completely new to me.

Come By	Dog moves around the stock in a clockwise position
Away To Me	Dog moves around the stock in a counter-clockwise position
There	A term used to position the dog where you want him

Walk-Up	Used to ask the dog to walk straight into livestock from where they are
That'll Do	A release that tells the dog we are done working
Steady	Used to indicate to the dog to slow down
Time	Same as steady - just a sharper tone
Look Back	Used to tell the dog to do an about-face to look for stock
Lie Down	Used to get the dog off his feet to stop moving stock
Stand	Used to get the dog to stop on his feet to stop moving stock
Hold	Used to have the dog hold stock at a gate or pen
Watch	Used to let the dog know that we are getting ready to shed
Balance	The place the dog has to be to move the stock in a straight line to the desired location
Flank	When the dog is moving around the stock in either a clockwise or counterclockwise position
Normal Flank	A direction the dog moves that is the shortest distance from the handler to the stock
Off-Balance	A direction the dog moves that is the greatest distance from the handler to the stock

Square Flank	When the dog pulls his shoulders back, working off his hind legs, to turn their head out to an imaginary circle in either a clockwise or counter direction around the stock
Outrun	When the dog runs out in an arch either clockwise or counterclockwise from the handler's feet to get behind the stock
Lift	When the dog reaches the far side of the stock and begins to make contact so that the stock begins to move
Fetch	When the dog brings the stock, by following behind them in a straight line, to the handler
Gather	The combination of outrun, lift, and fetch that allows the dog to gather the stock in a manner to bring them to the handler
Wearing	The dog moves back and forth (side to side) behind the stock
Drive	When the dog is moving stock away from the handler - when the dog and handler are both on the same side of the stock
Rate	When the dog slows his forward movement when bringing or driving stock
Draw	A direction that acts like a magnet that pulls the stock
Heading	When a dog repeatedly goes to the head of the stock

Cross over	When a dog, on the outrun, crosses an imaginary line from the stock to the handler
Splitting	When a dog rushes into the stock and pushes too hard so that the stock separate
Singling	When a dog separates one of the stock away from the others either by chase or on purpose
Slicing	When a dog does not complete a flank, stopping short, turning into the stock and moving them in an undesired direction
Heavy Sheep	Sheep that are slow to react to the dog and require the dog to push to move them
Light Sheep	Sheep that are flighty and reactive to the dog requiring the dog to work them from a greater distance
Gripping	When a dog bites the stock. There are two types: appropriate and inappropriate. An appropriate grip is a heel or nose nip when trying to get the stock to move in the desired direction. An inappropriate grip is one where the stock is moving, and the dog nips any other part of the body.
The Bubble	An area around the stock that they feel is their comfort zone.

Herding Concepts

The bubble, sometimes called the flight zone, is the area around the stock that they feel is their comfort zone. If the dog enters this bubble or flight zone, the stock will move. If they are outside of this area, the stock will remain still. The size of the bubble or flight zone will be dependent upon the type of stock you are working. For the remainder of this book, we will be focusing on working sheep and how to train your herding dog for this particular livestock.

Herding dogs are quite intelligent and quickly learn what the bubble on the livestock is. Some dogs like to push on the bubble, whereas others don't want to push on it at all. For those dogs that push, you need to control their pace, and for those that don't want to enter the bubble, they must be encouraged to walk up. The dog must learn to feel the flight zone and stay in the zone at the appropriate distance to keep the livestock calm and settled while working.

The flight zone is further dictated by the type of sheep you are working. If you are working heavy sheep, the flight zone will be much smaller than that of lighter, more flighty sheep. Not only will the flight zone change with the type of sheep, but it will also change with the level of energy your dog emits. Each dog has its own level of energy they exude. Just like people, some are high energy, and others do not have a presence that the first possess. Think about the people you know; some are always moving at a quicker pace and exude a greater level of confidence than others. Wouldn't you say they are high energy? Others move more deliberately and are slower to react, so you might say they operate at lower energy.

I previously trialed a dog that when we reached the post, sheep 400 yards away were wanting to leave. That is how aware sheep are to their surroundings as well as the energy both you and your dog exhibit. Another time, I was competing in an arena trial when I was very ill. I knew it was all I could do to go to the post. My energy was so low that the sheep wrapped

themselves around me as if I wasn't even there. Now, these were not dog broke sheep but Rambouillets lambs who had never been worked with a dog nor been in a small group of only 3. To this day, I keep trying to mimic that low energy to gain a tight turn around the post but without having to be on my deathbed to accomplish it.

Honing The Dog's Natural Instinct

We begin building our partnership with our dogs in a relatively small area. Not so small that we can't move around the sheep but not so big that we can't move into a position to correct our dog when it is needed. I have two areas for this, one is a pen, approximately 60 feet square, and the other is about the same diameter that is round. They both serve different purposes. With some dogs, I even quarter off these areas to be able to be in the right position to make a correction. I have learned that if you need to take more than one step to put yourself in the correct position to correct your dog, you are already too late with your correction.

The first exposure is to see if we can get the dog to balance the sheep to us. That means that the sheep are between you and the dog. We look to see if the dog will naturally go to the other side and try to fetch the sheep to us. The only way this can happen is for us to be constantly moving sideways as well as backward. To help move the dog around to the proper positioning, we use a technique of pressure and release. We apply pressure by moving into the dog and release that pressure when we back up. We will generally use some sort of distraction as well, possibly a flag, or an empty feed sack.

All dogs are different, so you will need to assess your dog for their desire, excitability, talent, and readiness. Most of the time, a dog is close to a year old before we begin instinct testing. If they appear to have the drive to stalk the sheep, gather them, and bring them back to the handler, I would suggest scheduling herding lessons in earnest. Remember, the dog

already knows how to herd; we are just refining those inherent skills into a partnership between you and your dog.

Where to start

When we begin to mold your dog's talents, we work very close to the appropriate type of sheep to help the dog go to the outside around the far side of the sheep. At this stage, we are constantly in motion - generally backward so that we can give room but keep a watchful eye on both the dog as well as the sheep. Our number one duty is to the sheep and to ensure their safety. Always remember, without the sheep, there would be no need for herding dogs.

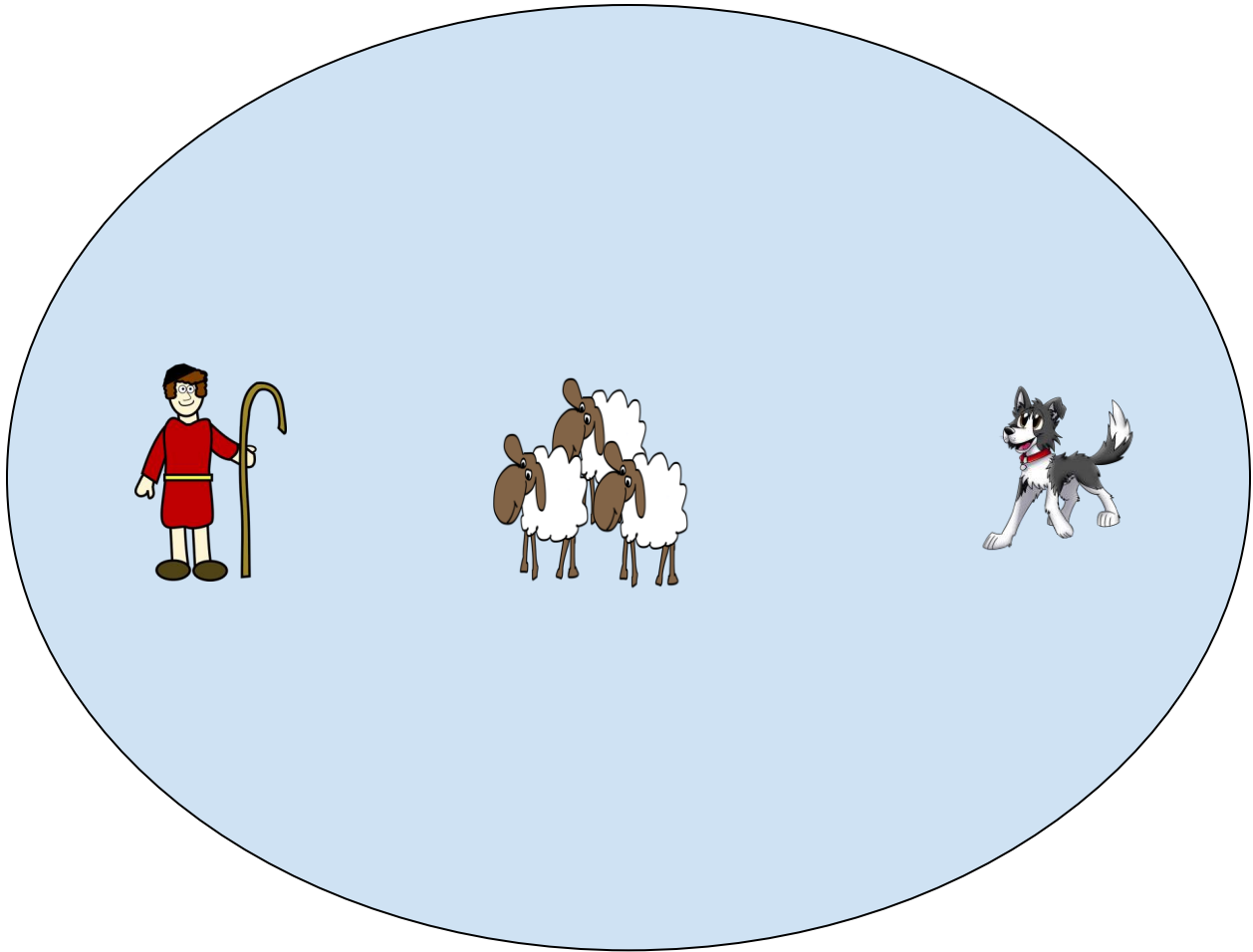
So, the scene looks like this - Dog - sheep - handler.

See the drawing below to show how the dog remains on the opposite side of the sheep from the handler.

If the handler were to move to his left - the dog would also move to his left to stay opposite the handler behind the sheep.

If the handler were to move to his right - the dog would also move to his right to stay opposite the handler behind the sheep.

Again, this is called balance, and we don't want the dog to change and go the opposite direction until they have caused the sheep to move their heads in the opposite direction. So if the dog is moving left, he will catch the eyes of the sheep, and they will turn their heads to the right. Then we would want the dog to change his direction and move to the right to catch the sheep's eyes again and turn their heads to the left. All the while, we as the handler are moving backward, giving the sheep a place to go but keeping them within an imaginary channel.



The object at this stage of training is to keep the sheep between the dog and the handler. We are trying to get the dog to work off of our body pressure. So, if we move left, so will the dog. If we move right, the dog will **BALANCE** off of our movement and also move right. Just think of the face of a clock with 12 at the top and 6 at the bottom. If the handler is at 6, we would want the dog at 12 with the sheep at the center, between the two. The handler is facing the dog, which is putting a certain amount of pressure on them. The handler will use this pressure and increase it by moving forward toward the dog should the dog come in too close to the sheep or decide to exercise a grip. It is the handler's body pressure that speaks the loudest to the dog. At the same time, the handler can growl at the dog with a "Hey" or "Ahhhh" to enforce the added pressure of moving toward the dog's space.

Sometimes, if a dog is excitable or has a high prey drive, we will use a distraction, like an empty feed sack, a flag, a stock stick, or a rock bottle. These all help to increase the pressure we want to apply to the dog.

The amount of pressure to be used will be determined at the individual dog's level. Some dogs are very pressure-sensitive, and just a little pressure in the form of body movement will be sufficient, whereas other dogs will require everything the handler has. At this stage, we are only working with the dog's instincts and communicating in their language as best we can. Their language is not spoken, but rather physical. That is why we use our body to pressure the dog away from where we do not want them to be and backup to release pressure and allow them to enter that space.

Tools

There are four core tools we use in herding work:

- Energy
- Body Language
- Words
- Tone

Every person has individual energy. Sometimes that energy is tired and will present itself as lower energy. A higher energy person will move quicker, with their shoulders back, with more rapid movement. This body energy is picked up by our dogs. When we get excited or agitated, our energy has a complete format change. When excited, we probably speak with higher tones, and our movements will be rash and choppy. Remember that your dog picks up on this and will mimic the energy in their movements. As the handler, it is your job to maintain the level of energy that allows your dog to

see you as a calm, confident leader. You need to become the pack leader. Someone has to be in charge, and for a lot of dogs, if that is not you, they will step up and take that position. In addition to your energy, there is also the tone and the words that you use.

Words will be the last tool we will discuss because it is not until your dog understands and is doing the maneuvers correctly that we want to put a word to the action. We don't want your dog doing something wrong, giving it a name, and then thinking that doing it wrong, they were, in fact, correct. They'll be confused, and it will be much more difficult to try and correct them in the future.

The use of our body language is how we will move the dogs around. When they come in too tight, we will walk into them, putting pressure on them, and therefore using our body to tell them that they need to get back. If they are going to the left and we want them to go to the right, we will use our body to **block** them. If they are becoming aggressive, we will put our body in between them and the sheep so that we control those resources. Remember the reward to your dog is getting to the sheep

In addition to the four above, we will use distractors. Some of these distractors can include any of the following:

- An empty feed sack - open or rolled
- A flag
- A herding stick
- A crook
- A shaker bottle
- A rake
- A long line
- A rattle paddle

These are just additional distractors that we use to help get the results we want from the dog. Once the dog gives us what we want, we begin to remove the distractors. The only ones we might keep because we use these in competition, would be a stock stick or shepherd's crook, as these are just mere extensions of our arms and allow us to reach out a little further when we need to.

Depending upon the softness of a dog, some of these distractors would be appropriate, and others would be much too harsh. For example, if your dog is soft, having a rolled-up feed-sack or a flag might be a little bit too much, and they would choose to either leave the herding session or begin maneuvers that are known to indicate their insecurities. In time, all dogs can get used to a handler using a stock stick or crook, if they're handled appropriately. **None of these should be used as a weapon.**

These distractors are only meant to be used until the desired result is achieved. Once achieved, we continue to use our energy, body language, tone, and words to work with our herding dogs. At a point in the future, we will put whistle commands on the words we use to be able to have clearer communication with our dogs at a greater distance.

Leadership and body language

Body language is the number one tool you have, not only in herding but in life. Our body language speaks louder and is truer than our words. How many times have you been around someone, and their words are saying something, but their body language is indicating to you that what they are saying is not true? It is believed that 55% of communication is body language, 38% is the tone of voice, and only 7% of communication is the actual spoken words. We've all experienced a situation when someone is telling us one thing, but our gut, or intuition, is telling us something completely different. Where did this gut feeling come from? It came from the incongruence in words being spoken, the body language of the person,

and the tone used in saying the words. Dogs are masters at picking up on these incongruences.

Some dogs are considered to be hard. What I mean by this is that they have strong personalities and will require a bit more convincing to mold their behavior. With these dogs, you must be consistent in your use of all four of your tools. Your energy, body language, and tone must be congruent with your words; otherwise, your dog will not believe you are capable of leading and will step into that position.

The proper way to communicate with your dog is to ask with your body, accentuate with your energy, then correct with your distractors if necessary. If done the right way consistently, you will be able to stop the use of those distractors, as your connection with your dog becomes stronger. Your dog will learn that by not listening to your body pressure, they will get corrected. If your dog is not listening to your body, continue to use the distractors as needed until they do. Remember, a soft dog that starts cautiously may not need the use of distractors. The same dog, once the hunting instinct kicks in, becomes keener, and you might need to use distractors at some point in the future. Your dog becoming keener is a good thing, and lets you know that the dog is now very much in touch with its instincts.

Livestock

Here at the Canine Communication Center, I like to start my dogs on sheep. The sheep I use to start young dogs are perfect because they are light enough to move yet heavy enough that they do not put undue pressure on young dogs and undermine their confidence.

One of the biggest advantages you can gain in herding is to be able to read and understand the livestock. There are several core characteristics of any breed of sheep. Remember, your dog already comes with an intuitive nature as to how to herd. We are just honing the process. As human

beings, we do not carry the herding instincts, and so, therefore, it is up to us to learn more about the livestock that we are dealing with.

Sheep

- Sheep want to be back where their buddies are or wherever the safety of their pen is.
- Sheep want to stick together for safety.
- They are leery of both dogs and humans unless you're the human that feeds them.
- Their feet move in the direction that their heads are pointed.
- Sheep always have a leader unless they are lambs, and then they are clueless.

Remember, sheep are prey animals, and as such, they are very much aware of their surroundings. They are constantly looking for an opportunity to get back with their buddies or their safe zone. Learning to read sheep and paying attention to even the subtle signs of an ear twitch or the moment a head turns, will give you a greater advantage in this sport.

Sheep do not move in a direct, straight line. Therefore, your dog will constantly be **wearing** back and forth to keep them headed in the right direction. If there is a draw or a pull, your dog may need to be off to one side or the other and not directly behind the sheep to keep them moving in the desired direction. Your dog knows this instinctively, and they position themselves between the sheep and whatever is drawing or pulling them like a magnet. Your dog maintains that side to keep the sheep moving in a straight line. The one thing your dog does not want is for the sheep to get away. So, if the sheep start running, it is up to you as the leader to allow the dog to cover and catch those sheep and bring them back to you. That is

their natural instinct. Most herding dogs have the instinct to bring sheep as prey, back to the leader. If you allow the sheep to get away, your dog will look at you as a bad leader, and they will lose confidence in you.

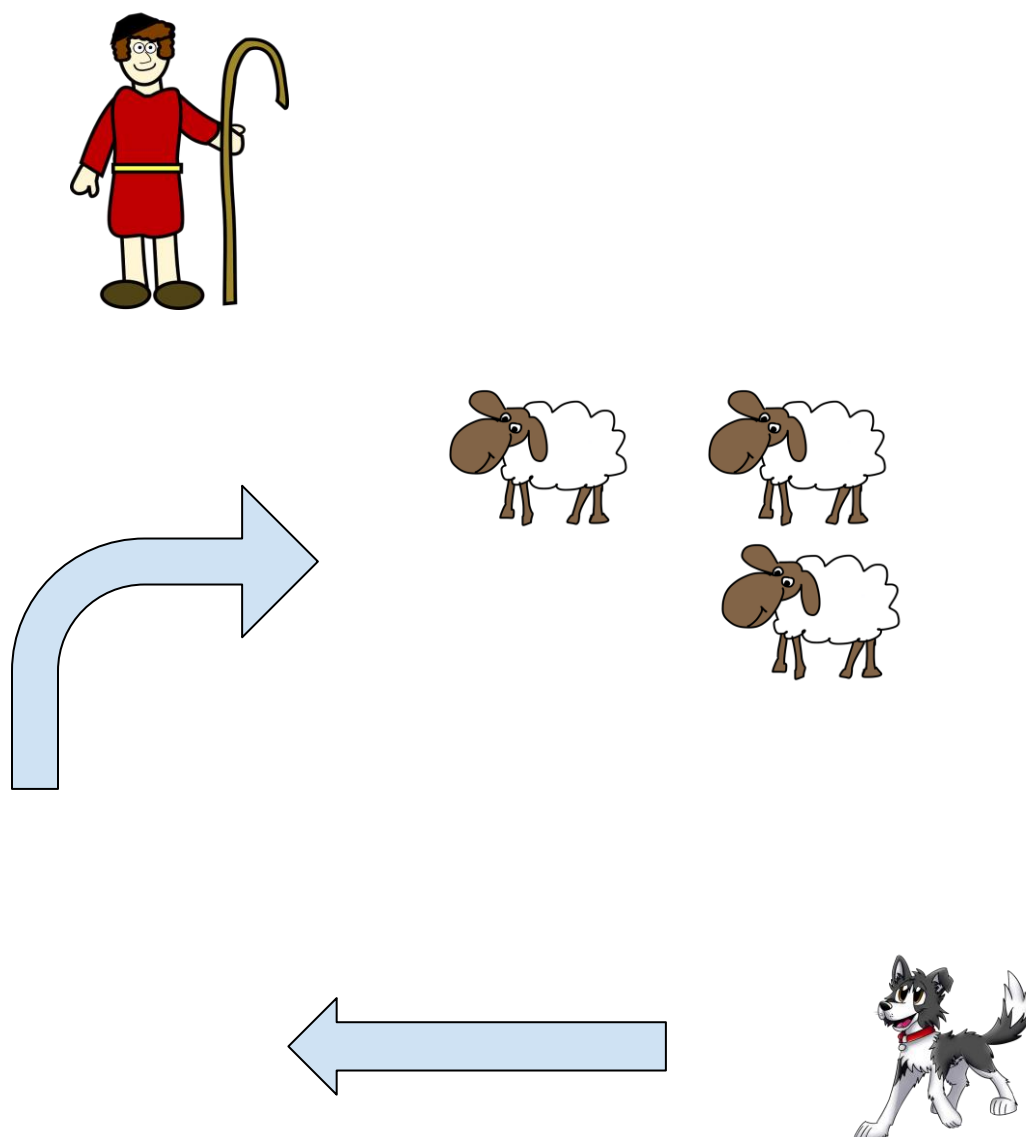
It is not only the type of sheep, but the number of sheep you are working that makes a difference. Sheep have only two defenses. One is to turn and fight your dog, and the other is to flock together for safety. Left to their own devices in a large flock, sheep will gather in a tight ball. It's the ones on the outside that are the most vulnerable, so anytime you have more than four sheep, you will see that one always tries to get in the middle. If you are working less than five sheep, they normally cannot act normal, as no one sheep can be in the middle.

Sometimes, your dog will single out a sheep from the others and go after it. This is still normal behavior and very much part of your dog's hunting Instinct. Although not appropriate long-term, it is something that is just a natural thing for your dog. When this happens, have your dog put the sheep back together and growl at him/her for singling one of them. At some point in the future, we're going to want the dog to single a sheep, so we don't want to come down too hard and overly correct them for doing this.

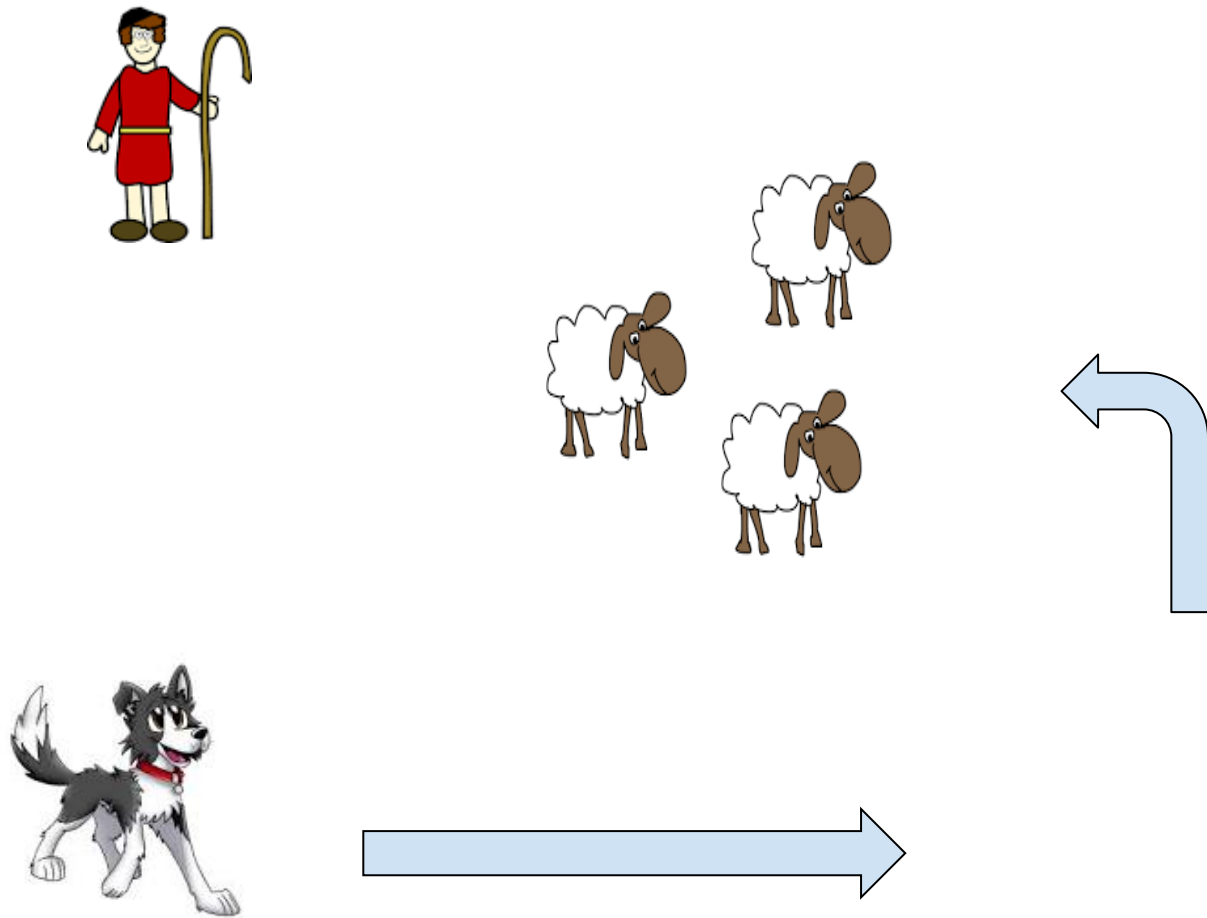
There is a difference between a dog gathering the sheep and bringing it back versus a dog chasing the sheep with intent to kill or do bodily damage by taking the livestock down. Remember, our very first duty is to the sheep. It is up to us to ensure their safety. No one wants to have an injured or dead sheep due to a dog being out of control. Sometimes, when you are first getting started with herding, it is difficult to know the difference between a dog chasing a sheep to bring it back or chasing a sheep to take it down. This is where you must learn to read your dog's energy level and intention. You may be asking, what determines an animal's energy? Well, it's the combination of that animal's intentions and emotions. Consider it to be the following formula: **Intention x Emotion = Energy.**

A general rule of thumb is the more sheep you have, the calmer they will remain. Generally, sheep like to stay clear of both humans and dogs. Depending upon the type of sheep you are working, they may be more concerned over the dog rather than you, the handler. You can tell which the sheep are more afraid of by how they react to you versus the dog. If they are constantly turning around and looking at the dog wanting to know where that dog is, it is a good bet they are more fearful of them. Otherwise, if they're constantly looking at you and ignoring the dog, then you are the one that they are more afraid of.

Sheep move in the direction their heads are pointed unless provoked. They will rarely back up. Herding dogs move sheep by watching the direction of their heads. We can learn from this. By watching the direction the heads of your sheep are pointed, you will gain an indication of where they want to go. Position your dog so that the sheep's heads will be pointed in the direction you want them to go. On the fetch, your dog will position the sheep's heads to bring them towards you. If your dog sees the sheep's heads turn away from you, they will go to the side of the sheep that the head is facing to move it back into the correct direction, so it goes towards you. You must learn to watch your dog and the sheep's heads at the same time.



Every group of sheep has a lead sheep unless they're lambs. We call them clueless because, at this point, they're so young they have not decided who would be brave enough to be the leader. As lambs, they are usually with their mothers until weaning, and they have allowed their mothers to take the position of leader. You can generally tell the lead sheep in a group because it will be the fastest to react to your dog. It will generally carry its head higher, and it will be wearier of the dog than the others.



We rightfully say that they have the largest flight zone out of the group and are, therefore, the most reactive and the one that pays the most attention. They could also be the one who turns and faces the dog more often. In starting young dogs, we try not to allow this facing up to happen because it can possibly undermine the confidence of a young dog. Therefore, we are very particular about the sheep we use when starting young dogs. We make sure to pick sheep that will not do this so that the young dogs have the opportunity to pay attention and focus on the lead sheep.

One of the best exercises I use to help new handlers learn about working sheep is to have them go into the pen and work the sheep without a dog. I hear a lot of grumbling out of the newbies about having to do this, but when they are through, they are amazed at just how difficult it is. I have them try

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to move the sheep through a pattern or course by themselves. This gives them an idea of where they need to be, as well as where their dog needs to be to move the sheep in a straight line to each obstacle. I would encourage you to try and move the sheep on your own without a dog. Just get three to five sheep and go into the arena and try to move them through a course. I bet you'll come away thinking your dog makes it look pretty easy. You will then begin to understand and feel what the draw or magnetism that pulls your sheep in a certain direction feels like. Notice how you would have to position yourself in such a way to apply pressure on the sheep to keep them moving forward and not allow them to run back. Remember, we're the ones that have to learn how to herd. Our dogs already know how to instinctively. We are just trying to hone or mold their instinctive abilities.

Preparing your Herding Dog

There's a lot of preparation that goes into preparing both yourself and your dog to begin the herding process, and this starts outside the arena, away from stock. If you cannot control your dog outside the arena, you're certainly not going to have any control when we introduce livestock, and your dog's adrenaline starts pumping. Instinctively, every dog knows that to survive, they must have a pack leader. If they do not see you as that pack leader, they will take this role on themselves. Our dogs need to see us as the leader, the one that controls all the resources. They must be able to look to us for guidance on what is acceptable behavior. As a leader, we must commit to being an effective communicator. This goes back to using your body language, your tone, and your energy in a congruent manner to clearly communicate with your dog.

If you need assistance with convincing your dog that you are the pack leader, check out the [PACKAGES AND PROGRAMS](#) we offer at the Canine Communication Center.

Effective leadership has three major components: YOU must remain calm, YOU must be crystal clear, and YOU must be consistent in your actions, words, and deeds, under all circumstances.

To be an effective leader, you must remain calm. If you become emotional, your dog sees, as well as feels, this and loses confidence in you as a leader. Anytime we lose our emotions, our dogs see this as a weakness, and they may attempt to take over the pack leadership role. Under all circumstances, it is our utmost responsibility to remain calm and communicate clearly to our dogs. We must remain crystal clear in our communication of the rules; of what is acceptable.

Both in and out of the arena, you must establish clear boundaries and have consistency in your reinforcing of those rules and boundaries. Your dog wants boundaries. Your dog wants to know what is acceptable versus what is not acceptable. If your dog understands the clear boundaries, they are allowed more freedom to do things. They don't have to worry about doing something wrong. Once they know the rules, they can relax knowing what is acceptable and what is not. We, as human beings, want to know what the boundaries are. We want to know what the rules are so that we can go about our business and do the things we want to do, having no fear of being in trouble because we know what the boundaries are. Your dog is no different than a child. Children, dogs, and other human beings all want clear boundaries and rules to know what is acceptable. Just know all three will push the limits of the rules and boundaries to try different behaviors until you firmly let them know what the rules and boundaries are. Knowing gives freedom to a dog and allows them to be secure in their surroundings.

Let's be clear on how to establish rules and boundaries. A lot of times, people will allow their dogs to perform tricks and reward them with food or other treats. Doing this, they certainly have the dog's physical awareness, but they don't have the dog's mental attention. The dog's body is doing

what is asked, but the mind is still anxious and focused on getting what they want.

Establishing a connection and establishing yourself as the pack leader is very different. It's about gaining the dog's respect. It is about training concepts and building a relationship versus commands. It is about your dog understanding the rules and that they need to respect the rules and be accountable on their own for them. In return, you respect the dog and provide what they need.

If you look at a pack of dogs, the pack leader owns everything. They do so by claiming it with their bodies. If there's food, and the pack leader wants that food, they simply walk to the food, and every other dog moves away. If there's something they want, they simply take it. There's no negotiation. There's no reward for the dog giving it up. There's no yelping, no barking to make it happen. **The pack leader simply owns everything.** As the pack leader, you own everything. You own the food, the toys, the bed, the car, the entryway space, and you own the sheep. You claimed that ownership by taking it and being clear to the dog that it's yours. They need to give it up, both physically and mentally. They do not think about talking about it.

This is the response that you want to achieve from your dog. You own all the resources. You are the one that allows them to have the resources, but only when you choose. Dogs want to know the rules, and then they want to be trusted to follow them without our constant distrust and having to tell them how to act and every step to take.

When training our dogs, we must remain positive in our approach. Being positive means looking for what's right more than looking for what is wrong. Don't confuse this with only using positive reinforcement. We absolutely need to correct any wrong behavior, and that must be done in a calm, clear manner. Anytime our dog does not understand, it is up to us to find a way to become clearer, to communicate our wants. It is not the dog's

responsibility to figure us out. It is our responsibility to provide clear, calm, consistent communication when trying to teach our dogs. As human beings, it is our nature to walk around, looking for more things that are wrong than things that are right. Against this nature, when it comes to training our dogs and small children, we must focus on those things that they are doing correctly and encourage more of that. When we first start herding training, beginners have a very difficult time with this concept, mainly because they do not know what is right versus what is wrong. It is up to the herding instructor to help clarify when things are wrong and explain what is wrong about it.

Too many herding instructors will indicate that you should correct the problem, but then they forget to tell you when it is right what it looks like so that when you are working your dog, you can understand the difference. Knowing what the right way looks like will allow you to recognize when your dog is wrong and enforce a correction. But you shouldn't be expected to correct something you cannot recognize. As an instructor, it is up to me to be clear in my communication, both with the dog as well as with my herding students. With clear instruction, both the students and the dogs are very capable of learning. Being positive means respecting the knowledge and skills of both the dog and the handler. Keep in mind, your dog knows more than you do about this sport, so learn to read your dog and become aware of what they are thinking before they act on it. The best time to issue a correction is when your dog is thinking of the act - not during it.

Consistency is important when trying to learn anything new. As the leader, you must be consistent in how and when you correct your dog. You cannot sometimes be the leader and then sometimes not be the leader. You cannot ask nicely one day and then suddenly lose your cool the next. Inconsistent reinforcement only confuses your dog, increases their insecurity, and makes training that much harder and longer to achieve results.

Remember, herding starts outside the pen. The foundation of herding begins outside the arena, outside the pen. It begins with the connection you have with your dog. The better the connection you have, the better the team you will be. If your dog does not respect you and see you as the leader, they will quickly take that place in the pack. When this happens, you are fighting an additional battle for control. Every day you are with your dog, you are teaching your dog how to respond to you and what your expectations of behavior are. Inside or outside the pen, you must always be the pack leader, even on those days when you don't feel like it.

Remember, you must remain the leader; otherwise, your dog will feel it is their responsibility to do so. If you are interested in knowing more about becoming the pack leader, I have a [Basic Behavioral Program](#) that explains the 5 Golden Rules of becoming the pack leader.

Things Your Dog Will Need to Know Before Herding

There are several things your dogs will need to know before you can even begin herding. One is a reliable lie down. They must also have a reliable recall, be able to walk on a loose leash, and ride in a car, as well as be able to sit, stay, and wait patiently. These are the things you can teach your dog at home, before ever entering the training pen. Once your dog is proficient with these and has passed the instinct test for herding, they can be taught how to get back, get out, as well as go around the stock to the left and to the right.

Here is some general information about teaching how to walk on a loose leash, lie down, sit, stay, and wait. If you are unsure how to teach these lessons, please sign up for our [Puppy and Basic Training Class](#), or the Obedience Level I Class, either here at the ranch or the Onsite Training in Your Home.

Walking on a loose leash - while obedience trainers want their dog to be on the left side of them walking on a loose leash, herders need to teach their dogs to walk on both the left as well as the right side of the handler. Show your dog that being by your side is a good place to be. Begin by standing still in a low distraction place in the house with your dog on a leash at your side and rapidly feed your dog a series of yummy treats. Release, play with your dog and repeat. Progress to walking around and feeding a treat when your dog moves into position by your side. You can practice this with your dog both on and off the leash. If you are clicker training, you can use clicks and treats for the correct position and for your dog offering eye contact.

Sit - With a treat in hand, touch it to your dog's nose and slowly lift your hand above and slightly back of your dog's head. Don't say anything. At this point in time, your dog doesn't know what the word "sit" means. When your dog looks up for the treat, he will probably sit. Click or say "Yes" and treat your dog. If he tends to move around and back up, move the lure more slowly and work with the dog backed up to a corner. Repeat. You can use your dog's mealtime for a training session, letting him work for his supper. Once your dog is readily following the lure into a sit position, you can then put the name "Sit" to the action. You can then eventually remove the lure and just use the word.

Lie Down - To lure the lie down from a sit position, put the treat under the dog's nose and slowly move it straight down or down and slightly forward, forcing the dog to lean backward and down. Click or say "Yes" and treat when his elbows touch the floor.

Stay - Three criteria comprise a solid stay. Your dog must be able to hold his stay for a reasonable duration and distance and in the presence of distractions. Only work on one of these things at a time during a training session. Never try to improve or increase all three at once. With your dog on a leash, stand next to your dog and tell him to sit, then move your palm

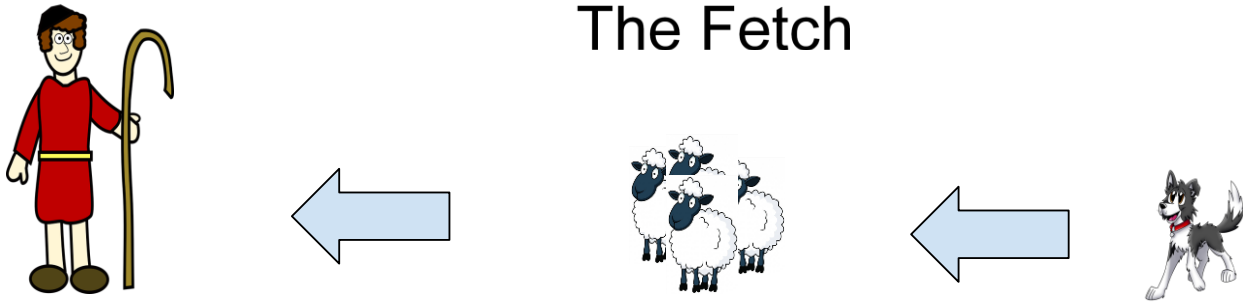
toward his face with your fingers pointed down to the floor and tell him to “Stay.” Quietly praise him for a second or two, and then release him by saying your release word “OK,” or whatever you choose, as you move back and encourage him to follow you by clapping the side of your leg. Both your verbal cue and your body language should signal your dog that’s it is ok to move. Repeat, then feed him a treat while he maintains his stay. By treating him when he is in a stay, we are rewarding the stay and not the release. Gradually build up the seconds that he can maintain his stay. Start adding distractions once you get him to maintain a stay.

Wait - The wait command is very similar to the stay command. This is used when you are going in and out of doors, getting into and out of kennels as well as automobiles, and patiently waiting to be fed. You always go through a door first, and your dog should wait for you to go first. Make sure you have your dog’s attention and eyes on you. Face the dog and with assertive energy and your body language, stop them and tell them to wait.

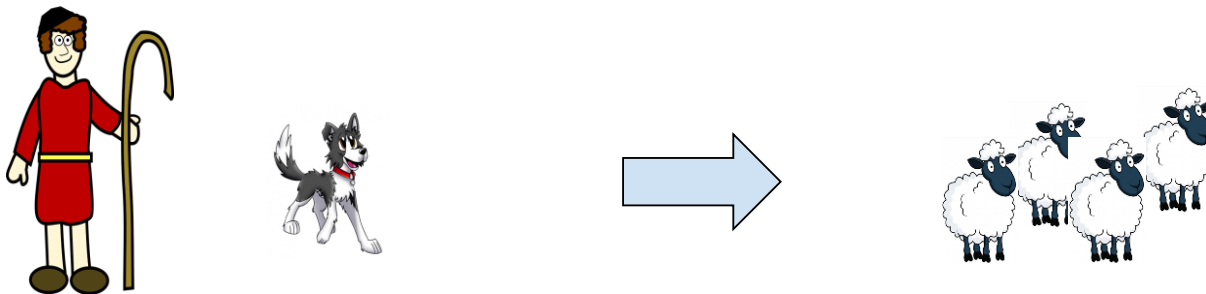
Herding is a Team Sport

Just like any other team, there is always a captain. With a herding team, that captain is always the handler. You are the one that calls the plays, and it is always the dog’s job to move the sheep. In the fetch position, your dog’s job is to bring you the sheep. When driving the sheep away, it is the dog’s job to take control and take them in the direction you indicate. All the time, it is your responsibility to make sure your dog knows that the sheep belong to you, and they are not allowed to bite, injure, or harass the stock.

The Fetch



The



As a team sport, you, as the leader, need to learn how to communicate in a way that the dog understands. Dogs learn first from your energy and your body positioning. You need to portray your position as the leader by having your head up, back straight, and maintaining assertive, calm movements. The key is to use your body language in a way that is needed to communicate with your dog. When you learn to speak “Dog,” your training will move much more rapidly. While humans depend greatly on verbal communication, dogs use very little vocals. Instead, they use body language. So, it is important to say little and use your body positioning and energy to communicate in a way your dog will understand. If you were to watch a video of wolves hunting, you would see that it is not a frenzy of barking, yelps, and yips to coordinate the pack. Instead, dogs use quiet, calm body language to direct each other and work together as a team.

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Your job as the pack leader is to communicate clear goals and boundaries to your dog and to maintain a positive, non-emotional attitude when working with your dog. This begins with your posture. You want to have an upright body posture with your shoulders back and head held high to exude power. If you look at a pack of dogs, one will square off to an opponent he is challenging. He will hold that pressure until the other dog gives and retreats; otherwise, there will be a fight to decide who will be the top dog. You can communicate to the dog that the sheep belong to you by using your body. By holding your head high, squaring your shoulders, and directly facing the dog when standing between him and the sheep, you are clearly communicating to your dog that they belong to you.

Ideally, we want to exude calm, assertive energy. This assertiveness begins with confidence. Confident people walk straight, head up, with their shoulders back and have smooth intentional movement. They make reasonable eye contact, and their arms and hands are low and not flailing about. Direct, focused eye contact with a dog is a lot of pressure and is considered a challenge to the dog, so keep your contact soft and casual. Making direct eye contact with a frustrated dog will elevate the situation because the dog feels threatened. If your dog shows signs of insecurity, do not seek to make direct eye contact. This is perceived by the dog as being threatening and increases their insecurity. It is our job to maintain the position of leadership, and as a leader, you would never look to a subordinate for validation.

Additionally, you don't want to feed the aggressive mind by making direct eye contact. In the herding pen, the best way to handle a high-powered dog that is challenging the handler for the sheep is to exert body pressure on the dog and look to the side or over the dog so as not to invoke a fight through direct eye contact.

The use of pressure is a very important tool when working with a herding dog. It is what will keep the dog from diving into the sheep, and it is what moves the dog to where you want them to be as well as what we use to take the sheep away from the dog. One caution about pressure, be sure to hold the pressure long enough that the dog commits, both **physically and mentally**, to give the behavior you want. Most people learning to herd make the mistake of not maintaining the pressure long enough to get the change they want.

It is important to remember that anytime we feel down or let negative emotions affect us, our body language will follow and show this to our dogs. Your dog watches every movement you make, and they can feel when you are angry, frustrated, confident, or insecure and will react accordingly. Your dog reads your insecurity as you not being in control, and without a solid leader, they will feel the responsibility to step into that position. The cycle will escalate the more you get angry or frustrated, showing less confidence so that the dog will take more and more control.

The Stock is Your Responsibility

One thing that we must keep in mind is that the health and welfare of the stock is the handler's responsibility. To best achieve the safety of the stock, you must stay with them in a position that will allow you to get into a position between the stock and the dog if necessary. If you leave the stock and go to your dog, the dog can outrun you and get to the stock before you are in a position to stop, block, and correct them.

If you are herding with a hard dog, you might need to up the pressure. In addition to squaring up your body and directly facing the dog, you may need to use a distractor - a flag, a stock stick, a crook, a rake, a rattle paddle, or a shaker bottle. The flag, stick, crook, rake, and rattle paddle is meant to be an extension of the handler's arm. They help create a longer reach to block the dog. The shaker bottle is to be used to make a noise to break the dog's concentration. If needed, the shaker bottle can be thrown

to the ground in front of the dog to brake their forward momentum. Another caution about these distractors is that not all dogs need them. In fact, they can be quite detrimental to shy, insecure dogs. So, I recommend you reach out to a professional before attempting to use any of the distractors mentioned.

Applying the right amount of pressure is more of a feel than a hard fact. Your body language and any distractors will define just how much pressure you are applying. You must use the right amount given the dog you are working with. Too much, and you can shut a dog down. Not enough or an insufficient amount for repeated undesirable behavior results in inconsistent results. It is important to apply the correct amount of pressure at the moment that the correction is needed.

Mental Yield

This might be one of the hardest things for a new handler to understand. It is not sufficient to get the dog to respond without mentally giving in to the handler. The dog must commit to the handler's wishes with both their body and their mind. The dog needs to learn to work with a calm state of mind. This is the state of mind that the dog needs to maintain to be rewarded. If you are having a problem getting into your dog's mind, check out my training courses offered at www.TheWineglassRanch.com.

Any other state of mind must be corrected. We do this by taking the sheep away and blocking the dog from them until their mind relaxes. Only then should the dog be allowed to return to work. If you fail to get a calm mental state from your dog, you will always be fighting with them for control of the sheep. You can never develop a true partnership if you are in a power struggle with your dog. We are working on developing a connection with a herding partner that creates a strong partnership — one where we work in unison and harmony.

How Long Does It Take To Train a Herding Dog

It depends on so many factors, including the drive level (**Keenness**) of the dog, who is handling the dog, how often the dog works, and how connected the dog and handler are. The dog must have a certain level of drive or keenness to be able to want to herd stock. It takes time for a dog to find their own sense of herding, and it takes time to become a team. We control enough to keep the stock safe, but we only increase that control as the training progresses. If we start out controlling the dog's every move, they will become sour and turn off to herding. We have to give up control, in the beginning, to gain that control in the end. We are here to keep it fun and mold the dog's instinct. Once you and your dog have made a connection, will you start to get consistent with your work. The end result is a beautiful partnership where drive meets control. A partnership where you are working together as a unified team towards a common goal.

Training a herding dog is not a linear process. The general flow of training is always progressive, but it is normal and expected that you would move back and forth along the journey. Sometimes you will have to take a few steps back and repeat a lesson you thought the dog had already learned. The main key is to know that you will get there. Don't be in such a hurry that it is not enjoyable for you and your dog.

Instinct Testing

To begin herding training, the dog is required to pass an instinct test. An instinct test is a test to determine your dog's current drive or what we call keenness. Depending on the dog, the reaction to sheep can vary from no interest to wanting to take one down. All are very natural reactions and okay. Here at the Canine Communication Center, we use a small pen that will allow the evaluator to protect the sheep but still allow the dog room to move freely around the sheep and do a little fetching to the handler. But, I want to warn you that all of the obedience we required that you have on your dog before coming for an instinct test will be pretty much out the window. Once we introduce the dog to the livestock, their instinct takes

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over and overrides any amount of control we thought we had over our dogs. I have called this **ADD. Adrenaline Deafness Disorder**. ADD is where the dog's adrenaline reaches a certain level that their hearing completely disappears. The only way to break the hypnosis created by the adrenaline is to maintain a quiet calm demeanor as the leader. Using an assertive body pressure to block the dog from the sheep when necessary and keeping the dog moving by backing up and allowing them to work when they calm down is the best way to assist the dog.

If your dog doesn't show much incentive, don't lose hope. The initial lack of incentive does not mean that they cannot become a herding dog. It is just an indication that they are unsure of themselves or possibly that they are not quite ready to start herding training. I have had some dogs that do not show much keenness at the start but given a bit of time, turn on, and become wonderful herding dogs.

The key to remember is that the instinct test is just meant to evaluate the dog at that moment in time. The evaluator is looking for some signs that the dog does have an interest in the livestock. Many dogs have instinct but lack confidence, so it appears as though they are not interested. This is where an experienced evaluator can help. They know how to get the dog excited and feel that they and the evaluator are a pack, and working together as a pack gives the dog the confidence they need to turn on. Some signs that the dog is feeling insecure and unsure of what to do are:

- Will not look at the livestock
- Will eat poop
- Will urinate and defecate
- Will obsessively sniff the ground
- Will look for their owner
- Will look to the evaluator for guidance

There are many things an experienced evaluator can do to help a timid dog overcome their insecurities and enjoy working the livestock. Under these circumstances, the evaluator may allow some chasing and wool grabbing so as to excite the dog to the level that they are more interested in partaking in herding the livestock. Sometimes the evaluator will grab a sheep and act as though they have captured it and invite the dog to participate. At other times they may bring in an experienced dog to move the sheep around to invoke a stronger pack mentality. Dogs generally will gain confidence when they are with other dogs and start to work together as a pack.

Other dogs will show a great deal of keenness. So much so that they try everything they can to go through the evaluator to get to the sheep. They show a great deal of desire to chase the stock, splitting one off from the others and attempting to bite the stock. An experienced evaluator will be able to work with a dog that has an excessive drive and be able to protect the sheep by their body positioning and the use of distractors. Generally, in the beginning, the evaluator will put the dog on a long line so that they can stop the dog when necessary. Once the dog has a more solid foundation, this long line is removed, and the dog will be allowed to work freely. The use of a long line is for the safety of both the dog and the sheep and is just an additional tool available if necessary.

Drive or Keenness

A herding dog must have “drive” or “keenness” to be able to herd livestock successfully. Having sufficient drive is the foundation upon which we build all of our training. Without it, you have nothing with which to work. Remember, we said that all aspects of herding come from the hunting instinct of the dog. What we do as handlers, is hone that instinct into something we can manage and control. We teach the dog to look to us as the pack leader and the one that gives the orders.

Some dogs will naturally want to circle the sheep and bring them back to the handler. Others will need to learn how to balance the livestock to the handler but may be able to drive the livestock away. Each dog comes with their own gifts and will need to learn additional behaviors. The key is to work with what your dog has to offer and to use the appropriate amount of pressure to get the desired results. We never want to put so much pressure on a dog as to shut them down completely. We must always keep in mind that the number one rule is that the livestock must be protected. The safety of the livestock is the responsibility of the handler. The second rule is the emotional safety of the dog. As the pack leader, it is our responsibility to look after our pack members. We do this by teaching them how we want them to act. We do what is necessary to get the lesson across without harming the dog physically or mentally.

This is done through the use of pressure and release. It is the release stage that teaches the dog. Once the dog achieves the physical and mental stage we are looking for, we release the pressure and allow the dog to continue working. This give and take is critical to be sure we are not using too much pressure and that we are being fair to the dog. **Timing** plays a big role in knowing when to release the pressure. The dog must be allowed to work in order to learn. This is why it is extremely important that you work with an experienced instructor in the beginning. They will be able to help you understand what to look for to improve your timing of when to put pressure on and when to release that pressure.

We must allow the dogs to work as long as they remain in a calm state of mind. It is during this time that they are learning the most. **A calm mind is an open mind.** As a pack animal, they understand that there has to be a leader. The leader defines the rules and the ultimate goals. They do not make all of the decisions, but they oversee that all of the decisions are conducive to the end result. If there is a difference in opinion, it is an understanding that the leader has the ultimate say. This is getting into the

dog's head. Once we have control of the dog's mind, amazing things can begin to happen.

Next Steps

Once the dog has passed the instinct testing and can go around the sheep both directions, has a reliable stop, and can be called off, we like to move out into a bigger area to allow the dog more room to move naturally. With the room also comes the responsibility of the dog to gain greater distance from the sheep. It is understandable that in the beginning, some dogs like to work too close as they have not had the opportunity to become comfortable with distance.

Once we can get the distance between the dog and the sheep, the dog quickly learns that there are multiple sheep they must focus their attention on. A lot of times, the dog's instinct level will elevate, and much more fluid movements will result.

All the time, we are still responsible for the safety of the sheep. If necessary, we need to block the dog, not allow them access to the sheep, and keep them moving all at the same time. There is a lot to think about when you are first starting, and what I see more often than not is that my students forget to keep moving backward. When the movement stops, everything jams up. The key is to keep moving while protecting the sheep and putting pressure on the dog to get them to move in the desired direction. Whew! That's a lot to think about. But trust me with practice it will all come together and become effortless. It will become more of a feeling than a thought process. You will instinctively know when to put on pressure and when to take it off.

There are key points on your dog that you will learn where to put pressure on to get the desired results. If you want to turn your dog's head, that is where you will focus your pressure. If you want your dog to pull his shoulder back, that is where you will learn to put pressure. To speed the

dog up, you will learn how to put pressure behind them. You will learn the building blocks to work with your dog in a beautiful partnership so that together, you will be able to gather a group of sheep and put them through a course culminating with a pen.

Now that you have more room for your dog to work, you will be working on perfecting all aspects of herding. One of these is making sure that your flanks are correct. Remember, as of yet, we are not really talking to our dogs other than a growl, ahhhh, or “No” as a correction. Until we can get the correct movements consistently, we don’t want to put a name to it. If we do start using terms and the movement is not correct, we are only teaching the dog to do it incorrectly. So, it is important to get the desired movement correct first. One of the things we want to work on is the square flank.

Square Flanks and Why They Are so Important

The correct movement around the stock is the dog moving calmly and quietly with their head turned away to release pressure from the stock while the dog positions itself. The dog can periodically check in with them with a slight movement of their head, but the dog must keep their head squared off as they move around, so the stock does not feel threatened.

The purpose of the flank is to position the dog to a new location, not to move the sheep. You should be able to flank your dog all the way around the sheep without them moving.

To obtain a square flank, we will need to put pressure on the key points of the dog to get them to move where we would like them to move. We want the stock calm as the dog moves around them. If the dog is moving around the stock but staring at them, they will not settle and are likely to move before we want them to move. The dog has to release pressure by turning away from them.

To achieve a square flank, we set the dog up in a sit-stay or lie down position relatively close to the sheep, then we back up in the direction of the sheep, maintaining our position between the sheep and the dog. When we release the dog, we step directly towards the dog to get them to turn their head away first, then go around rather than straight into the sheep. This consistent use of pressure to the head to get a dog to square off every time before they approach the sheep will teach the dog to never go straight at them when gathering or moving around the stock. The square flank allows the dog to move around the stock without pushing on them.

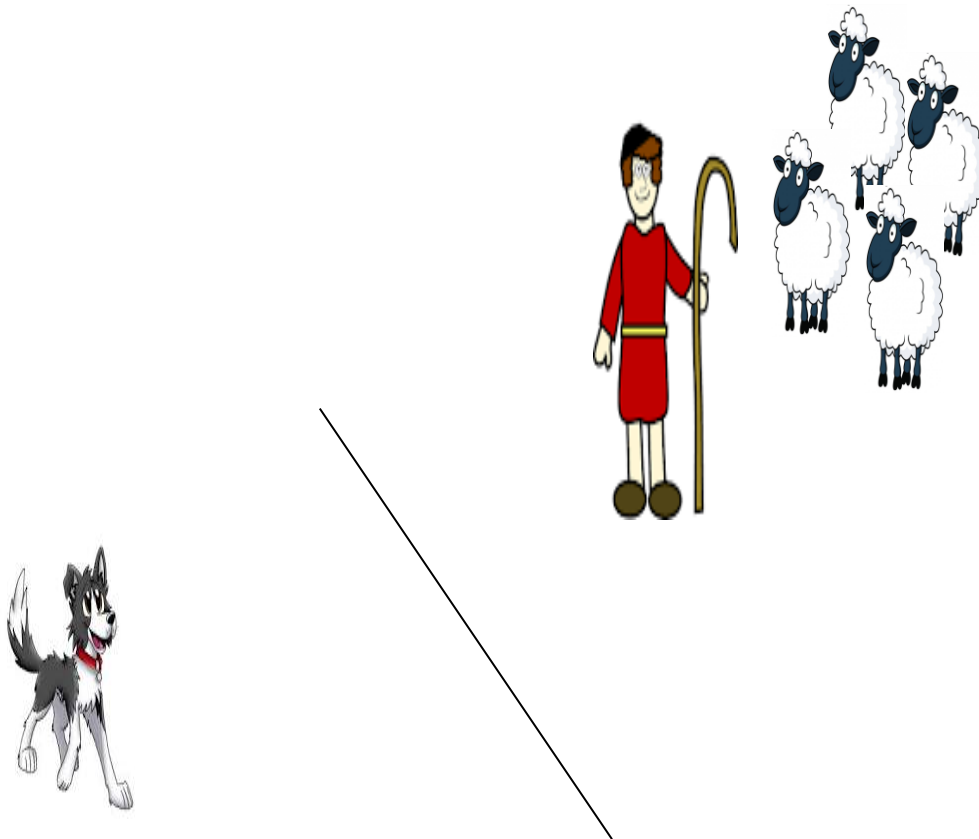
There are many benefits to having a solid square flank on your dog. First, the stock will remain calmer. You will obtain more precise control over your dog when working at a distance, and it will be the beginning of the gather. Having square flanks on your dog allows them to maintain the correct distance, on the bubble, when flanking. The key to getting a square flank is keeping the right amount of pressure on the dog's head until they turn it to the outside so that when they start on their flank, the first step is to the side rather than in a direction toward the sheep. The dog should only be allowed to complete the flank if they do it properly. Remember, the sheep are the reward, so if we allow the dog to continue to the sheep, we will be rewarding them for the wrong behavior. We want to get both a physical as well as the mental yield from our dog.

A mental yield is best observed by the dog turning away from the stock and holding their distance until they are invited back in. Many dogs will turn away, but the minute you take the pressure off, they will come right back in. They may have given to you physically but not mentally. The dog needs to understand that they cannot get the stock until they have yielded both physically and mentally to the specific behavior you are asking for. Only then can they get the reward of the sheep.

Once the dog yields, it is important to allow them to return to the sheep. The dog will only learn if they are allowed to make mistakes and get

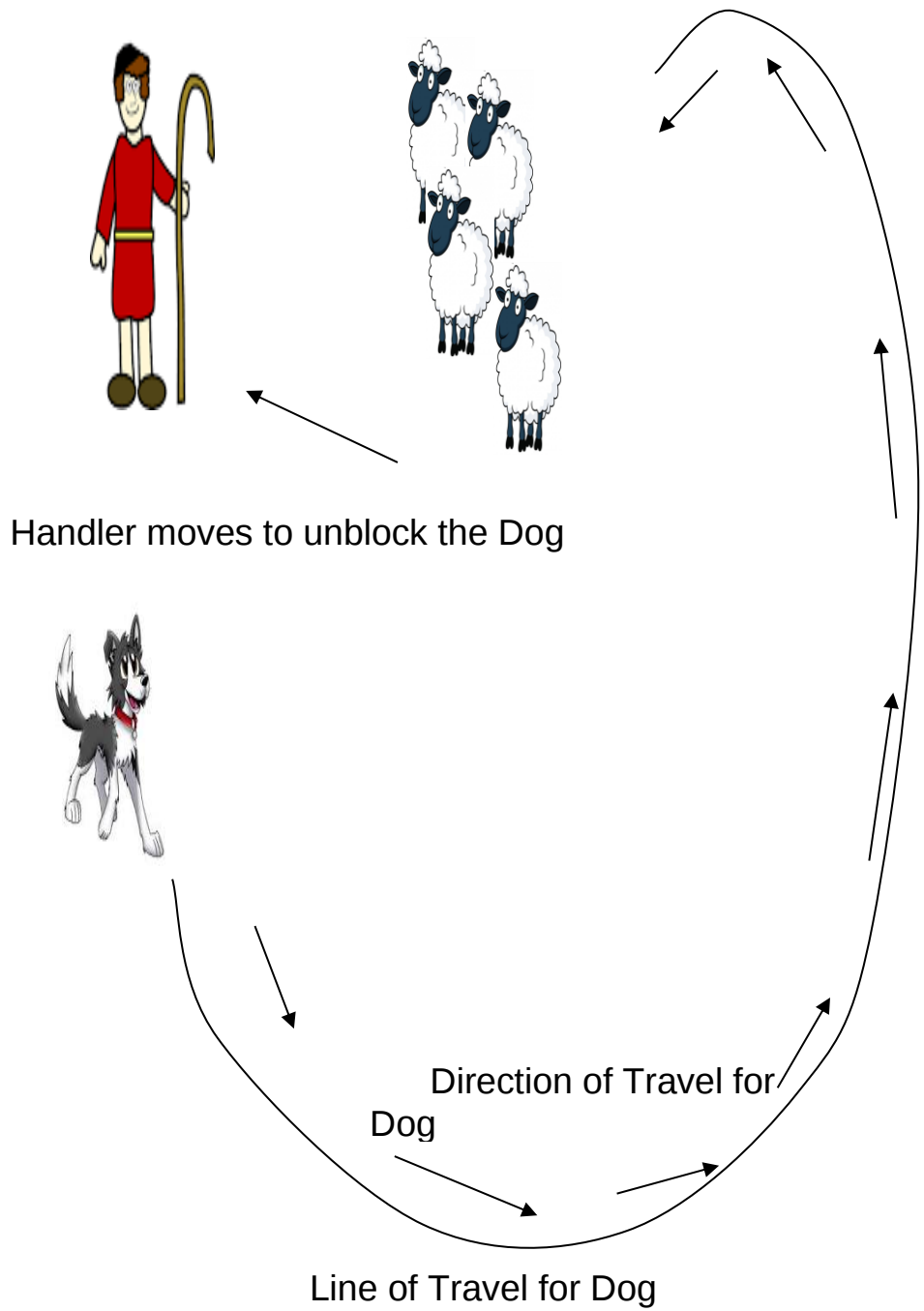
corrected. It is the release of the pressure from the correction that registers with the dog. So, it looks like this - if the dog makes a mistake, we step in between the dog and the stock, squaring our bodies to the dog, and push them out with our bodies; they give physically and mentally, we immediately step back and allow them to take control of the stock by either continuing to walk or by sending them around the stock. Repeat as many times as necessary.

Blocking the Dog from getting to the Sheep



Invisible Line that Handler Will not Let the Dog Cross

Allowing the Dog to continue working the Sheep



One word of caution here. We don't want to drill our dogs to the point that they lose interest. We want to make sure to keep each working session fun and about 10 to 15 minutes in length. We want to make sure the dog maintains a happy attitude and will be looking forward to the next training session. When you are working with a training instructor, they will be able to help evaluate when your dog has had enough and needs a break. Again, sometimes this is 10 to 15 minutes, so don't feel discouraged that you didn't get a full 30 to 45 minutes on the sheep. This additional time could be detrimental to the overall training process, so trust your instructor to know what is best for your dog.

Figure 8 Exercise

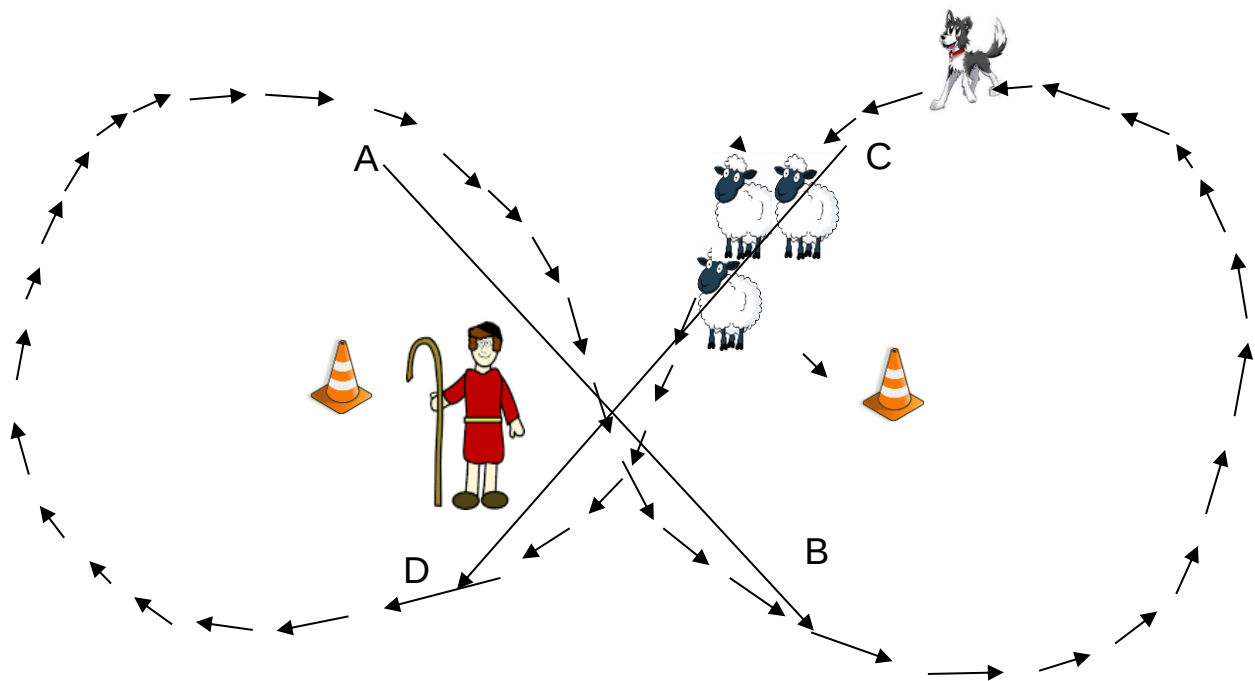
There is a simple exercise that helps trainers mold the herding dog. It is a simple figure 8 pattern. This exercise allows the dog to free up and to give distance. One of the first things a dog must learn when working as a team is to work in such a way that the stock remains calm and controlled. The figure 8 exercise allows us to get the following behaviors.

- Move freely in both directions around the stock in an arc that takes the pressure off the stock
- Work at a distance behind the stock that allows for movement at the correct speed
- Move in square flanks
- Adjust their speed, or rate when working stock
- Recognize us as the leader in charge
- Hold the pressure

We achieve the figure 8 by applying our body pressure to the right spot on the dog to get them to move where we would like them. As the dog moves around the stock, we step into their shoulder to get them to move out and give space. We will step into the head and neck region to apply pressure until they turn their head out to give us a square flank. At the center of the figure-eight pattern is the transition of changing directions so that the dog

will be moving in a straight line, which represents a fetch. Here we face the dog to maintain the distance we got from the circle and ask the dog to slow their feet down by facing them and applying pressure to their head as they come straight in. You will need to walk backward for a bit, then step through the sheep and ask the dog to move in the other direction by applying pressure to their head. Hold the pressure until they turn their head squarely then catch the hip to continue to flow around. If needed, step into the shoulder to get the distance. Using the figure-eight exercise will help make all of these procedures solid and consistent as a foundation for further training. If done correctly, it teaches distance, rating, square flanks, and directions. The arrows in the following diagram represent the line of travel for the sheep.

Figure 8 Exercise to practice



Practice the Flanks on the outside of the cones, and in the center, you will be going relatively straight from Point A to Point B and Point C to Point D practicing the Fetch. Change directions and continue the exercise.

The handler is always moving and, in a position to step between the dog and the stock if they are not getting the behavior wanted. Once the dog is constantly flowing in a relaxed manner around the stock and responding to your body language, you can begin to start putting the proper command on the motion. It cannot be stressed enough that you want to make sure that you have consistent ownership of the stock, distance, and flowing movement before you start adding commands.

Commands

Up until now, we have not added any commands but have used our bodies to communicate. Now that we have the dog committed to making the proper movements and flowing freely and quietly around the stock, we can start to name the behaviors and ask for more precise movement.

Both dogs and people need to be able to receive information and process it before they can learn. We have been giving our dogs the time required to perform the maneuvers correctly, and this has allowed them to develop the muscle memory to follow through instinctively.

We want to make sure that our dog is in the proper state of mind to receive this new information. A relaxed mindset is open and available to absorb the verbal command and make the connection between the action and what they hear the handler say. The following are the things to look for that indicate your dog is in a learning state of mind:

- Relaxed facial expression
- Relaxed body language
- Slower movement
- Head and tail carried in a relaxed manner
- Earset relaxed and casual

Adding commands at any time when a dog is not in a learning state of mind will not result in the desired response. It could cause the dog to associate

the command with an agitated state of mind, making a calm dog, who has learned a command in a frantic state of mind, quickly become frantic when the command is used because they were in that state of mind when the command was learned. We also need to guard not pushing our dogs into an agitated state of mind by asking them to do things on command that they don't know yet. This will just get the dog to guessing, you saying the command over and agitating the dog further. Now the command is associated with frustration and confusion. The best thing to do is to stop talking the minute your dog leaves a learning frame of mind. At this stage, you need to use your body to communicate.

To help foster a learning state of mind in your dog, it is your responsibility to be calm, clear, and consistent in your communication. Use a calm, quiet voice and calm, intentional movement while allowing the dog ample space and time to do it right. Just like us, our dogs may sometimes have to stop and think before they can process what we are asking. Be sure that you are asking, then allowing them the opportunity to do it right. This is where patience will pay off. The more consistency you have in your asking, the faster your dog will learn. If we do the same thing each time we ask the dog to do something, the dog will learn faster and will also become more consistent in their response.

When adding commands, it is important to remember to be calm with our tone when asking the dog to respond. Concentrate on using a slow and low tone with your dog. Using this tone will invite listening from your dog. A very well-known and respected handler once told me, "You want your dog listening *for* you rather than listening *to* you." At the time, I didn't understand this comment, but as time passed, it has become one of my go-to statements. The real meaning behind this is that your dog is always in an open, receptive state of mind, so they are always open to and listening **for** any command from the handler. In actuality, the softer you speak to your dog, the more they will have to be open to and listening for you.

The evolutionary language used by dogs focuses on three dimensions: the pitch of the sound, its duration, and the frequency or repetition rate of the sounds. Just as when a person is angry or making a threat, the pitch of their voice tends to drop to a lower register. Conversely, when a person is trying to be friendly and inviting someone to come closer, his voice tends to rise in pitch.

In the animal kingdom, a high-pitched tone is associated with distress or excitement. This is why hunters use a high-pitched squeal of a dying rabbit to call in coyotes. If you really want to excite your dogs, try using an “eek eek eek” in a high pitch tone and see the reaction from your dogs. I don’t care if they are a Maltese or a Mastiff; the reaction will be the same. Although they are removed many thousands of years from their ancestors the wolf, they still carry the basic instincts of the hunt. They become alert, ears up, head high, body tense, ready to pounce. The rule of repetition says that sounds that are repeated frequently, at a rapid rate, indicate a degree of excitement and urgency. In contrast, the long-duration, low-pitched growl of a dominant dog indicates that he has every intention of holding his ground and not backing down.

This is why you mustn't communicate with your dog in these high-pitched tones. They are associated with distress, excitement, and lack of control. If you want your dog to look to you as the leader, you must learn to speak in slow, low tones. When it comes to the tools needed to communicate effectively with your dog, spoken words are the least effective. Your dog is watching what you do with your body, so focus on that and not verbalizing. Being quiet will give your dog the time to think. If you are going to verbalize, you must do so sparingly, deliberately, and consistently. Allowing the dog the time to think through and solve problems is a way you can nurture the learning frame of mind in your dog.

Patricia McConnell, a well-known researcher, and behaviorist found that short sounds that were repeated several times increased a dog’s activity

level, while long, drawn-out, single sounds tended to slow activity or get the dog to remain still. In whistle signals used by shepherds, sharp whistles might get a dog to run out towards the sheep, and a stop whistle might be a long-drawn-out whistle. Additionally, using a dog's name is useful if you want a dog to do something, but the name should not be used if you want the dog to stay in place.

To see if your dog knows the commands and is not following your body, work the dog in a circle. Stand still and then ask for a specific command using only your voice. If the dog does not know what to do or does the wrong thing, you know they have not made a solid connection with what you are asking with the command. This will show you where you need to work a bit more, so your dog clearly understands what is meant by the words alone. Just add your body to that command, and then eventually, with the time, you will be able to stand still with your hands in your pockets and just use your voice to get the proper response from your dog.

The Use of Positive Target Words

You've heard me mention the word "no" several times in the book. I do use this to let the dog know that they are not right in their choice of action to a command. We call "no" a target word. No is a target word that focuses on what behavior is not correct. From puppyhood, we have used the word to stop a dog from doing something we do not want, so it is an easy transition to the training pen. No is considered a negative target word. But it's important to understand that your dog also needs words of encouragement. Words that let them know they are on the right track. If all your dog hears are negative target words, they can easily get frustrated, try harder, guess, and escalate the situation to something unwanted. We need to positively reinforce the dog with target words as feedback to be an effective leader. Negative words can trigger a defensive response, where positive words trigger an inviting response.

When your dog is doing something undesirable, you can use “No” to stop the behavior, but then you must give the dog an alternative action, then use a positive target word to let the dog know that this is the appropriate behavior under the circumstances.

For example, if your dog bounds to the door barking and jumping around when a stranger rings your doorbell, you would automatically say “No.” But now you need to give the dog an appropriate behavior. So, if you can teach your dog to quietly sit while you open the door and greet your visitor, you can then reinforce this with a positive target word “Good” or “Yes.”

How To Improve Your Timing

It is very important that you concentrate on getting your timing right. Many people use a tool called a clicker when doing basic obedience training. Clicker training is a method based on a bridging stimulus (the clicker) in operant conditioning. The system uses conditioned reinforcers, which a trainer can deliver more quickly and more precisely than primary reinforcers, such as food. The clicker is a device that makes a “click” sound to precisely mark the desired behavior. When training a new behavior, the clicker helps the animal quickly identify the precise behavior that results in the reward. The best thing about using the clicker is that it forces you to focus on your timing.

Another way to help with your timing is to only work on 1 or 2 items during one session. That way, you can narrow your focus and pay more attention to the specifics you are looking for.

Always set your dog up to do it right every time so that you can begin to use the appropriate command, followed by your positive target word. If you are working with a trainer, ask them for exercises you can do to help improve your timing.

Pay attention to behaviors your dog is already doing correctly. Most dogs have behaviors they do naturally, with no training required. I call these gifts, and each dog comes with their own special gifts they give to us. When you see these, reward them, and apply the appropriate commands as the dog performs them; then follow with your chosen target word.

Be sure to work within your dog's natural abilities. If your dog is soft, give them the benefit of the doubt. If your dog has a high drive, you can demand more precision from them. When at home and away from livestock, you can practice the basic obedience moves to foster a stronger connection with your dog and practice your timing and positive target words. As your herding training advances, the development of an established connection will go a long way in your dog trusting you when you ask for more advanced commands.

In Summary

Well, I hope you have enjoyed this Introduction to Training the Herding Dog. Herding is a fun, enjoyable activity for both you and your dog. Herding dogs are amazing animals. They are extremely intelligent and want to please their owners. You need to know that there is no specific timeline on the overall process. You have to decide how far you want to take your dog and how committed to the sport you want to be. Some dogs learn at a slower pace than others and will require more time, but don't be discouraged. With time and patience, they will get there. It is very common for all dogs to go back and forth with learning all of the different commands. Think of it as a dance where you take one step forward and then two steps back. Then the next time, you will take two forward and one back. It is a sport where you have to learn to give and take as a journey and not a race. The more time you spend on creating a solid foundation and a solid connection, the better you and your dog will be in the long run. The amount of time it takes will depend on many factors, including how often the dog gets to work, the experience of the handler, the type of stock, the area worked in, and the dog's drive level. Like anything else, the more often you

practice, the faster the process will be. It is encouraged that you find and work with an experienced handler. This will give you the ability to ask questions and find other exercises that can help you and your dog excel at this wonderful sport.

Victoria Long owns and operates The Wineglass Ranch and the Canine Communication Center in Parker, Colorado. She is an active member of both the United States Border Collie Handlers Association as well as the American Border Collie Association. She is known for her positive training principles and individualized training programs. Victoria works with all breeds at all levels of obedience and behavioral issues and specializes in herding training.

Reach out with any questions to her at www.TheWineglassRanch.com.
Better yet, schedule an Instinct Test or Training Lesson today.



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