

## DAWG VOCABULARY

Whether your dog is a pup, teenager, adult, mature, or senior...establishing a clear cut, consistently used "dog vocabulary" will be one of the nicest gifts you'll ever give your dog during its lifetime. Providing your dog with a 'specific vocabulary' to help with communication and training will influence and vastly contribute to the end result of what your dog ultimately becomes: a genius, incredibly smart, sharp as a tack, sweet, loving, or dumb as a stump.

Many dog owners are convinced that 'their' dog "understands" them & creating a definitive language, which is such a fundamental communication tool for us, is not necessary when it comes to the dog. They easily dismiss its importance by assuming the dog will 'figure out' what they mean or that the dog will 'pick up' what they mean on his own. No doubt this is partially due to living so intimately with our dogs and not wanting to see them as the little aliens that they are, or to even consider them a 'foreign' relative who's permanent address is now the same one as our own.

Thinking about the need for some sort of "language bridge" to help communicate with the dog never seems to enter their mind. Unintentionally or not by not recognizing "we" are the ones needing to learn to be (dog) 'bilingual' we set ourselves up for many of the problems that do arise. Add in other household members or friends who also 'talk' to your dog on a daily basis and it can become quite confusing for the dog let alone frustrating, for he's been given the job of figuring out how to become the family's multilingual expert. When we actually stop to look and see 'HOW' the dog does manage communicating with us - especially if we haven't had any formal type of study or practice concerning canine behavior, culture or conversation, it's pretty awesome!!

However no matter what age your dog is when you decide to 'create a dog vocabulary', you'll find it will help bridge 'ANY' communication gap that currently exists. So how do we proceed with this process? First you'll want to collect all your family members for a pow-wow. Sit them all down together and find out 'what' type of tasks (behaviors or tricks) EACH of them would like the dog to do. Write them down and be as specific as possible. Once you've decided this, then you'll need to go back over each one on the list, and add 'when' and 'where' to them. Again, be specific. You are trying to decide situations in which you will want the dog to behave in a certain manner, and if any of these may have a particular location when you want to use them, eg: not jumping on guests as they enter the door.

For us to be as clear as possible and give the dog a signal or cue that it will understand, we first have to define exactly what it is that we want the dog to do and be sure each person in the family understands what this is. Please don't assume what each other thinks. We have seen many family's frustrated that their dog doesn't get it only to find out later that the reason was a lack of communication among themselves. For instance, the word "Outside" meant 'Let's go to the backyard' (to eliminate) but the dog never learns to let anyone know he needs to go outside. Why? Because there are three different outlets leading the yard: a regular door from the kitchen & dining room, several french doors from the living room, and a sliding glass door from the master bedroom. Every time someone in the family asked the dog to go outside they went through a different 'type' of door and each door was in a different location within the house. It's true they may all lead to the yard but this is an abstract concept and too much for a dog to initially absorb. The dog may get housebroken but he will never learn to "tell anyone" because he never had a consistent exit to use, to firmly establish a routine.

If your dog is a puppy think seriously about what you'll want from him when he's a full grown adult, & again be specific. It's also helpful to write down behaviors you are NOT willing to put up with or live with, to help sort out what you don't like, don't want, and don't have to have - because you can plan ahead to institute a preventative game plan.

Now take these tasks, behaviors, or mini-performances you want to establish, and attach an easily identifiable word to recognize it. This will become your cue, or command (it absolutely, positively may NOT be a sentence), and has a couple of rules that go with it. Rule One: No two words can sound alike, and Rule Two: no word used may have more than one meaning. Sound simple? It can be a challenge. For example: "outside" and "inside" SOUND too much alike. If you use one, you'll need to permanently drop the 'side' part of the other. "Outside" can also have MULTIPLE meanings. We've heard it mean: 1) as stated above, go outside to the yard & relieve yourself; 2) come play with me outdoors (going through the garage door; the back door to the yard, and/or the front door); 3) lets go get the mail; and 4) want to go for a walk.

Pretty big stretch of one word isn't it? Did you catch how many 'doorways' were involved in this situation? Again, its three but the definition of each door here is here different from the example above because we have added 'two' more doors: the door to the garage and the front door. How can the dog possibly know the difference between them when all we say is "outside"? He can't. In this situation, more than likely the person stating the cue is also giving another signal through their body language. Or the dog just waits and observes the owner until he can 'tell' which direction they are going to go. It is possible to train a dog to know 'which' door is which, but to do so each door needs to be taught individually with it's own 'name or cue' to be able to distinguish it from the others. Defining a task, and assigning it with a word cue to designate what you mean helps to avoid these 'multiple meaning' situations.

One last example of multiple meanings we see is the use of the dog's name. We see this one a lot! Its not that dog owners do this intentionally but we specifically want to point this one out because it is so common. What does your dog's name mean? Think about it and write them down. Did you find it means: "Yoo-hoo, I'm talking to you", "Don't do that", "Stop that!", "Come to me", & "NO!". You may have even more than this, but try and reserve the dog's name for just what it is = his name. Use it only when you specifically want the dog to know you are talking to him, just the same as you would for anyone else in your household.

Once you've completed your list the last step is to go back through it and look for any words you may already have in use for your children, your cat, or in general everyday situations. Consider these as 'already used' and delete them. They are used as, 'cat cues' or 'child cues' or everyday 'slang' cues or words. What we want right now is to invent a 'dog specific' vocabulary of simple words that will only have meaning for the dog.

We've seen many a dog react to a mother telling her child at the dinner table to "sit down!" and not even realize that the dog parked itself too. Another good one is using the word "potty" for the dog to eliminate when he lives in a household with toddlers. The owner cannot get the dog housebroken & doesn't understand that 'potty' has become a dead word to the dog. He hears this word all the time being around the kids and it doesn't have any significance for him.

The last two things to consider are: 1) if you speak two languages you may also want to teach your dog to be bilingual too. Take into consideration the other caretakers your dog will have such as the veterinarian or groomer, and be sure your dog's vocabulary includes any necessary 'cues' to understand & accommodate these people. 2) Take your completed list and post it somewhere accessible. You'll want it readily available to refer to because the last thing you want to do is have to go looking for the list! ( A popular location is taped to the front of the refrigerator door.)

To help you get started we have included a sample vocabulary list. Feel free to change any of the words or add new ones for there really isn't any universal standard unless you're planning to mingle in competitive sports events. Let your imagination flow and allow your sense of humour to show through with your choices. You'll be using these words nearly everyday so have some fun with them!

#### A 'CITY DAWG' DOG'S VOCABULARY

CUE WORD:	MEANING:	'What You Want To Say' but DON'T:
C'MON	Follow.	Come WITH me, let's go THIS WAY.
'AH	Wrong.	No. Don't. Stop. That's not what I meant.
OUTSIDE	Yard Door.(to the toilet)	Need to use the bathroom?
Get BUSY	Eliminate.	Go ahead...NOW relieve yourself.
CONDO	Go INTO the Crate.	Go in your bedroom so we can go to sleep.
OFF	FOUR paws on the floor.	Take your feet off the table, or Get your little body off my furniture!
HERE	Move towards you.	Come here. Come towards me. Bring your cute self over here so I can touch you.
WAIT	Don't Step Forward.	Stop, don't take another step forward! (It is ok if the dog wants to move sideways or turn around. He just can't step towards you.)
GREEN LIGHT	Ok to step forward now	Okay, you can move forward now.
ENOUGH	No Barking.	Be quiet, that noise is inappropriate right now.
BACK	Back Up	You're too close please back up a step of two.
QUIT	Don't! (ie: growl)	That behavior is totally unacceptable and won't be tolerated.
LOAD UP	Hop up into the car.	Come keep me company while I run errands.

#### \* WORDS NOT TO USE:

NO  
 COME - to follow you  
 COME - to come to you  
 STAY  
 DOWN or GET-DOWN = for jumping  
 SIT-DOWN  
 LAY-DOWN

#### SUBSTITUTE:

AH  
 C'MON  
 HERE  
 WAIT  
 OFF  
 SIT  
 DOWN

F/Y/I: We tend not to use the word "Come" because we want to save it as a 'fresh sounding' cue for those who want to go on to formalized obedience or competition classes. When these dogs have to learn what this command 'actually' means (it's a multi-task performance said with one word meaning: No matter where you are, come to me, sit smack dab in front of me & stay until you are told to move), and if it hasn't been used before, the dog won't have a conflict with its meaning, or having it become a word with double meanings. Its not necessary and more often than not becomes one of those confusing idioms that mess us up. Be different! Don't use it.

Alternate choices:

CONDO: Cave, Castle, Palace, Box, Crate, Kennel

GREEN LIGHT: Free, Release

BACK: give ground, reverse(\*If you own a retriever & plan to train for trials or hunting, definitely do not use the word 'back' around the household for it's a standard cue in this particular sport.)

You might think that some of the obvious choices for cues have been left out. OH HOW SILLY OF US! Actually, it's intentional. Like "Okay"...it's used to mean soooo many things in our conversations which the dog gets to regularly 'hear', he doesn't need it for one of his clarity clues.