

RELIABLE RECALLS

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What is a recall?

In simple terms, it is us calling our dogs back to us and them responding. It is about our dog's safety and our responsibility as owners, to have our dogs under control.

Having a good recall requires a good relationship with your dog, so that they know that recall is just another game to play with their human. Your dog needs to know recall is a worthwhile game and not something that always means the fun is coming to an end.

Why do we need a recall?

Ultimately, it is about safety for us, our dogs and others.

We do not want our dogs running riot around our parks causing problems for other users.

We want our dogs to be safe and return to us when we call them, keeping them safe.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our dogs are under control when in public spaces (and private spaces as well).

We don't want to be the person (and dog) that when people see us coming they head in the other direction because they know that our dog is 'a bit of a problem'.

So, why would you **NOT** train a recall?

Simple! You wouldn't! You should always train recall!

Before you get started

Before jumping straight into the games there are a couple of things you need to know!

3Ds

What are the 3Ds? The 3Ds add up to the overall D of DIFFICULTY. They are:

Distance
Distraction
Duration

Any situation can be made more or less challenging depending on your dog but, for example, asking your dog to do a behaviour without much distraction should be easy. However, if you add distance and duration to the same behaviour, can your dog still succeed?

By amending the 3Ds we can really start to build behaviours that we can rely on. You can raise one D and lower the other two. You may raise two and really lower one, the ways to utilise the 3Ds are endless; practising behaviours in different environments and situations will help your dog to really understand what it is you want and will also help build a behaviour that will last a lifetime.

One of the best things to do is to monitor your 3Ds so that you can easily remember where you were at your previous training session. If I know that my dog can do a behaviour 90% of the time (so nine out of ten times) then I know that I am ready to move to the next level.

Remember, the 3Ds add up to the overall D of DIFFICULTY so if your dog is struggling you need to lower the difficulty!

Rewards

When it comes to rewarding your dog, it is vital that you are giving them an appropriate reward for the situation. For example, if you were always being fed your favourite food, then at some point it is going to lose its value and something else will become more interesting.

Therefore, it is important to know not only what rewards your dog likes, but how much they like it. For example, if you are practising in a quieter environment or one that your dog is comfortable with, then use a lower value reward. Save the high-value rewards for those areas that are more exciting to your dog. For example, you could use their meal when you are practising at home, but get out the super favourite reward at the park. If you know that your dog is not keen on something (dogs have preferences just like us) don't use it as a reward. If you are given something you don't like for a job well done, are you likely to do a good job again? No!

So make sure that you know what your dog likes and what your dog LOVES; use the right reward for the right situation.

Remember, rewards do not always have to be food, they could be:

Squeaky Toy

Tennis Ball

Sniffing the ground

Playing catch

Basically...if your dog likes it, it is a reward!

Rewards cont...

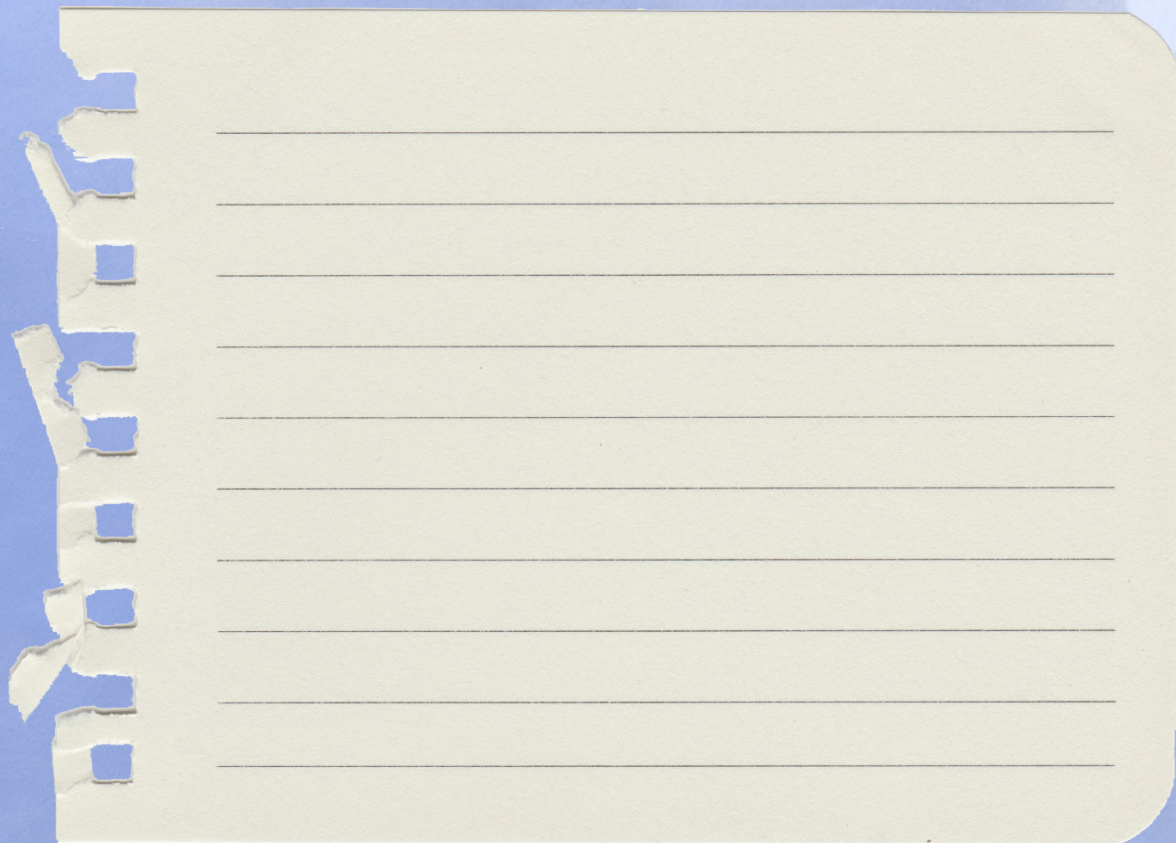
By putting thought into what your dog loves and likes, you can be sure their rewards are enticing enough for the environment and activity. Use the "most loved" for the most exciting environments (like when out on walks) and use the "likes" in quieter locations, such as the living room.

No matter how extensive your list is, I'm sure that you can add more. For example, did you add toys to your list? Did you break down what sort of toys? Balls, tuggies, squeakies, fluffy ones, rubber ones? Did you put down food? What types of food?

Really get into the doggy details, as it will make all the difference to your training sessions.

Why make some notes below of the things your dog likes and loves because sometimes it's easy to forget when we're rushing out the door what we can take with us. Having a list of these things will help you to grab something on the go!

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail!



A piece of cream-colored lined paper with a torn left edge, intended for writing notes. The paper has ten horizontal lines and is set against a blue background.

How does your dog know they've earned a reward?

Simple – we tell them!

We teach our dog a “marker” word which tells our dog they have just done something that has earned a reward.

The same as when we're told – Well done, good job, amazing! We know that these are nice words and it means we've done something well, so we're more likely to repeat the behaviour again in the future.

We teach our dogs in the same way, we teach them that a certain word means they've done something correctly and they've earned a reward for it.

The word should be short and simple – I recommend “yes” or “good”

All we need to do is teach our dog that this marker word = reward.

Therefore, when your dog does something you like you say your marker word. This lets your dog know a reward is coming, more rewards mean the likelihood of the behaviour being done again increases.

What's in a name?

I am sure you've heard the phrase - "Stop using my name, you're going to wear it out!"

The same applies to our dogs! If you continuously use their name in a variety of situations with no particular benefit to them, they're just going to become bored with the word and it'll have no meaning.

Why not make a note of how many times a day you say your dog's name? I bet it is a lot more than you realise! Think about how many times you've said their name and whether it has been worth them responding to it?

You need to ensure that when your dog hears their name it is something they are excited to hear.

Therefore, it is worth reminding them every day that their name is worth listening to.

For example: You're in the supermarket and someone calls your name. You look up to engage with them and realise it is a random person calling to their friend who has the same name as you! That is your own personal reflex to name. You respond to it.

How do we train recall?

Well there are lots of things we can do to train a recall and this book gives you my top five exercises to train to get the reliable recall you want.

Equipment

Ideally, when training and practising recall, you should have your dog in a harness and long line. This is to ensure you always have some contact with your dog through the long line, while having it attached to a harness means that there will be no sudden shocks to their neck should they run off and reach the end of the long line.

When using a long line, ensure that it doesn't get wrapped around you or your dog. Don't be tempted to use a line longer than is needed- you should never need to use one that is more than five metres long as it could get caught around something (you, your dog or another person or dog) and this should NEVER happen.

Remember safety first! Only train where it is safe to do so and if you need more help or advice on recall then get in touch.

Ready to get started?

Remember – recall is just another game to play with your dog – so if you're not having fun – you're not doing it right!

Start the exercises in a relatively boring environment and gradually increase the 3Ds...remember those!

Distance
Distraction
Duration



Classic recall

The first exercise your dog should learn.

What you need

Rewards

How to train a classic recall – follow the steps below:

Step One With your dog next to you say “Come” and reward your dog – repeat this a number of times so that your dog begins to associate the word “Come” with rewards being given.

Step Two With your dog next to you say “Come” (as your dog has now learnt that this means a reward) they will look at you. This is what we’re looking for – your dog looking at you. This is where you will use your marker word (e.g. good) and then give them their reward. Keep repeating.

Step Three Next you can start to play with the 3Ds (Distance, Distraction & Duration). Say “Come” and step away from your dog. (This is Distracting and increasing Distance from your dog). Your dog will look at you so you mark and reward. The mark highlights to your dog that the moment they looked at you is when they earned their reward.

Step Four Start with your dog a short way away (no more than 2 metres) from you, say “Come”. Your dog should look at start to move towards you. Then you mark and reward. Your dog is now learning a creating a chain of behaviours.



Classic recall cont...

Progression

Start to increase and play with the 3Ds – Increase the Distance from you, Increase the Distractions in the environment and extend the length of time (Duration) you're playing for.

Quick Recap

- With your dog in front of you say "Come" and reward.
- With your dog in front of you say "Come", your dog looks at you, say your marker word and reward.
- With your dog in front of you say "Come", step backwards, your dog looks at and follows you, say your marker word and reward.
- Start with your dog a short distance away from you, say "Come", step backwards, your dog looks at and follows you, say your marker word and reward.
- This is creating your behaviour chain and an understanding of what "come" means.
- Progress by increasing the 3Ds



Canine Circuits

Starting the recall game

What you need

Harness

Longline

Three cones (or similar like flower pots etc – anything to mark out a triangle on the ground)

Rewards

How to play the circuit game – follow the steps below:

Step One Place your cones (or similar items) in a triangle shape, the cones should be no further apart than the length of your longline.

Step Two Starting at a cone with your dog in their harness and attached to the long line. Say “Come” (even though your dog is there with you as this is just another opportunity to highlight that following the word, rewards appear) and scatter some food by the cone. While your dog is eating the food move to the second cone as quickly as you can – before you start this exercise decide whether you’re going clockwise or anti-clockwise and stick to this direction to begin with.

Step Three As your dog finishes the food at the first cone they will look up to see where you went and you can then say “Come” and then scatter more treats at the second cone and as your dog is eating these you can move off to the third cone as quickly as you can.



Canine Circuits cont...

Step Four As your dog finishes the food at the second cone repeat as before.

Step Five Continue moving around the triangle in the same direction to begin with, this is because following the same path reduces the distractions as the novelty of a new area wears off.

Step Six Keep going until either:

- a) Your rewards run out
- b) You tire
- c) Your dog tires



Canine Circuits cont...

Progression

As your dog learns this new game you can start to increase the 3Ds. Start changing the direction from clockwise to anti-clockwise and soon you can be completely random as to which cone you move off to as this can keep the game fun and fresh for your dog. Start doing the exercise in new areas, with different distractions.

Don't increase the 3Ds (or overall difficulty as it were) too quickly as you don't want to set up your dog to fail. For example, don't practice this in a quiet field behind your house and then expect your dog to be able to play the exact same place in a busy park to begin with, you need to build up the difficulty left step by step.

Quick Recap

- Start a cone one and say "Come" and sprinkle food at the cone
- As your dog is eating you move to the next cone as quickly as you can
- Your dog looks up say "Come" and sprinkle food at the cone
- Move to next cone when your dog starts eating and repeat
- Stick to the same direction to start and then gradually change direction and then choose random directions
- Progress by increasing the 3Ds



Chase Recall

This exercise uses chase and play to build more fun in your recall.

What you need

Harness

Longline

Rewards (varying level of low and high value treats – such as low = bland biscuits /high = cheese or hotdog).

Tuggy toy, squeaky toy (I recommend having a toy on a rope to begin with to keep the game close to you).

How to play the chase recall game – follow the steps below:

Step One With your dog in their harness attached to a long line start by sprinkling some low value food on the ground.

Step Two As your dog is eating the low value food back away slowly from them (keeping hold of the long line).

Step Three As your dog finishes eating the food and looks up say “Come” and RUN AWAY to a set cone/point.

Step Four Whether you reach this point before your dog catches you or not, as your dog reaches you turn to face your dog and reward heavily! Lots of high-value treats or a game with their favourite toy. Remember – you should still have hold of the longline and remember to shorten this/step on it before giving your dog their reward. Otherwise, your dog may learn to grab the reward and run off!

Top Tip - Only repeat this exercise a couple of times as you and your dog will tire quickly.



Chase Recall cont...

This is a great exercise to teach **URGENCY** in your dog's recall as when they hear "Come" you may run away! Just remember that playing this game means that you and your dog are likely to tire quickly so it is likely that you'll only need to do a couple of these at a time.

Progression

Why not try sprinkling even more low value food and see if:

- a) Your dog is more interested in following you as you run off
- b) You can call your dog to come to you before they've finished eating
- c) How else can you increase the 3Ds? Can you get a further distance away, can you do it around more distractions, can you play for a longer duration?

Quick Recap

- Sprinkle low value food on the ground
- Back away from your dog slowly
- As your dog looks up say "Come"
- Run away to a set point
- As your dog reaches you turn in to face them, retain close contact on the longline by picking it up or stepping on it, reward heavily with high value treats or favourite toy.
- Progress by increasing the 3Ds

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Loopy Legs

This exercise is lots of fun and encourages your dog to return close to you.

What you need

Harness
Longline
Rewards

How to teach Loopy Legs – follow the steps below:

Step One First you need to teach your dog to come around one of your legs from front to back then as they come around your leg they move from back to front between your legs (also known as 'middle'). Start with treats in both hands and your legs apart. With one hand in front of your dog's nose, guide (lure) them around one of your legs (treat from your hand along the way if your dog is not sure what you're asking). As your hand guides your dog behind you, your second hand full of treats can come between your legs from front to back to get your dog's attention. As your second hand is offering treats you can guide your dog between your legs from back to front.

Step Two Once your dog learns that coming around behind you and through your legs is not something to worry about, we can start to get more active and increase the fun and movement. As you guide your dog into the 'middle' position, instead of feeding them when they are in-between your legs, throw the treat out just in front of you so your dog can chase it.

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Loopy Legs cont...

Step Three Say “Come” and guide your dog into the ‘middle’ position and throw treat out again.

Step Four As your dog learns to go ahead to get the treat out in front of you, this gives you an opportunity to relocate before calling “Come” again. This keeps the movement fun and exciting for your dog – you just need to be mindful when using a longline that you don’t trip up!

Step Five Keep repeating, keep moving and keep having fun. Change throwing out treats in front of you to a toy, as your dog returns the toy you can ask them back into the “middle” position before throwing the ball back out.

Loopy legs is a fast and fun game to play with your dog that encourages not only chasing after something (which dogs naturally like to do) but to return to you for another go at the game. Playing over and over in the same location helps to build familiarity of the area you are playing in so the novelty of distractions is taken away, gradually add in more distractions by moving off in a different direction meaning that there is a potential for new smells for your dog to ignore as they want to get back to you. Even large dogs can learn to come gracefully between their owners legs, you just need to take the time to teach them how.

Word of Warning - when you’re practising with a harness and a long line ensure that the line is not wrapped around your legs – you will be able to learn as your dog comes into “middle” to lift your leg over the longline before you throw the treat out – hence why to start with only throw the treat out a short distance until you can learn how to step out of the way of the longline before throwing treats/toys a further distance away from you.



Loopy Legs cont...

Progression

Add in more movement, make the game fast and fun and start to play this game in a variety of locations, even if you just do it once and continue on your walk. Vary where you do it and increasing the fun and the value of what you're throwing out. As you send your dog forward for a reward why not add in a chase recall at the same time – Run off and say “Come” as your dog returns ask for ‘middle’ and as they come between your legs, throw out the toy again. This will build fun and urgency into your recall.

Quick Recap

- Teach ‘middle’.
- Throw a reward out in front of you as your dog comes between your legs.
- Say “Come” and ask for ‘middle’ again and throw the reward out again.
- Keep repeating while keeping the game fast and fun.
- Watch out for the long line when you're using one.
- Progress by increasing the 3Ds.

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Back and Forth

This is a fun game that can also teach a retrieve at the same time.

What you need

Harness
Longline
Two toys
Rewards

How to teach Back and Forth – follow the steps below:

Step One With your dog in front of you, throw a toy out for your dog to get (if your dog is not inclined to recall for a toy you can do this with food, although it is definitely worth trying to teach them to enjoy a game with a toy in this case). To start with don't throw the toy far away. As your dog investigates the toy encourage them to show that engagement with the toy is what you're looking for – remember if you use your marker word at this point you should follow it up with a reward).

Step Two As your dog looks back at you with the retrieved toy or from eating the food show them you have something else in the other hand. As your dog returns to you for what is in your other hand, mark and throw out the toy/food (reward).

Step Three Repeat, repeat and repeat. If your dog is already retrieving, then make it a little harder so when they come back to you ask for a sit, then mark and reward by throwing out the second toy. If your dog is just learning to retrieve a toy don't worry if they don't pick it up straight away or bring it back to you, as you've not thrown it far you can move to it when you have thrown the other out for your dog.

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Back and Forth cont...

Step Four As soon as you're asking your dog to sit as they come back to you, add in touching their collar while they sit, then mark and reward by throwing out their toy again. This helps to teach your dog that it doesn't mean that every time you reach for their collar that the game/walk is coming to an end.

This is another game that can be fast and fun and also tire you and your dog quickly so don't do too many repetitions. This game is teaching your dog that as they return to you the game continues. So, why would they not want to return to you?



Back and Forth cont...

Progression

Add in more movement, why not add in more toys so your dog doesn't know which one you're going to reach for next; maybe you'll throw a tennis ball or maybe you'll pull a tuggy out of your pocket for a game of tug before dropping it and heading off to throw another ball. The more you mix it up, the more fun it will be and the more your dog will want to play with you.

Quick Recap

- Have at least two toys - but the more the merrier!
- Throw one toy out in front of you - as your dog reaches the toy and retrieves say "Come".
- As your dog returns to you mark and reward - the reward is a different toy being thrown out.
- As your dog reaches this toy, recall them and repeat.
- If your dog is not yet retrieving, you can do this for thrown out treats - marking your dog as they return to your position and then rewarding with something thrown out.
- Progress by increasing the 3Ds



The counting game

(my personal favourite)

This is another fun game that encourages urgency in returning to the owner.

What you need

Harness

Longline

Lots of rewards

How to play the counting game – follow the steps below:

Step One With your dog in front of you, sprinkle some treats on the ground and move away from them.

Step Two While your dog is nibbling the first pile of treats, start counting out a second pile of treats. Literally counting the treats you place on the ground. Say “1” and put a treat on the ground, then say “2” and put a treat on the ground, keep repeating until your dog comes over to investigate.

Step Three As your dog begins to nibble the new pile of treats move away and start counting out a new pile of treats. Your dog will finish the other pile of treats and head to the new pile.

Step Four You will find that the amount of treats you count out starts to decrease as your dog begins to get the idea of the counting game.



The counting game cont...

(my personal favourite)

Step Five As your dog begins to understand you can start moving away quicker and further, really add in some movement to it. Move in any direction, as this means that your dog needs to go over new ground each time introducing them to new distractions all the time as they won't be familiar with the area.

Step Six Your dog may start to leave a pile of treats you have counted out in eagerness to get to the new pile you've started to count out – this is brilliant as it means they're moving away from a distraction to get to you. If they have left a pile of treats can you run past it to see if they can ignore it?

Step Seven Keep going until either:

- a) Your rewards run out
- b) You tire
- c) Your dog tires

If you're not having fun then you're not doing it right!



The counting game cont...

(my personal favourite)

Progression

Use higher value treats to see if your dog can leave them behind, while your dog is running to the new pile can you throw a treat in another direction and will they ignore it to come to the new pile you've been counting out? Is your dog now just running straight with you as you leave a pile of treats? Can you add in any of the other games you've learnt? Could you add in a 'sit' or a 'middle' before your dog eats the pile of treats?

Quick recap

- With lots of treats readily available sprinkle some on the ground for your dog to start eating.
- As your dog is eating move off to another area and start counting out more treats on the ground.
- As your dog arrives at the new pile move off and start counting out another pile.
- You want to start seeing your dog leaving treats behind to get to your new pile.
- Can you extend the behaviour chain by adding in another behaviour before your dog nibbles the new pile?
- Progress by increasing the 3Ds

Final Thoughts

Recall is just another game to play with your dog, if you're not having fun then you're not doing it right.

You must always set your dog up to succeed or they will not want to play the game with you. Make sure that you have a reward your dog wants, if you don't have something that they want then they'll go and find something else that is more interesting to them.

Increase the 3Ds at a rate they can cope with, gradually add more distractions! You must remain consistent when training your dog, so if you are using "Come" as a recall cue then everyone involved in your dog's life must use the same cue! Consistency is vital!

Finally, if you are still struggling then seek professional help from a fully qualified trainer that is registered and affiliated with a well-known organisation such as the Kennel Club, or the Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT), this ensures that the trainer you choose is constantly learning and progressing themselves through Continued Professional Development and that they are part of the UK Dog Behaviour and Training Charter.

Summary

- ✔ Keep things simple
- ✔ Set your dog up for success
- ✔ Have the right reward for the right situation
- ✔ Stay calm
- ✔ Be patient
- ✔ Practise! Practise! Practise!
- ✔ Suitable exercise and enrichment
- ✔ Above all...have a sense of humour

About the author

From a young age, Jo has been passionate about animals. As a child, she kept a wide range of pets including, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits and even stick insects.

When she was older, her focus turned to dogs and horses, but following a nasty riding accident in her early 20s, she decided to focus solely on dogs and began helping at local puppy training classes.

During this time she spent many hours roaming the countryside with her faithful Labrador, Max. After realising that there was no other job that she would rather do, Jo began her own business based in the heart of West Sussex.

Over the years, she has worked with hundreds of dogs and trained their owners using her positive reinforcement training methods in a fun and engaging way.

Jo is accredited by the Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT) and the Kennel Club (KCAI). She is qualified to teach all levels of agility from foundations to high-level competition. In addition, she is an IMDT examiner assessing future canine professionals, an approved Kennel Club agility judge, a podcast host and a published author.

Jo currently has four dogs, which are all trained in agility, scentwork and trick training. Jo has competed at the highest level in agility across the country and even at Crufts.

