



QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN LOOKING FOR AN OBEDIENCE SCHOOL

Does the club

- have a variety of class times to meet your schedule?
- offer classes beyond basic obedience should you wish to continue?
- offer other activities that might be of interest, such as agility, flyball or show handling?
- have enough stability to have established a good reputation?
- offer the kind of instructor:student ratio that guarantees a reasonable amount of individual attention?
- want to know a little bit about you and your dog before the first class starts?
- allow you to observe a class?

Does the instructor

-espouse non-punitive methods of teaching basic obedience? A motivational methodology, particularly for very young dogs, will minimize the need for very many corrections later on.

-have experience with more than one breed of dog? A high flying Border Collie needs a different approach than a laid-back Basset Hound, and a defence-oriented Rottweiler will react differently to a correction than the touch-sensitive Sheltie. All breeds will have to complete the same set of exercises, but it's helpful if the instructor recognizes that I may have to handle a specific exercise slightly differently than the handler beside me.

-have the ability to communicate? There are as many different styles of teaching as there are personality types, but this does not obviate the need to be an effective communicator. We need to hear about the exercise, and we need to see the exercise, usually through a demonstration with another dog, and some of us even need to feel the exercise, by having our hands physically placed in the correct position.

-teach the handler not the dog? The commonest complaint from a beginner class is ".... but my dog does this so well at home!" There is no one place so full of distractions as an obedience class. This is *not* a good learning environment, and most good instructors understand that they are using the class to show us what to do so that we can take puppy home and show him what to do.

-understand that there is more than one method to get the job done? What if I try to get the dog to do a "down" using the same method the instructor espouses, with no luck? The instructor should have an alternate plan, or be willing to create something with me that will work.

-teach according to the goals we have set for ourselves and our dogs? If I want to be a competitive obedience handler, can the instructor prepare me for that? If I just want a dog that will not embarrass me by dragging me around the neighbourhood, or biting the kids selling Girl Guide cookies, am I still required to teach the dog only what is required for the obedience ring?

-provide written instruction? They say we only retain a portion of what we see and hear, and I think that goes down to zilch on the first night of obedience class! It's helpful to have some kind of handbook that outlines what was covered in class and gives a step-by-step description of the exercises.

-make it fun? When friends of mine ask me why I give myself further stress by competing in dog trials, I respond by suggesting that, because of my dog training, I probably "play" more in one week than they do in one year! Besides, it keeps my weight down!