

READ IT FIRST

**Quick
AND Dirty
Tips™**

The Dog Trainer's

Complete
Guide
to a
Happy
Well-Behaved
Pet

Learn
the 7 skills
every dog
should
have

JOLANTA BENAL



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So Many Dogs, So Little Time

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT DOG

The odds that you and your dog will live happily together for his whole life go way up if you, the smart human, the one with all the choice in this situation, give at least as much attention to the characteristics you want in a dog as you would to picking a date on Match.com, and then try to pick a dog who kind of sort of fits the bill. You can get a terrific dog by dumb luck—I know, because twice now I’ve adopted dogs who just happened to show up at the right moment—but really, it’s not the best strategy.

The Internet’s rich in quizzes and checklists that offer to tell you what kind of dog to get. I tried a couple while I was working on this chapter. I was afraid they’d be silly, and they are. They ask stupid questions—for example, “Do you want a guarding dog?” How can I put this? *You don’t want a guarding dog.* Dogs bred and reared to be suspicious of strangers make, let’s say, problematic family pets; for one thing, they can’t distinguish among burglars, your dinner guests, and a bunch of EMTs. You *might* want a good-size dog who can bark on cue, but I promise you that’s about all the guarding you need.

As for the quiz results, they were loopy. One told me I should get a “Faux French Bulldog,” whatever that is (is it made of polyester?), or one of several other currently popular designer mixes. Another suggested a mixed-breed (so far, so good) or a Field Spaniel as my two best choices. Oh, lord. I have lived with several dogs and worked with hundreds, so I kind of know what I like. I like whip-smart, athletic, sociable, better-keep-me-busy-or-I’ll-get-annoying dogs, and although I can handle springtime shedding, the thought of grooming a dog regularly all year round makes me want to disembowel myself.* I’m a sucker for Pit Bulls

* Forget paying a groomer, either: \$45–\$150 every six to eight weeks. That money could be spent on dog-training seminars, Laphroaig, and MP3 downloads.

and Pit Bull mixes. I really like herding-dog mixes. And—wild card here—I am a pushover for a nice Chihuahua. Spaniels . . . People, I know some great spaniels, but they're not the right dogs for me. As for supporting the puppy mill/designer mix industry—no. Just no.

The results were not only way off base in terms of my actual preferences, they were also way too specific. Not that it doesn't make sense to consider breed *type*—it does, because breeds and groups of breeds (and their mixes) tend to show behavioral similarities. But a list of five or seven or a dozen breeds implies “Get one of these and you're set.” It's not so simple. When you get a dog, even a dog who belongs to a known breed, you don't get a *breed*; you get an *individual dog*, who may or may not have read the breed description (which may or may not be worthless, anyway; see “What If You're Looking for a Particular Breed?” p. 18). Work the other way around: Consider what qualities you want in a companion dog, and then look for those qualities. Breed and breed group can narrow your search, but the dog you're looking for may turn up pretty much anywhere.* This is the beauty of the behavior descriptions and matchmaking paradigms some shelters use—they focus on the qualities of individual dogs and try to pair human adopters with compatible dogs.

And, oh, yes, then there's love. Love is not so predictable. You may fall in love with a completely inappropriate dog. It happens. Frankly, all my dogs have been more or less inappropriate in one way or another. If you thought you wanted a sweet, soft spaniel mix but then fell head over heels for a fast, independent Jack Russell Terrier, fine! But, having chosen that JRT, you must now live up to her; no getting mad when she'd rather learn new tricks than cuddle. As the great trainer Leslie Nelson has said, “Love the dog you have, not the one you wish you had.”

Falling in love with a dog who's not your type is not necessarily bad; you thought you wanted to cuddle on the couch all evening, but hey, teaching a new trick every other day turns out to be a blast, it gives you a huge sense of accomplishment, and you're crazy about your brainiac dog. Excellent. Purposely adopting a behaviorally troubled dog is quite another matter. *Don't do it*. Shy dogs, scared dogs, fear-aggressive dogs will pull at your heartstrings—of course they will. Then they may

* And I'm going to wind up with a Cavalier King Charles one of these days, as penance for scoffing at spaniels.

refuse to set foot outdoors, or may growl and snap at children or visitors, or may send other dogs and people to the hospital; and then you have to pay someone a lot of money to help, and have I mentioned yet that no ethical trainer will guarantee a happy result?*

A really difficult dog may also turn *you* into a trainer specializing in behavior modification, which is what happened to me. Not that it hasn't been great, but there are less emotionally trying routes to a new career. Behaviorally healthy, "easy" dogs also deserve loving homes. They really really do.

How to Decide What Kind of Dog You Want

Dogs take a lot of time and work, so start by walking yourself and your family through a typical day and see how—and whether!—a dog would fit in. Consider the following questions.

- Can you easily see when you'd exercise the dog?
- How will you manage to get a nine-week-old puppy outdoors to pee and poop every hour or two for his first week in your home, and with gradually decreasing frequency afterward?
- On what weekday evenings can you and your partner reliably attend that basic manners class?
- If you work long hours, who'll give the dog a break or two so she isn't crossing her legs all afternoon and into the evening?
- Do you come home from work wiped out? Your puppy or dog will need attention, care, and training regardless.
- If you have children, are they mature enough to understand that animals are not toys—that they feel pain, need rest, and sometimes want to be left alone?
- Who will supervise the puppy/dog during your kids' playdates and make sure the children don't overwhelm him, or vice versa?
- Are your children mature enough to participate in care for your dog?
- If you have other animals, how are they likely to respond to the new adoptee? If they are old or ill, can you realistically and humanely expect them to adapt?

* Behavior is simply not 100 percent controllable or predictable. Ethical trainers guarantee that our work is as scientifically sound as we can make it and in keeping with the state of the art. Period.

If, on reflection, a puppy would be more work than you and your family can manage right now, but you long to have a dog, seriously consider adopting an adult from a shelter or a rescue group. I'm not necessarily talking about an adolescent or young dog, either; she'll be almost as much work as a puppy, at least for a little while. Think "mature adult" or even "senior citizen."

MATCH UP NEEDS AND PERSONALITY

So you've decided that your life has room for a dog, and you have some idea of whether you're up for the challenge of a puppy or might do better adopting an adult. Now it's time to match personalities.

Though online quizzes are useless or worse, certain shelters describe their charges' behavior in a way nicely adaptable to your search whether you're adopting or buying. They rate aspects of doggy personalities on a continuum—"shy" to "bold," for instance, or "affectionate" to "aloof."



A True Dog Story: Charlie

One of the sweetest dogs I've ever met turned up at the Brookyn branch of the New York City municipal shelter some years ago, brought in as a stray. Charlie was a big (90+ pounds) black mixed-breed, not much to look at and grizzled in the face. He'd come out wagging for walks, then droop when I put him back in his kennel. He wasn't the most interactive fellow in the world, but he had a big neon sign over his head saying "I Am a Depressed Old Dog," so I crossed my fingers and did a formal behavior evaluation (see the section on shelters and rescue groups, later in this chapter, for more about these). Charlie did just fine, not that anybody wanted to adopt a huge, old, not-super-responsive mixed-breed dog. And then he developed kennel cough (bordetella), turning himself into a huge, old, not-super-responsive, *sick* mixed-breed dog. New York's municipal shelter system must by law accept every animal brought in, so the facilities are chronically short on space. When room has to be made, the less adoptable dogs die first. I did something I never, ever do: I leaned hard on two friends of mine who had recently lost a beloved dog. They didn't want to adopt; they needed time to grieve. Tough, said I.

You know how this ends, right? My friends came to the shelter. They left with Charlie. He lived five more years and became a certified therapy dog. And my friends forgave me my arm-twisting. Scout's honor.

You can turn that strategy around to help you decide what kind of dog you'd get along with best. Are you . . .

energetic ————— laid-back?

If you're on the laid-back end of the spectrum, the questions about how a dog would fit in to your life may already have steered you away from a puppy. Remember, adult dogs vary in energy level too!

impatient ————— patient?

Impatient people may do best with adult dogs who don't need a lot of training and who don't have problem habits to repair.

anxious ————— calm?

Anxious people, do yourselves a favor and don't get barky, reactive dogs—they'll make you nuts.

interested in grooming ————— okay with brushing out the winter coat ————— bored to tears by grooming?

Say you're bored by grooming but willing to deal with the winter coat, up to a point. No Huskies, Malamutes, or Poodles for you, unless you want to shell out big bucks for grooming.

fastidious ————— a mudpuppy?

Dogs are filthy, okay? They eat feces and roll in dead things. Accept this. If you're going to need to wash the dog a lot, please also take the time to teach her to enjoy being bathed.

physically affectionate ————— hands-off?

If you like cuddling with dogs, look for a dog who likes cuddling; you'll be sad if you adopt one who has handling issues or who prefers nearby floor space to the spot next to you on the couch. Also, be aware that small doesn't equal cuddly; people tend to force touch on small dogs, and it makes the dogs crazy.

fascinated by training ————— bored to tears by training?

If you're bored by training and you get a smart, energetic dog, neither of you is going to be happy.

athletic ————— a couch potato?

Couch potatoes, how about a nice middle-aged or old dog who's been displaced by the recession or a family illness? Leave the adolescent Pit mixes and the field-bred hunting dogs for people who won't want to kill them two days after bringing them home.

robust _____ frail?

Say you have osteoporosis and being knocked down could cost you a broken hip. Pass on the body-slammng adolescent Lab mix and go for a smaller, quieter adult dog instead. Also, if you are very small and your prospective dog is very big, think about how you'll physically take care of him if he gets tottery in old age. (Assistive devices do exist.)

quick to go into action _____ slow to go into action?

If you're proactive, you'll find your dog easier to train. For instance, if you're slow to get up when your puppy starts to sniff and circle, housetraining will be more laborious. There's no shame in being pokey, but you'll probably be happier with a dog whose behavior is low maintenance.

confident _____ not so confident?

Nope, this isn't about "alpha." It's about stigma. Certain breeds and types are stigmatized, and if you fall for a Pit Bull/Rottweiler/Doberman/Mastiff some folks will curl their lips at you no matter how nice he is. It can be tough to take.

Another question to ask yourself is what aspects of life with a dog might drive you crazy. Check out Chapter 11, "Stuff Dogs Do That Annoys People," for a whole range of normal dog behaviors that tend to get on human nerves. I stress, these are normal dog behaviors; if you can't stand even a little bit of barking, the "breed" you want is the one scientifically known as *Felis catus* (and its members have their own methods of making people tear their hair out*). I'll offer a few general suggestions, but please bear in mind the following:

1. Every individual trainer's experience is skewed—by whatever her specialty is, by what breeds are popular locally, because small samples are always skewed, by her own perceptions, by her development of a reputation as being "good with X problem or Z breed" (and hence being sent a lot of dogs with X problem or of Z breed).

2. Every individual dog is an individual (at least, behaviorally speaking; there's probably no such thing as a Poodle who needs no grooming). I know a woman who has had four or five Shelties over her lifetime

* If you don't know what I mean, go to YouTube and search for "Simon's Cat."

What Kind of Dog to Get If You Have Kids

Quick and Dirty Tip

You know what makes dog trainers want to bang our heads against the wall? Cute pictures of puppies and babies, or puppies and toddlers, nestled among the daisies, cuddling. Head, meet wall. Here's why.

How much supervision does your toddler need? How wrung out do you get in the course of a day, providing that supervision? Right. How much supervision do you think a puppy needs? *Every waking minute.* Just like your child. You can't always take good care of two species of infant simultaneously. Say you're bathing Babylini when Puppalini wakes from his nap. Puppalini needs to go out *right now*, but you can't leave Babylini. Puppalini pees on the floor. Now not only do you have an extra mess to clean up, but also every such accident will make housetraining harder.

Then there's the problem I mentioned in the questionnaire on p. 11—very young children don't clearly understand that other beings have feelings and needs. (Puppies obviously don't, either.) I was once called to a household where the 10-week-old puppy was growling at the children. They were very nice children, but they did not understand that a sleeping puppy needs his rest. The puppy wasn't a bad puppy; he was *exhausted*. And exhaustion had brought him to the point where now, at just 10 weeks, he had "aggression toward approaching children" in his behavioral repertoire.*

Please: Either don't get a dog till Junior's old enough to regulate much of his own behavior, or get a middle-aged dog who is house-trained, doesn't need an hour of off-leash aerobic exercise every morning before breakfast, and utterly adores children and also will go take a nap in the master bedroom instead of trying to grab their ankles when they play tag.

While I'm at it, get a medium-size or larger dog. Yes, yes, small person, small dog, very cute. A small, breakable dog combined with a small, active child can all too easily lead to a grouchy dog plus a child clutching his hand and crying, "He bit me!" or a dog with his leg in a cast plus a child crying, "Mommy, Daddy, I didn't mean to step on Scooter!" Or both. Sturdy, solid, adoring, unflappable: That's what you want in a children's dog. (P.S. "Adoring and unflappable" doesn't constitute a license for children to ride on the dog, pull his ears, or jump on his belly while he's sleeping.)

* The parents' failure to supervise and intervene was a problem here, obviously. But we might save a lip curl for the breeder who sold a puppy to a household with a four-year-old and a six-year-old where the parents had never had a dog before.

and who swears on her mother's grave that all except the current dog were non-barkers. Whenever I meet someone who has a Sheltie, I tell them about this woman, because I enjoy hearing their bitter laugh.

3. I mention all these breeds as points of reference, not because I believe you should focus your search on pedigreed dogs. Whether a dog's a mixed-breed or a registered Byelorussian Flapdoodle tells you absolutely nothing about her physical or behavioral health or whether you'd enjoy living with each other.*

WANT A QUIET DOG?

Get a Sheltie! (No, no, that was a joke. See a few paragraphs back.) Terriers generally bark a lot; so do Shetland Sheepdogs, Miniature Pinschers, Miniature Schnauzers, and German Shepherd Dogs. Northern-breed dogs (Malamutes, Huskies) yodel. Hounds and Beagles really do howl. It is hard to find a dog that doesn't bark some of the time, but Basenjis are reputedly "barkless." Excitable, playful dogs may bark more than average.

WANT A SUPER-BONDED, SUPER-INTERACTIVE, AFFECTIONATE DOG?

There is a T-shirt that says "Free Tongue Bath. See Pit Bull for Details." Akitas, Shiba Inus, and other Asian breeds are generally not so affectionate, although the other day I met a Tosa Inu who lives for the lap. Most of the Poodles I've met, of all sizes, seem strongly engaged with their people. Ditto a lot of the herding breeds (less so the Cattle Dogs).

Human-oriented dogs tend to be easier for most of us to train than dogs originally bred to work independently and at a distance. (But breed descriptions often need decoding—more about that below.)

If you picture yourself cuddling a small dog, remind yourself repeatedly that "small" and "cuddly" aren't equivalents (a lot of popular terriers are small; Lhasa Apsos were bred as guard dogs and are exactly as cuddly as you might expect a guard dog to be). Pugs are usually friendly, and Cavalier King Charles Spaniels have a rep as sweet-tempered dogs, borne out by the ones I've met. Small dogs in general seem to run to the snappish, but I suspect that's at least partly because people forget even cute dogs need personal space and downtime.

* Though, of course, the health records of an individual dog's parents and grandparents (etc.) will be revealing.

WANT TO RUN OR HIKE WITH YOUR DOG?

You can't run or hike with a brachycephalic (short-headed, short-nosed) dog or a dog with orthopedic or cardiac problems. Choose a young, lean, athletic dog with sound joints and a strong heart.

ARE GROOMING AND DROOL AN ISSUE FOR YOU?

Most dogs shed seasonally, but Northern breeds and other double-coated dogs shed like the dickens. You will be able to build entire new dogs out of what you find in your vacuum cleaner bag. Long or wiry coat = needs careful grooming: Poodles, Airedales, Rough Collies, Maltese, Shih Tzus . . . Short-coated dogs shed dirt more readily than heavy-coated dogs. Dogs with hairy ear canals, such as Cocker Spaniels, need special care as they are prone to infections (and infections hurt, and pain makes dogs crabby).

Mastiffs, St. Bernards, and other jowly dogs drool. A lot. *Really* a lot.

DO YOU HAVE PLENTY OF MONEY?

If not, stay away from breeds with long lists of pervasive health problems. See the discussion of pedigreed dogs' health, below.

DO YOU HAVE OTHER PETS?

If so, you need a dog who's animal friendly, or who can easily be taught to accept other nonhuman household members. Terriers were bred to chase and kill small furrries; the various retrievers were bred to pick them (and birds!) up and bring them to you; Pit Bulls, Akitas, Chows, and terriers in general are often prone to fight with other dogs. Individuals vary, and plenty of people live with multiple dogs of these breeds and their mixes, as well as with cats and predatory dogs, but expect to have to do some work to keep everybody safe.

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

Not just city versus country, but hot versus cold. If you live in a warm climate, be aware that to keep a brachycephalic dog comfortable, or in the hottest weather even alive, you may need to run the air conditioning 24/7, 365 days a year. Northern-breed dogs and Newfoundlands aren't crazy about hot summers, either.

At the other end of the spectrum, your Chihuahua or other tiny dog

will not enjoy the great outdoors in Minneapolis in February. (Tiny dogs are not being wimps; they have a harder time maintaining body heat than big dogs.) Plan on housetraining to a litter box or pee pad as well as to the outside. Bigger dogs with short coats and no undercoat suffer in cold weather, too. Buy your Pit Bull a nice jacket.

REALIZE FANTASY IS JUST THAT: FANTASY

When you've got an idea of your dream dog's personality, activity level, and age, and how much you can or can't stand dealing with regular grooming, it's time to take a deep breath and step back. *You will not get your dream dog.* You will get a real dog. The real dog may be quite a lot like your dream dog, and with care and a bit of luck he or she won't come with any dealbreakers. What she also won't be is a perfect match for your fantasies. And a real dog can't get everything right every single minute of every day any more than our family and friends can. I know a woman who hired a trainer to teach her new dog to run to a certain chair and look out the window from it because that's what her old dog used to do. Try to avoid this trap: Your dog will be an individual. In some ways, she may be just what you expected; in others, she'll surprise you, for good and probably for ill.

PUNCH LINE

Once you know and love a dog, you often learn to enjoy qualities that weren't on your short list of "Gee, how fun." I'm just sayin'.

What If You're Looking for a Particular Breed?

Many people try to match their hopes with a specific breed of dog. As I mentioned earlier, this isn't a bad strategy: Breeds do differ behaviorally.



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