

Guide Dog Trainer

If you're interested in a career working with our amazing dogs and the people whose lives they change, then we have two key technical roles – Guide Dog Trainer and Guide Dog Mobility Specialist. Guide Dog Trainers take our dogs when they first come into training, using positive reinforcement training to give them the skills, experiences, and confidence for their future as life-changers. Guide Dog Mobility Specialists match our dogs with their future guide dog owners, working with the dogs and the owners to teach all the important skills to create and maintain successful partnerships. They also provide support to existing partnerships by teaching new routes and helping them adjust as their needs develop and change. It takes around two and a half years to qualify as an Academy Guide Dog Trainer, and around three years as an Academy Guide Dog Mobility Specialist.

Both roles involve a full learning programme taught through our Guide Dogs Academy. The Academy is how we recruit, train and retain our technical staff (the people training the dogs, our clients, and then the partnership together). It's not a physical building – instead our learners are based in local teams all around the country with their own Academy tutor who teaches one small group at a time, with lots of hands-on experiences from day one.

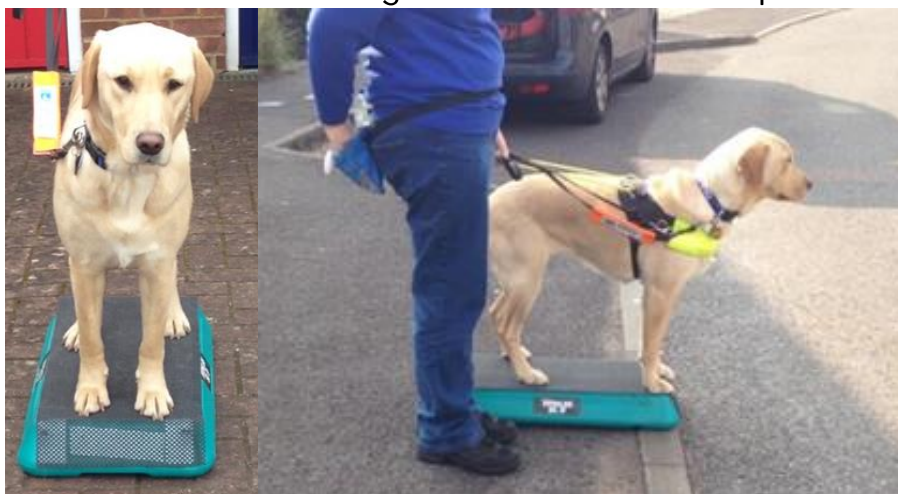
Training our dogs

Our dogs mean the world to us, and we do everything we can to make sure they are healthy and happy throughout their lives, from before birth right through to retirement and old age. One of our key principles in training is being positive. We get to know each dog as an individual and put their likes, dislikes, and preferences at the centre of their care and training. This includes making sure puppies and dogs are put in situations and surroundings that make behaving in the right way easy to choose. We use rewards such as praise, food, or toys to help our dogs form a positive association with a behaviour we like. By doing this we encourage those behaviours to be repeated and over time, become habit. This way of

training helps build a bond of two-way trust between the person and dog and is widely accepted as being the safest, kindest, and most effective way to train any animal. Guide dogs have a really tough job in that they have to ignore their instincts to chase something moving, to say hello to another dog, or to go to a person who is offering food – our training helps them ignore these distractions, but we can also help as members of the public in our behaviour around them.

Training a dog to go on a platform

Why do we use a platform? We use a platform to teach dogs to walk forwards to give guiding tension – pressure in the handle for the guide dog owner to feel where to go. It is used as a focal point.



Behaviour we are wanting: When presented with a platform, the dog will positively step onto platform with all 4 feet, positioning itself in 'straight', i.e. 2 front feet lined up at the short, front edge of platform, irrespective of handler positioning.

Training plan:

1. With the dog off lead, place the platform on the floor. Any movement towards the platform (sniffing or looking or touching) gets marked with a reward. Begin to develop the dog putting any feet onto the platform and praise with multiple rewards.
2. Continue to praise this behaviour and work towards the dog stepping up onto the platform with all four feet – feed the dog on the platform in position. Vary which side the food comes from to prevent

him curling round and anticipating it. Reset the dog by feeding him off the platform.

3. Once the dog is consistently stepping onto platform and positioning themselves straight, place the lead on the dog. Approach the platform with the dog on your left-hand side, position yourself at the dog's head and reward the dog for standing on the platform and looking straight.
4. Begin to work towards the dog being on the platform and you gradually moving back away from the dog's head, until you are at the dog's hip and he is still looking straight on. Reward. Make sure your food is coming up and over the dog's head, so he doesn't curl round.
5. Repeat with the dog in full harness.

Notes: Make sure you are in a quiet, distraction-free environment and keep sessions short and positive. Let the dog work it out itself and go at its own pace. Set your environment up for success, if necessary, use chairs to create a channel towards platform and stand on the other side.

Your task: Thinking about our positive training ethos and the steps involved in training a dog to step onto a platform, what training plan can you come up with to teach a dog a hand target – where the dog moves its nose to make contact with your hand when given the verbal cue of 'touch'? Think about the environment around the dog, rewards, variation in the behaviour, etc. Hand touches are useful when an owner wants a guide dog to move closer to them without having to grab their collar and is also used in recall to alert the guide dog owner through touch that the dog has returned from a free run.



If you finish this, you may want to have a go at the dog training myth-buster challenge too.

Myth buster challenge

Are these guide dog training statements true or false?

1. Guide dogs can find an empty chair in a waiting room.
2. Guide dogs are trained to cross the road when there is a gap in the traffic.
3. You can tell a guide dog to find a location and it will take you there.
4. Guide dogs can guide you to the pedestrian crossing button.
5. Guide dogs are trained to disobey only one thing – when they are told ‘forward’ at a road by the guide dog owner, but they see a car coming.
6. Guide dogs help with tasks inside the home, like taking clothes out of the washing machine.
7. Guide dogs are trained to eat their food when a whistle is blown to reinforce that the whistle means good things so it can be used outside to recall them when they are running off lead.
8. Guide dogs are always trained to be on the left-hand-side of a guide dog owner.
9. Guide dogs are all the same breed.
10. Guide dogs are only trained to help people who are completely blind.