



## How Can I Become a Dog Trainer?

Many people express interest in the field of dog training, but are unsure of how to get started, or what qualifications are required. This article aims to clarify the process.

The first thing to know is that training dogs is primarily about working with people, so prospective trainers must enjoy interacting with people on a daily basis. In short, trainers teach people to train their own dogs: very few trainers *actually* train the dog. A love of learning is required, as well as patience and understanding of a variety of learning styles.

Secondly, “trainer” is not a defined term. Anyone can call themselves a “trainer,” since no federal or state certification is required at this time (more information on available certification will be discussed below), so finding qualified professionals to learn from is crucial.

Here is a series of steps the AHS Training School recommends for people considering a dog training career:

1. Read as much as you can about animal behavior science, particularly the science of animal learning. Some excellent resources for beginners are *Don't Shoot the Dog!* by Karen Pryor, *Excel-erated Learning* by Pam Reid, *The Culture Clash* by Jean Donaldson (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), and any books by Ian Dunbar. More titles can be found at [www.dogwise.com](http://www.dogwise.com), under a search by subject. Steer clear of sources that downplay animal behavior science and claim instead to have learned the trade “by living with dogs all (my) life.” Living with dogs, even many dogs, doesn't automatically provide the skills and insight necessary to safely train other people to handle their dogs.
2. Learn about the profession itself by reading any/either of the following books: *So You Want to Become a Dog Trainer* by Nicole Wilde, *Coaching People to Train Their Dogs* by Terry Ryan, and *It's Not the Dogs, It's the People*, also by Nicole Wilde. Both authors are highly respected trainers who give realistic and helpful advice about the profession. These books can be found at [www.dogwise.com](http://www.dogwise.com).
3. Become a volunteer at a local shelter (such as AHS!) so as to develop or improve your own dog handling skills. Even if you have raised many dogs yourself, you will benefit from handling large numbers of unfamiliar dogs: it's a very different experience than working with your own! For further experience, you might also consider becoming a Training School volunteer. For more information, click on <http://www.animalhumaneociety.org/help/volunteer>.



4. Visit some local dog training classes, particularly those using science-based, positive reinforcement techniques. Watch how the trainer in each class teaches and how the dogs respond. If you own a dog, consider enrolling him in the class, even if he has had previous training. This will allow you the perspective of a student as well as a prospective trainer.
5. Look for a trainer willing to take you on as an apprentice. This is how most trainers learn the profession, as relatively few dog trainer programs are available throughout the country. Apprentices watch their mentors teach classes, take notes, and gradually assist with larger and larger portions of class. This allows trainers in training to gradually learn the profession under the supervision of an experienced professional who can provide feedback and guidance throughout the process. Apprenticeships vary, but most last from 6 months to a year or longer.
6. Take advantage of behavior classes and seminars in your area. Check listings in the local paper, training schools and so on.
7. After completing your apprenticeship, look for local training schools, shelters or small training businesses that are hiring trainers. Ask about their methods and training philosophy to determine whether or not their methods are consistent with your own.
8. Contact the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers ([www.ccpdt.org](http://www.ccpdt.org)) and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers ([www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com)) for additional information about the profession and eventual certification. Trainers who have received certification and hold the title CPDT are required to obtain continuing education credits on a regular basis in order to retain their title.