

# Frisbee Dog Basic Training Guide

## 1. Starting Out

Important. Consult your veterinarian before starting your dog on any form of athletic training program. You should verify that your pup has good hips, especially before attempting canine Frisbee, or else a potential problem of canine Hip Dysplasia could be aggravated.

Also Important. ALWAYS have water available for your dog while you are training them. Since dogs do not sweat, but expel heat primarily through their mouth and tongues, drinking water helps them cool down. Failure to provide water to a working dog can result in hyperthermia, which can be fatal.

The most important step in starting out is choosing the right dog! If this step is done right, then everything else is easy. One way to go about it is to acquire a pure-bred puppy of a breed that is known to do well at canine disc. The drawbacks to this method are that it costs money, you cannot really know how the pup will turn out, and you have to wait a year or more before the dog is able to train rigorously.

The second method of finding a good frisbee dog is to go to a shelter or rescue group and adopt an adult dog. This allows you to get to know the dog and test it for Frisbee dog aptitude. If the dog shows some interest in chasing the disc, then there is a good chance they will be a faithful, enthusiastic partner. The other up side to this method is that it is cheaper, and often the bond of a rescued dog is stronger than that of a dog raised from puppyhood.

Ideally, you want a dog with the following characteristics:

- Adult weight between 30 - 50 pounds.
- Lean build.
- Strong retrieval and tracking/chasing instincts
- Even temperament ( They will be off-lead with other dogs )
- Sound hips

Another important step toward good Frisbee dog training is basic obedience. The main point of this class should be to teach the owner, not the dog. Once an owner gets a feel for teaching basic obedience, then teaching disc dogs comes naturally.

Once you have a dog, here are a few things to do ( and not do! ) when beginning training:

### DO

1. Throw the disc on the ground, rolling it like a wheel. This will allow the dog to get used to chasing it without a bad experience of possibly getting hit by a flying disc.
2. Allow the dog to have fun, and don't worry too much if they lose interest and/or don't bring the disc back.
3. Use a happy voice and try to convince your dog this is the best thing since Doggy Biscuits. Always make training an extra special time.
4. Dogs who are not interested in the disc may be enticed to play with it by sliding the disc on the ground in circles in front of the dog. They will pounce on the disc, and when they do, throw a roller and the dog should follow it. Some trainers will actually rub the disc lightly along the dogs torso to entice them to bite at it, but care should be taken not to cause the dog to associate fear with the disc, so make sure you talk to your dog with a

happy, reassuring voice while doing this step.

5. Put the discs away when you are not there. Your dog should realize the disc is a special toy that is only available when you are there.

#### DO NOT

1. DO NOT throw the disc directly at the dog. You want to avoid hitting the dog with the disc, especially in the face. Doing so could result in the dog developing a fear of the disc.
2. DO NOT push the dog too hard, to the point it is no longer having fun. If your pooch loses interest, then quit for now and start when you are both fresh.
3. DO NOT encourage a dog under 14 months to leap. The stress of landing can damage a dog that is not fully developed. If a young dog is a reckless leaper, then keep your throws low. Concerned owners can request that their veterinarian take x-rays to determine if their dog's growth plates have closed and they can begin jumping.

( Remember, if both you and your pup are not having fun, then you are trying too hard! )

## 2. Basic Fetch and Retrieve

Once your dog is going for the disc, it is time to encourage them to bring it back to you. For this, the long training lead is the best tool. Purchase or make your own 30'+ lead and put it on your dog. Then play as usual, only when the dog grabs the disc, call the dog and reel them in, all the while praising them. Make sure the lead is not attached to anything and that you are not holding onto it when the dog chases the disc. Only grab the lead when the disc is picked up and the retrieve should begin.

What if my dog drops the disc when I start pulling it in?

-Stop reeling right away, go and get the disc and start playing with the dog and disc. Eventually they should get the idea that you want the disc brought to you.

What if my dog resists the retrieval?

-If this is happening, then you need to work on recalls with your dog without the disc being present. If your dog does not come when called, then you cannot expect them to do so when they are distracted by a toy! A good obedience class does more for the owner than for the dog. In it you will learn basic training techniques that you can apply to canine disc.

Once your pup is returning the disc, the next step is to get them to catch it in the air. Unless your dog is already trying to catch the disc, care should be taken when throwing it for them. Keep the disc from flying in the direction of the dog, as it may hit them and cause them to be mistrustful of the disc. Do not be discouraged if your dog does not immediately take to the airborne catch. Some dogs take many months to establish the coordination needed to catch the Frisbee in mid-flight. Use low, flat trajectories to give your dog the best chance.

## 3. Dropping the disc

One commonly asked question is "How do I get my dog to drop the disc?" Well, a reliable "Drop!" command is very important to any canines well being, so try teaching your pup to drop anything they have. You can do this several ways. Perhaps the best is to tell your dog "drop", point to the ground, and have something else in your hand the dog wants, such as another disc, a toy, or perhaps occasionally a treat. When the dog drops what they are holding, praise them and then give them the other item. After the dog gets the idea, begin to "forget" to give them the other item, but keep praising them. Soon, the drop command will be automatic. For dogs that are not too stubborn, it is possible to teach the drop by squeezing the jaw joint gently and saying drop until the item is

dropped. Then praise and maybe even give the item back to show that you want them to drop it, but don't plan to take away their toy forever.

#### 4. Jumping

Care should be taken when training your dog to jump. When a dog leaps, it should land flat, so that all four legs absorb part of the impact. Many Frisbee dogs jump and land vertically, and this can stress the rear legs and spine. The canine knee is not designed to absorb vertical force, and a tear of one of the knee ligament is more likely in a vertical landing, especially if a dog is twisting at the same time. Try training your dog to jump by teaching them to jump through a hula hoop, or some other device that will not hurt them if they crash into it. This will force the dog to get their butts up in the air during a leap and land flat. Remember that young dogs, under 14 months, should not be encouraged to jump.

## Frisbee Dog Equipment

### 1. Discs

#### Characteristics

Here are several key characteristics of flying discs:

1. Shape
2. Weight
3. Material

The ideal canine disc is light, thin, and made of soft but rigid material. Types Flexible/Floppy Flexible/Floppy discs are great for starting out, for dogs that have dental problems, or show dogs that cannot afford the slightest risk of a broken tooth. While tennis balls and bones pose more risk of tooth damage than Fastback Frisbee discs, some folks may still want to use these flexible types:

#### 1. Floppy Disc

A cloth/nylon disc with a rubber outer ring. Nice because they float! These discs are very flexible, and some tricks that require a rigid disc are difficult to perform with them.

#### 2. Nylabone

These are closer to 'regulation' than Floppy Discs, and are probably just as safe. Be aware that there are some versions of the Nylabone disc that are harder than others. Make sure you get the flexible, rubbery type. Note that there is a Gumabone model with a bone shape extending out of the top of the disc. While safe and easy for dogs to pick up, these discs fly like bricks.

#### 3 Frisbee Fastback

This is the disc of choice for most Frisbee dog enthusiasts. The Fastback Frisbee disc is a 107 gram disc made out of a soft PVC type plastic that a person can actually mar with a fingernail quite easily. They don't last as long as the harder types you can find in pet stores, but that means they are less damaging to the dog's teeth. The lightness of the Fastback allows it to remain aloft longer than most discs, and therefore give its canine pursuer more time to catch it.

#### 4 Aerobie

Aerobie discs come in three flavors: The Aerobie Superdisc, which is made from a transparent plastic with a soft rubber rim. This disc will fly a long ways, and is light enough and soft enough to be considered a good doggie disc; The Aerobie Sprint flying ring, made from a hard plastic coated with a softer rubber. While this

ring can be used with dogs also, its low profile makes it easy to put a lot of velocity behind it, so use it for short tosses or long distance throws, being careful to not throw it directly at your dog; Finally, the Aerobie Jelly disc is a flexible disc that is great for puppies or folks concerned about tooth wear and damage. This disc is a little more rigid than the Floppy Disc, so tricks like butterflys are a bit easier to perform.

#### 4 Other discs

Any other discs used should be soft, have no protrusions, and should not be much heavier than 110 grams. In other words, the hard, generic 'doggie discs' one can sometimes find in pet stores or be given as promotional items should be avoided, as should 185 gram freestyle discs and especially golf discs.

## 2. Sandpaper

If you are using plastic discs, you need to maintain them. Keep them clean, since dirt on a spinning disc acts just like sandpaper on your dog's teeth. The dishwasher is a great place to clean discs! Also, the disc should be kept smooth. As a disc is used, it develops cuts and sharp dings that can cut your dog's mouth. Rather than simply throw them out, try sanding them:

### Flexible Sanding Block

This tool can be found at any hardware store. It is a foam block that is covered with sandpaper, and easily conforms to the shape of a disc. It is better than regular sandpaper since it is not affected as much by water ( or dog slobber! )

### Plumber's "Cloth"

This is 'sandpaper' for copper and pvc pipe. It comes in a roll of 1 inch wide "cloth" and can be easily torn into small pieces and used as needed. Since it is designed for plumber's, it is nearly impervious to water and slobber.

## 3. Cones

If you plan on competing with your dog, even if you do not plan to be a serious competitor, you may want to purchase some orange cones to mark off the scoring distances when you practice. This will give you a better idea of where the distances are that will give you a higher score. Cones can be found at toy or sporting goods stores.

## 4. Measuring Tape

You can buy a crank type, 30 yard plastic measuring tape at most hardware stores. These are far easier to use than the retractable metal measuring tapes most folks are familiar with.

## 5. Protection

Once a dog and owner get serious about dog Frisbee, they begin to train for freestyle routines, where dogs may leap off the bodies of the thrower. If you try this without thinking, you will find out just how much damage a 50 pound canine can do leaping off a human's back, even if the dogs nail's have been trimmed, and the thrower is wearing a sweatshirt!

## Neoprene

Fortunately, there is neoprene!

### ***Vest***

The best protection you can get is a neoprene diving vest. It protects the entire upper torso, and is easy to get on and off. They can be pricey, but they have been found at Wall-Mart for under \$30. Remember, you don't need a very thick one (2mm is usually sufficient). Often Dive Shops sell their used rental vests cheap. Also, Diver's Outlet <http://www.diversoutlet.com/> has a GREAT vest for \$30 plus shipping

### ***Thigh wraps***

Normally used for thigh support, these thigh wraps are great protection for when your dog jumps off your thigh. They can be found at most sporting goods stores.

### ***Waist Pad***

The neoprene waist wrap is usually sold with the idea that it will help the wearer lose weight via sweating. While water loss is not true weight loss, these wraps are nevertheless great extra protection for when your dog missed a vault and lands a little lower than the diver's vest. These can be found right next to the thigh pads in most sporting good stores.

### ***Safety Goggles***

Don't forget to wear some form of eye protection if your dog does serious vaults. If a dog misses or thinks it may fall, it will try to grab/stand on anything they can get their paws on, including your face. Also, a vaulting dog is usually moving very quickly, and they can flail their legs as they fly by.

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