

Frequently Asked Questions

Dee Ganley Dog Training Services

1) How many students do you take each week and how many instructors are there?
Student/teacher ratio? 1-6

Twice a month we offer Behavior 101, the no-dogs class that is a prerequisite for any of our entry-level classes. We usually have about 8 people at these. Those who want to can register for classes at the end of Behavior 101. If there is room in the class they want to join, they can start immediately. If there is a waiting list for that class, they are put on the waiting list and notified as soon as there is an opening. So we don't take a certain number of students each week; we just keep adding them to classes whenever we have openings.

2) If I understand this correctly, there could be a person in pre zone 1 or Zone 1 who just took Behavior 101 and is attending their first time with the dog as well as several other students at varying stages of "newness", including some who are ready to pass the skills test. If that's the case, and there are, let's say, 6 teams there, how does one instruct the first night folks so that their criteria is low and their rate of reinforcement is high while also providing middle-range folks with appropriate tasks and feedback and keep the almost ready for the next class people from being bored

3) This has been a challenge, but an interesting one! We have tried to keep the skills requirements for each level tight enough that there is never a huge gap between newbies in the class and people who have been working on their skills at that level for weeks. I really think that is the key to success; if the new students at a level can't even get their dog's attention yet and the skills test for that level includes sit/stay, there will be such a big gap between the students that I don't see how that could work. We use lots of games and fun exercises that can be altered slightly to suit different individuals in a class or that each student can perform at his or her own level. Also, a head trainer will usually have an assistant shadow brand-new students and give them special assistance as they start a new level.

4) What is the average or designed length of time people will spend in level one & level two, and then thru level 3

There is no designed length of time. People initially buy a 6-punch card good for six classes over 16 weeks, but they can always buy another card in class if they want to continue on. We have a few people who just spend their 6 weeks and then they're done, however far they have or haven't progressed. Much more commonly we see people buy at least a couple more punch cards, and some keep coming back for months.

Level 1, which requires the owner to be able to get and keep the dog's attention with distractions, can be very easy for some and very difficult for others. We offer a lot of help, including suggestions regarding improving leadership at home, which we think greatly improves attention away from home. There are people who spend one week at this level and people who have spent 6-8 before moving up. Although it really varies, I would say on average that people spend about 5-6 weeks each at Levels 2-4 (as I write this, I am thinking of a dedicated owner with a challenging dog who has been working away at Level 3 for probably three months at this point -- but she is pleased at how much her dog's work has improved).

5) I am "at war" with myself about offering a 6 week class that jams a lot in, in case people don't come back for more vs. offering 2-4 week courses that introduce things more slowly and take more time to build skills, but then I worry people will think the first class was so "nothing" why should they sign up for more (of course, I would give them a course description as well as motivation, demonstration of results and encouragement). I'm not talking "levels" classes, but it sort of is like having to take your up to level 3.

6) What can you tell me about client's goals and how the levels classes fit with what they think they want to teach their dog and by when?

People have an enormous range of goals. Some people want something very specific, such as a dog who doesn't jump on people, and as soon as they get that, they are done with class. Others want much more. We work in partnership with the Humane Society of Missouri and a lot of our students have adopted dogs from their shelter. They often have a kaleidoscope of behaviors that they are working on. Others, of course, get "hooked" by training and want to keep on and see what they can accomplish with their dogs, long after their initial reasons for coming to class no longer apply. Our philosophy is that we are there to help each student reach his or her own goals, not to try to make them work toward goals we set (within reason, of course; we have to standardize to some extent). Every student hears this at Behavior 101. If a student comes to one of our trainers with a goal that is not a part of our printed curriculum but is within range of what's reasonable in class, we incorporate working toward that, whether that means adding exercises that teach this skill to all students in the class or having that student work on that skill alone while the rest of the class is doing something else. When we get feedback from students, we often hear how much they appreciate the individual attention they received, and how different we are from other classes they have attended where their individual needs and goals were not asked for or considered.

7) Did your program start smaller? What is the minimum number of clients you think you would need to have a successful drop in/levels program?

We don't have a drop-in system, per se. People sign up for a time and a day of the week so that we know we can expect enough students to make it worthwhile for the trainers to show up! We did start a little smaller, but not much. Of course in the beginning all we had was Level 1. When we planned these classes, we thought that we could expect to lose roughly half our students at each level, so that we would need half as many FD2 classes as FD1, then half again as many FD3s, and so on. We were wrong! I would guess that our move-up rate is closer to three quarters than half. We evaluate and adjust all the time.

8) When and how do you carry out the testing to move up to the next level? During class? Do they make an appointment? Are there "test" days during the month? (I never did get to the calendar page)

Any student can ask, at the beginning of any class, for a move-up test. We reserve the last ten minutes (or so) of class in case anyone wants to do that. It's good for the other students to see this; both the successful attempts, and the unsuccessful ones. We encourage anyone who thinks they are vaguely close to "test along" with the person who is really testing, so that each student gets an idea of what areas he or she needs to work on, and how close they actually are to moving up (and some who don't realize how well they are doing do pass, to their delight and surprise!).