

Head Start Program

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many students do you take each week and how many instructors are there?

Student/teacher ratio is 1-8. Once a month we offer the **Head Start Program** - the no-dogs class that is a requirement for those who have never attended open enrollment classes before. There is usually room in the class they want to join and 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 Puppy Class or Level 1 who just took Head Start 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 (so can move up). If that's the case, and there are 6 teams, 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?

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.

3. What is the average or designed length of time people will spend in Level 1, Level 2 through Level 3?

There is no designed length of time. People initially buy 6 sessions to use over 8 weeks (we keep track for you), but they can always buy another set of classes if they want to continue on. Occasionally teams move up quickly based on their skills. 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 sessions, 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 2-3 (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). It's really about giving you as a team the time to learn the skills at your own pace.

4. What can you tell me about client's goals and how the level 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 of course and 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 Head Start. 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.

5. 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?

Any student can ask, at the beginning of any class, if it's time for a move-up. We will usually tell you when it's time but sometimes you are ready and we haven't said anything. It happens. If you're not ready we will let you know why not yet. We encourage anyone to 'test along', 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!)