



PATTERNING BEHAVIOR

The purpose of this lecture is to explain the meaning of the term “patterning” and to describe different methods for patterning the dog. This lesson includes the following:

- Definition of the term “patterning”
- Different methods of patterning
- How other people can assist you
- Problem solving

Definition of the Term “Patterning”

The term “patterning” refers to teaching the dog through repetition the preferred route you would like to take through a complex or non-standard environment. Examples of this type of environment include college campuses, shopping malls, and large transit centers.

In these environments, you must be familiar with the route you want to travel and you must know the sequence of turns you will have to make to reach your destination. The dog has no way of knowing where you want to go in these environments unless you can give him direction.

Different Methods of Patterning

There are different methods you can use for patterning the dog, and you will practice these methods in class and find which works best for you and your dog.

The most common method practiced in class is called "back chaining." When using this method, you begin at the end point of your route. For example, if you are working on a college campus and you want to teach your dog the route to one of your classrooms, you would begin at the door of that classroom. You would start by touching the door handle, praising your dog and using a food reward when your dog shows interest in the door handle.

You would then back up a couple of steps and say "Juno, forward, find the door." The dog will most likely target the door with enthusiasm, at which point you would praise and give him a

food reward. You would then go further back to the entrance of the hallway where the classroom is located and say "Juno, forward, find the door," and repeat the praise and food reward when the dog finds the correct door.

If there are many doors in the hall, you should also be aware of time-distance when you begin asking the dog to find the door, and you should add a directional cue as needed ("Juno, forward, right, right, find the door"). It is common for dogs to indicate the wrong door early in the patterning exercise, so make sure the dog is at the correct door before praising him.

Another common issue is progressing too quickly, for example, by moving too far away from the door before your dog understands the specific door you wish to find. To fix this issue, decrease the distance between you and the door to ensure that the dog successfully finds it before moving further away again.

As you continue the back-chaining exercise, you will go further and further back on each repetition until eventually you are at the starting point of the route, for example, outside at the curb where the bus drops you off. This method is effective because it builds the dog's drive to reach a familiar destination where he has been rewarded several times; however, no matter how enthusiastic the dog is about reaching the destination, it is still your job to give the dog appropriate directional commands and make sure that the dog follows those commands.

Another method some people use is to heel the dog through the entire route first, using either the cane or human guide. Stop the dog and praise him at each point where the dog has to indicate a turn (for example, an intersection of two hallways). The number of times this has to be done before the dog shows some recognition of the route varies between individual dogs.

The first time you work your dog on the new route in harness, make sure that you are either giving him very clear instructions on where to turn, or that you have someone accompany you and let you know if the dog looks like he is going to miss a turn. It is very important that you prevent the dog from making a mistake when he is first learning a new route. Each mistake made during the learning process will lengthen the time required for you and your dog to be able to travel the route smoothly and confidently.

How Other People Can Assist You

If you have people available to help you pattern your dog, they can help in the following ways:

- Giving you orientation information to help you provide direction to the dog when you are first practicing the route
- Letting you know if the dog looks like he is anticipating an upcoming turn by looking in that direction, so you can praise that anticipation
- Preventing you from bypassing a turn when the dog is learning the route
- Using the human guide method to assist you in heeling your dog through a new route if that is the method you choose to use

Problem Solving

When people encounter difficulties with patterning their dogs to new routes, the difficulties are usually due to one of the following causes:

- Insufficient repetition of the route in the learning phase. One repetition is not sufficient for the great majority of dogs. Three to five repetitions is the most common number, but this will vary by dog, with some needing more and some able to be successful with fewer.
- Unrealistic expectations of the dog. Just because the dog has been shown the route and has demonstrated some awareness of the turns doesn't mean that you can go on autopilot. You must always give the dog direction and pay attention to whether he has made the turns that he is supposed to make.
- Lack of familiarity with the route on your part. If you don't know the route that you need to take to reach your destination, you must learn it before working your dog on it, either by using your cane or by working with an O&M instructor.
- Lack of sufficient reinforcement at the end destination. You have to make the destination very reinforcing to the dog. Get excited when you get there! Give the dog sincere verbal and physical praise that he enjoys. Be generous with food reward. If the destination is somewhere that you will be sitting down, like a classroom or a bus stop, sit where you usually sit and play with the dog for a few minutes.
- Missing subtle signals the dog is giving you. New dogs especially will often show minor hesitation at decision points; they may slow down or look in the desired direction but not yet assertively turn in that direction. You must know where you are supposed to turn

and be alert when you are getting close to a turn so that you can be aware of small signals the dog is giving you. Confidence and assertiveness will improve over time as you and your dog continue to reach your destination successfully.