UPPER SNAKE RIVER VALLEY DOG TRAINING CLUB

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2021

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January Meeting

When: Jan. 21st at 7:00 PM
Our January meeting will be held over Zoom. Please check your email closer to the meeting for more information.

Sunday Practices

These self-guided practices are great way to get out of the house and work with your dog!
When: January 10th from 2PM-5PM- practices will run for 8 weeks
Where: 4-H Building
Cost: $80 for the 8 weeks (that's only 10 dollars a session!) **Sign up at www.USRVDTC.org

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE

*If fees aren't paid by the end of January, reapplication into the club will be required.

did you find something smelly?

GIVE ME BACK MY ARMS!

SELF HELP

HOW TO GIVE HUMANS THE ILLUSION OF BEING IN CHARGE

THE JOYS OF NOCTURNAL BARKING

SQUIRREL WATCHING WITHOUT TREMBLING

100 WAYS TO MAKE YOUR OWNER FEEL GUILTY

EFFECTIVE BEGGING

HOW TO MAKE THEIR BED YOUR BED

THE ART OF THE SILENT FART

1000 WAYS TO GET MORE TREATS

HOW TO AVOID THE VET


Whaddayah mean I rolled in Yellow snow?

Have you found a fun fact or a comic/meme you'd like me to share? Feel free to send it to me!
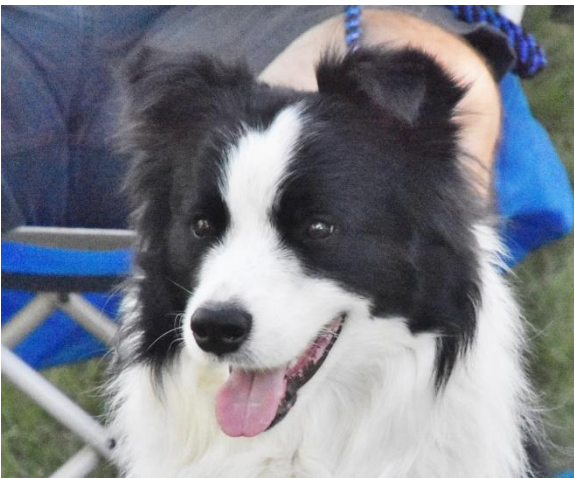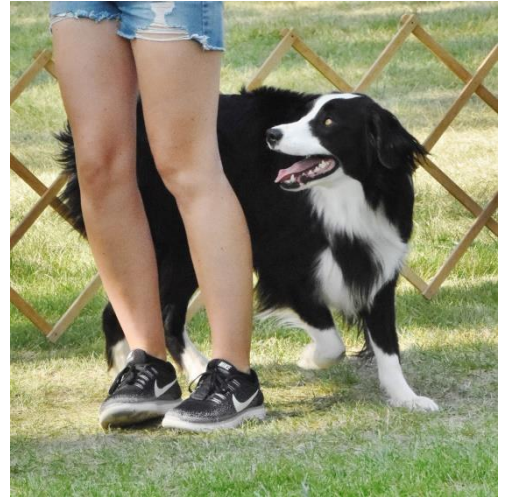
THE PHOTOS ARE IN

UPPER SNAKE RIVER VALLEY
DOG TRAINING CLUB AUGUST TRIAL

If you competed in the August obedience and rally trial and would like copies of your photos, please email me at chasede@d93mail.com. Please be aware that over 1,500 were taken. These are just a few highlights!
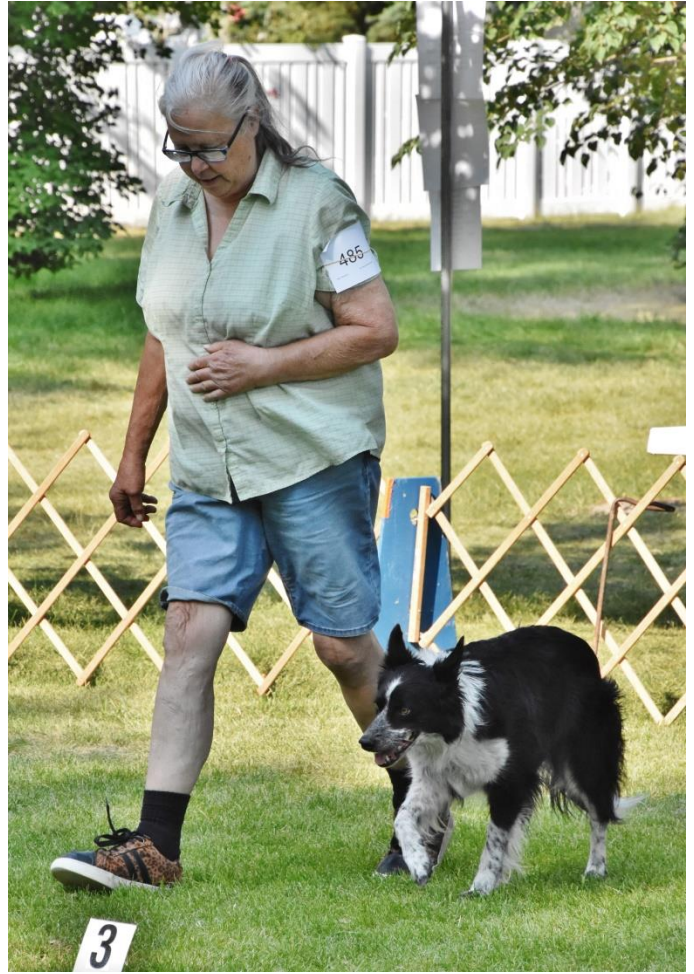
Everything You Wanted to Know About Proofing—But Were Afraid to Ask

By Casey Lomonaco on 08/01/2009

Fluency training—don't leave home without it

Fact: Dogs don't generalize well.

Fact: Dogs are very good at discriminating.

*"My dog can sit, come, **target**, give eye contact, walk politely on leash, (insert any other **behavior** here) well at home, or even in the training center, but the behavior breaks down or the response is otherwise unsatisfying when I begin taking the behavior on the road and into the real world."*

Dedicate yourself to fluency training if you want reliable and immediate **cue** responses regardless of environmental distractions. The various components of fluency are described below; start by examining each behavior to find out which aspects of fluency apply. Develop a training plan to address those aspects individually.

Only work on <u>one</u> aspect of fluency within a given **training session**. Why? Let's say that you are learning to play the banjo, and you are also learning to speak Japanese. As new tasks, they each require a fair bit of concentration and mental energy. Would it be easier to practice the banjo today and concentrate on the Japanese lessons at another time, or would you like to learn the Japanese alphabet and the banjo at the same time? Eventually, you'll be able to sing a song in Japanese while playing the banjo. But, both banjo playing and Japanese speaking will require significant practice—separately—before it's possible to do them both skillfully and simultaneously.

Introduce two (or eventually more) aspects of fluency into a given **training session** only when each aspect is meeting your **criteria** individually. Teach your dog the way *you* would want to learn, and allow separate training opportunities for each new criterion or aspect of fluency. Don't increase criteria unless your dog is achieving 80% success at the current criteria level. If your dog is performing at less than 50% reliability at the current criterion, break the training down into smaller steps and lower criteria to ensure a high **rate of reinforcement**.

What do fluent behaviors look like?

There are a number of components of fluency that may need to be shaped when polishing a specific behavior. I like to divide the components into three groups. The first group is "the 3 Ds"-distraction, duration, and distance. The second group is "PaLS training"—Precision and **Latency**, Speed.

The final component of fluency, and the culmination of good training, is **stimulus control**. The four corners of **stimulus** control are described in more detail below, but are:

Not all behaviors (or all trainers, for that matter) require proofing to a high level of fluency.

- The dog does the behavior immediately upon perceiving the cue
- The dog does not offer the behavior without being cued (doesn't "throw" the behavior at you during training sessions)
- The dog does not offer the behavior in response to some other cue
- The dog does not offer any other behavior in response to the cue

Not all behaviors (or all trainers, for that matter) require proofing to a high level of fluency. You may not want to put behaviors like eye contact under stimulus control, for example. Training stationary behavior responses (sits and downs, for example) from a distance is different from training moving behaviors (heeling or loose-leash walking). Moving behaviors are trained for distance and duration at the same time.

Those D words

Distractions are everywhere! If you want your dog to respond to cues regardless of the distractions in the environment, manage the environment effectively throughout the training. Be realistic; don't ask the dog for behavior that he can't perform in an environment that exceeds his current level of training.

Start small. A handler movement (i.e., wagging a finger, tilting the head) is a good general distraction with which to start. Move on to bigger body movements (jumping up and down, spinning in a circle) until those are also reliable. Other ideas for distractions to introduce include tactile distractions (holding position for touching, petting, grooming), bouncing tennis balls, remote-control cars, kids, cats, food on the ground, balloons tied to the mailbox, the television, and music. Scents can be *huge* distractions for dogs.

The surface the dog is training on can function as a distraction, too. If a dog is used to performing a behavior on a hardwood floor, he may not respond to the cue the first time on grass, or pavement, on a fluffy bed, or in the snow. Weather is another distraction—will your dog respond to cues if it's raining?

If the dog performs reliably in the bathroom, practice in every other room of the house. Practice in the car. How about in a box, with a fox, with a mouse, in a house, here or there, proofing, proofing everywhere! (Dr. Seuss knew something about proofing, I tell you!)

Duration is next. Some dogs think "sit" means, "put butt on floor, receive click, receive treat, pop back up into stand or lay down." It's important to remember that the click ends the behavior, but don't forget that every behavior that occurs between the click and the delivery of the **reinforcer** is reinforced. In this case, that would include popping up.

Practice reinforcement delivery. Feeding while the dog is in position is a critical bit of information for the dog. You can reinforce in one position and then offer a hand target to reset the dog for another opportunity to receive both the cue and reinforcement for a correct response. I like the "300-Peck method" for building duration. (For more information on the "300-Peck" method, check out Aidan Bindoff's great **blog post** and **article** on the topic.)

You can use the "300-Peck method" to build *distance* as well. Initially, you may need to use management tools like tethers and baby gates to keep your dog from running up to you to respond to the cue. Most dogs think cues mean "do x behavior directly in front of my handler," and for these dogs the natural response is to try to come in close to you when responding to the cue. Tethers and baby gates are great for "kick-starting" distance responses. Manners Minders, which allow you to reinforce the dog from a distance, and stationary targets are also great for teaching distance behaviors.

PaLS training: Precision and Latency, Speed

For PaLS training, the first step is defining the baseline. The technique used to establish baseline and goal behavior for *precision* is different from the technique used to establish baseline and goal behavior of *low latency and high speed*.

Precision is the final, polished look of the goal behavior. Your perfect vision of a retrieve may be to have the dog grab the object in the center, hold it between the canine teeth without wobbling, and then deliver to hand without mouthing. Your current retrieve may be wobbly and "chompy." To start, describe both your current behavior and your goal behavior in as much detail as possible; videotaping your sessions may help with this.

I liken precision training to being a GPS for your dog; know the starting location, the ending location, and every turn and corner you need to take to get there before you start the trip. You may need a number of training plans to get there, depending on the complexity of the behavior, and you may need to shape the position of multiple body parts separately.

Remember that you are looking for 80% reliability before increasing criteria. Remember, too, to break the behavior down into smaller pieces when the rate of reinforcement sinks too low to keep your dog happily engaged in the session and actively offering behavior.

The technique for establishing a baseline and raising criteria is so similar for *latency* and *speed*, that it is best to discuss them together.

Latency is the amount of time that passes between delivery of the cue and when the dog initiates his response. Speed is the amount of time that passes between the beginning of the dog's response and the completion of the response. Living with my dog Monte has taught me all about high latency (and, coincidentally, low speed). I would ask for a sit, and before his butt started to lower to the ground I had time to call my mother, write this article, and teach one or two classes! And, while his butt began to lower but before it actually hit the floor, I could get a couple loads of laundry done, at least!

Trainers often recommend "clicking only the fastest sits." The problem many trainers run into is developing a framework for comparison—in order to be able to judge which sits are the "fastest," you need to establish baseline latency. A friend with a timer, and pen and paper or a video tape can be helpful.

Remember that to establish a baseline for latency you should start the timer when the cue is given, and "stop the clock" when the dog initiates the beginning of the behavior (clicking the initiation of the behavior). To establish a baseline for speed, start the timer when the dog initiates the beginning of the behavior and stop when the dog completes the behavior (clicking the completion of the behavior).

Do 10 trials and write down the appropriate time for each trial. After 10 trials, establish an average response time—your baseline. Do another 10 trials, now only clicking responses that come in under the baseline. Take a quick break to play with your dog, walk around the block, or give some belly scratches. When you resume training, take a new baseline. Has

the time improved? Look at the last recorded baseline. Is your dog responding to the new criteria you've set at least 80% of the time?

Continue to establish new baselines, reinforcing responses that come at or under the current criteria, until you reach the goal behavior. Every time you establish a new baseline, take note of the lowest number. If you get a response at .5 seconds, for example, you know that can be your eventual goal, as your dog is capable of doing the behavior that quickly.

Exciting reinforcers elicit more rapid responses.

For a dog that loves to play, using reinforcers like tug, fetch, chase, quick hand targets, or jumping (Mokie loves to jump to nose target my hand) can introduce movement and momentum into a training session, Exciting reinforcers elicit more rapid responses—"If I do the behavior faster, I earn the tug faster!"

Stimulus control

Essentially, *stimulus control* means that within the context of a training session the dog offers the behavior when it perceives the cue and does not offer the behavior in the absence of the cue. For example, your dog will not "lie down" when you say "sit." It also means your dog waits for cues rather than anticipating them. Games that mix well-proofed cues in random order are fun and good mental workouts for dogs, and teach the dog that your cues will be unpredictable. After adding a cue, don't reinforce un-cued offerings of the behavior during training sessions. (It is still wise to reinforce nice sits while greeting guests, going to his bed or crate to relax on his own, voluntarily "checking in," i.e. offering eye contact or an un-cued recall in a highly distracting environment like a playgroup, etc.) You may not want to put all behaviors under stimulus control; only you can decide what you to train.

Mastering a new language takes time

Wow, this sounds like a lot of work!

It may seem overwhelming to think about all of these aspects of fluency. Take a deep breath—and be patient with yourself and your dog. Remember, there is a big difference between knowing five or ten Spanish words and being able to speak the language. Fluency is a new language for your dog.

Make training sessions short and fun for everyone. Always end a session on a positive note. Record-keeping is valuable for tracking progress, seeing where the process should be revised or refined, and getting feedback from any trainer(s) you work with regarding training plans.

If you're a careful observer and someone who keeps detailed training records, you'll notice an exciting twofold process: you will become a more skilled and more empathic trainer, while your dog learns to learn!

Feel free to set your own criteria for how reliably, how quickly, how precisely you want your dog to respond. Some people really don't care about how straight or tucked a sit is as long as the dog lowers his rear fairly soon after he is asked.

The first few behaviors you train to fluency will take longer than any subsequent behaviors. Once you have three or more behaviors well-trained to fluency and under stimulus control, you should find all future proofing for fluency speeds up.

Keep in mind that most dogs would prefer five three-minute sessions a day to one ten or fifteen-minute session.

For most clients I advise spending ten to fifteen minutes a day training, keeping in mind that most dogs would prefer five three-minute sessions a day to one ten or fifteen-minute session. Even within the context of a 1.5 minute session, you could choose to work on five or more behaviors if you are working on stimulus control.

Frequent fun and short training sessions, well-timed clicks and reinforcement delivery, and clear criteria setting will have you and your dog on the path to proofing success in no time. Get out there with your dog and start clicking for fluency today!

How Smart Is a Dog Really? The Secrets of a Canine Mind

BY **JEFFREY KLUGER**

MAY 11, 2017 6:28 AM EDT

Bucky, a 1 1/2 year old Pug photographed in New York, NY on April 23, 2017.

O dds are you don't look forward to spending time in a magnetic resonance imager—and with good reason. The clanging, coffin-like machine seems purpose-built for sensory assault. But you're not Ninja, a 3-year-old pit-bull mix, who trots into a lab at Emory University in Atlanta, catches a glimpse of the MRI in which she'll spend her morning and leaps happily onto the table.

Ninja is one of the few dogs in the world that have been trained to sit utterly still in an MRI (the little bits of hot dog she gets as rewards help) so that neuroscientist Gregory Berns can peer into her brain as it works. "What's it like to be a dog?" Berns asks, a question that is both the focus of his work and the thrust of his next book. "No one can know with certainty. But I think our dogs are experiencing things very much the way we do."

That is what we want to believe. Our love affair with dogs has been going on for 15,000 years, and there's no sign that it's flagging. About 44% of families in the U.S. include at least one dog, meaning a canine population of up to 80 million.

Most of the time, we give our dogs very good lives. We fancy that they understand us, and maybe they do: come home sad and they'll nuzzle your hand. They don't have language, but they communicate volumes–with their eyes, with their barks, with their entire expressive bodies. "Dogs pick up on all kinds of things," says Juliane Kaminski, director of the Dog Cognition Centre at the University of Portsmouth, in England. "A system has developed in which both species–ours and theirs–attend to each other's

That's something we know intuitively, but science is pushing harder to understand it empirically. Canine-research facilities have been established around the world, in Hungary, Austria, Germany, Italy, Australia and elsewhere. In the U.S. alone, there are facilities at Duke, Tufts and Yale universities. The Association for Psychological Science (APS), which typically concerns itself with the well-being of humans, recently devoted an entire issue of its journal Current Directions in Psychological Science to the canine mind. The findings were often impressive: Dogs can count–sort of– learning to look at two boards with geometric shapes attached to them and choose the one that has more. They can read human faces–understanding the importance of using gaze to communicate and to direct our attention. They can excel at what is known as object permanence–understanding that when an object is out of sight, it has not vanished from existence. It takes humans a lot longer to learn such a basic truth of the world, which is why babies who toss food or a spoon from a high chair will so often not look down at the floor to try to find it.

Dogs may be better too than 3-to-4-year-old children at learning to ignore bad instructions. In a Yale study not reported in the APS journal, dogs and small children were given a box and taught to turn a lever to open the lid and get a treat. When the lever was rigged so that it was no longer needed, the dogs learned to ignore it and simply open the box. The children continued to turn the useless thing all the same. If dogs can beat us at this one small task, what other gifts may they be hiding?

A dog's behavioral software is ultimately determined by the power of the hardware, and that means the brain. As with all animals, one of the most important determinants of brainpower is size—specifically, the size of the brain relative to the size of the body. By this measure, the human brain is huge, about one-fiftieth the mass of the average human body.

Compared with humans and their 1:50 ratio, horses are dullards, at 1:600, and lions are little better at 1:550. Dogs are comparative scholars, weighing in at an impressive 1:125—a ratio that holds across all breeds of dog, from the Chihuahua to the English mastiff. All the same, a brain that makes you a genius in the animal world is not much in the human one. Berns keeps the preserved brain of an adult German shepherd in his lab, and it starkly makes that point: the brain is the size of a tangerine. "Dog brains just don't have the real estate to do the things ours do," he says.

While the sizes of the two brains differ, the structures are strikingly similar. Over the past several years, Berns and his team have used that similarity to good effect. Much of their MRI work has focused on the part of the brain known as the striatum. Rich in dopamine, the striatum mediates reward, pleasure and expectation—three pillars of a dog's world.

During Ninja's recent visit, the experiment involved determining how quickly she would learn to expect a food reward after being exposed to one of two smells. With the scanner running, a lab assistant released intermittent puffs of either isoamyl, a chemical that smells faintly like nail-polish remover, or hexanol, a carbon molecule that is detectable in grass clippings. After each puff of isoamyl, Ninja was given a hot-dog treat; after the hexanol, she'd get nothing.

Over the course of the test, the MRI looked for upticks in electrical activity in the striatum that would indicate increased anticipation after smelling the isoamyl. Analytic software would have to determine the answer since the naked eye could not pick out such small fluctuations, but Ninja offered clues that she had learned fast. After hopping down from the scanner, she was presented with two cups in the middle of a room, each containing one of the two chemicals. She trotted straight to the one with isoamyl.

Associating a smell with a treat is basic stuff, but Berns has used his MRI to probe more sophisticated parts of dogs' cognitive prowess: how they recognize the faces of humans and other dogs; how they recognize voices and words; even how they experience jealousy—when a treat was fed in pantomime to a dog mannequin. It's those questions about a dog's personality—does it love? does it empathize? is it loyal?—that most intrigue humans.

Investigators at the Messerli Research Institute in Vienna have recently tested the ability of dogs to behave prosocially—make an effort to help another dog when there is no reward in it for them. In the experiment, two dogs were placed in side-by-side cages, and one was trained to pull a lever that would deliver food to the other. The first dog got nothing and yet was usually happy to pull the lever all the same—provided the dog on the other

side was a playmate. Unknown dogs were less likely to get the same treatment.

Studies of the many ways dogs are said to come to the aid of humans have produced less positive results. There is no end of anecdotal evidence of the phenomenon: dogs that run for help when their owners are injured, dogs that bark to alert the family to a fire, dogs that know when you're sad and nuzzle to offer comfort.

Lovely–and maybe hooey. "Your dog may notice something's amiss when you're sad," says Kaminski, "but the message they're sending when they nuzzle may be 'You're acting weird, and that scares me.'" As for dogs that bark when there's a fire in the house? "They might just have been frightened," says developmental psychologist William Roberts of Ontario's Western University.

In one study Roberts and a colleague conducted, an owner walked her dog across a field and then fell to the ground, feigning a heart attack. Two other humans were seated nearby, pretending to be reading. The owner lay still for six minutes, and over repeated trials with different human and animal subjects, not a single dog sought help.

Roberts does not deny the truth of occasional stories of dogs that do seek help. But he thinks they're the exceptions. The majority of cases in which dogs do nothing "don't get reported because they are not interesting or unexpected."

If that's true, it leaves dogs as little more than, well, cats: amiable freeloaders on the human gravy train. But such a conclusion shortchanges them–by a lot.

Start with what we're learning about their intellectual octane, especially in terms of what's known as theory of mind, the ability to understand that humans and other animals have knowledge different from their own. The ability of dogs to follow pointing, and to do so innately, has generated a lot of interested in recent years. It doesn't seem like much of a skill, except when you consider that so many other animals make no sense of the gesture. The dog knows that the hand is used to indicate something else.

"When two humans do that, they take into account the common ground—a communicative context in which all this makes sense," says Kaminski. The same is true between dogs and humans.

Not all canine researchers are sold on the significance of all of this. Behavioral scientist Clive Wynne of Arizona State University cites numerous species—including dolphins, elephants and even bats—that learn the meaning of pointing if they've had sufficient exposure to human beings. "It's simply day-to-day experience with humans using their limbs to deliver things that matter," he says.

The canine understanding of object permanence is less open to dispute. Dogs perform well on so-called visible-displacement tasks: when they watch an object being placed in one of several containers and are then allowed to look for it, they know which container to investigate first. Dogs also master invisible displacement, in which, say, a toy is placed in a container, the container is moved behind a screen and then brought back out, but the toy is no longer in it. Some dogs follow that chain of events, rightly concluding that if they go behind the barrier they will probably find the toy.

In a 2013 study, behavioral psychologist Thomas Zentall of the University of Kentucky also found that dogs are capable of understanding that not only is

the existence of objects permanent but so are the characteristics. When a dog biscuit or other item of interest was carried behind a barrier and then carried back out, the dogs would give it a glance as it reappeared. But if it was secretly replaced by a larger or smaller version of the same object or one that had changed in color, they would stare much longer. The conclusion: a two-inch dog biscuit should remain two inches and a yellow ball should remain yellow, and dogs understand that.

What, however, does all this say about dogs' emotional experience of the world? They exhibit what seems unmistakably to be joy—in the jumping, yipping thrill they show when family members come home after a long absence. That may even suggest that they have an awareness not just of the past and the future but also of the rate at which time passes. Closed-circuit cameras show that they seem to prepare as the time comes for humans who have been out all day to return, stirring from a nap, checking the front door, becoming restless and excited.

A sense of time as a linear thing—that the current state is not the only state—is an abstraction that human babies take a long time to learn, which partly explains tantrums. A present moment without a cookie means an eternity without cookies.

Dogs may even teach us something about a common human problem: lack of willpower. Research has attributed this to what is known as ego depletion, with self-control failing over time the same way an overworked muscle does. In studies conducted in 2010 and '15, investigators found that self-discipline in dogs breaks down the same way ours does. In one experiment, dogs that had been required to perform a 10-minute sit-and-stay exercise were less likely to complete a puzzle task given to them next than dogs that had spent the same 10 minutes doing what they pleased.

The reason may be depletion of glucose in the prefrontal cortex. Dogs given glucose before the second task stayed with it longer after a sit-and-stay period. Dosing up on sugary drinks is not the way to improve self-discipline, but the research does show us one more thing we share with our favorite nonhuman species.

Ultimately, though, our curiosity about dogs will always be driven mostly by our love for dogs. Berns believes that it was juveniles on both sides of the human-dog divide that were responsible for initiating the interspecies bond. Wolf pups would be the ones likeliest to approach and appeal to early nomadic humans; and girls and boys–then and now–are the humans who love puppies most. Dogs are like us in their joy and empathy and inexhaustible curiosity, and we–at least when we're in their presence–become more like them. We are both better species for our very long union.