



Variables & The 3 D's

Introduction

In another article “Managing Expectations & Setting Criteria” we thought about reasonable expectations and setting criteria when we are training our puppies. This article expands on that by talking about variables.

What Are Variables?

What do we mean by variables and why do we use them? Variables are the things that we can change when training our puppies to alter the criteria (how high we are “setting the bar”) we are putting in place for a particular behavior. We use variables to proof behaviors. Proofing means practicing a behavior in lots of different environments and situations until your puppy generalizes that behavior and can do it anywhere, even with distractions!

The 3 D's

The three variables we work with when training our puppies are:

Duration (Can your puppy perform the behavior for extended or varying periods of time?)

Distance (Can your puppy perform the behavior with you at varying distances away from them?)

Distractions (Can your puppy perform the behavior when in new and interesting environments and for different handlers?)

You may hear these referred to as the 3D's.

As an example, let's think in more detail about how we might go about using our three variables when proofing Sit:

- 🐾 We would start with the duration variable and initially set low and simple criteria in an environment with minimal distractions.
- 🐾 We might start by asking our puppy to Sit for 2 seconds and gradually build up to a criterion of 30 seconds.
- 🐾 Once our puppy can reliably Sit for 30 seconds in that low distraction environment, then we can start adding in distance. We would start by taking a small step away from the puppy while they Sit and gradually increase the distance we move away to the criteria we set, for example, the end of the leash.
- 🐾 However, as we have added the distance variable we have to think back to our reasonable expectations and may need to “dial down” on the duration variable to begin with.
- 🐾 Once we have achieved the criteria we set for duration and distance, we can start to add distraction, where perhaps another person walks in the room, or we move to a busier location. Again though, we may need to lower our duration and distance criteria when we start adding in distractions!

Se Up for Success

- 🐾 Only change one variable at a time!
- 🐾 Have higher value treats available when you add in another variable, especially distraction! When we change the environment, our puppies can quickly lose focus and may not always associate the behavior we are asking for with that environment. As we mentioned in “Managing Expectations & Setting Criteria,” perfect performance at home may not initially carry over to puppy class or the middle of Target!
- 🐾 When you get the behavior you want, don't forget to reward and praise your puppy!
- 🐾 Always have reasonable expectations and set realistic criteria. Small steps work best and will be less frustrating for you and your puppy!

Other Resources

Here are a few resources relating to the above:

- 🐾 [Video - High Value Treats](#)
- 🐾 [Article - Building Sit and Down Duration](#)
- 🐾 [Article - Building Sit & Down Duration - Adding Distance](#)
- 🐾 [Article - Building Sit & Down Duration - Adding Distractions](#)
- 🐾 [Article - Managing Expectations & Setting Criteria](#)
- 🐾 [Video - Generalization - Being Consistent in New Environments](#)