

Chapter 5

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *How old does my dog need to be to learn a bop and/or Go Out?*

A: Any age! Even puppies as young as 8 weeks old can learn to bop. It's a great exercise to do with them as part of teaching them to "learn how to learn" because it is a short, simple, discrete action and is very amenable to using a clicker or other conditioned reinforcer. For the same reasons, this exercise is a good one to also do with adult dogs that are just starting to be trained. After teaching the bop, you can continue with the process and teach the Go Out immediately after you teach the bop, or wait until later in your dog's training.

Q: *Does my dog have to touch the barrier with his paw? Is a nose touch good enough?*

A: I recommend that you teach a paw touch instead of a nose touch for two reasons. One is I think that many dogs are more willing to make solid contact with the barrier using their paw than with their nose. Think about it. Would you rather shove your nose into a solid object or push against it with your hand? The other is that a nose touch is difficult to see from 50 feet away and know for sure that the dog actually made contact. With a paw touch you will often hear the dog's toenails scrape the stanchion or wall or see the gate sway a bit, especially since he is likely to make better contact with a paw than with a nose. At the very least you should see a distinct raising of one leg. You don't want to routinely accept a near miss because then the requirements become mushy and your dog will think that he doesn't have to bop after all. See the answer to the next question for more information.

Q: *Is it good enough if my dog lifts his paw and swipes in the direction of the barrier but narrowly misses making contact?*

A: No. It is best to keep your criteria black and white. Your dog either touched or he did not. As soon as you start accepting narrow misses, you start down a slippery slope in which the dog's job becomes fuzzier and fuzzier. If coming within 1 inch is good enough, then how about 2 inches? If 2 inches is good enough, what about 6 inches? Is a foot OK? At what point does it become not good enough? How do you know? How does the dog know? The concreteness of the job, and your consistency in requiring it, is what keeps your dog's Go Out strong and committed, even over a long show career.

Q: *Does my dog always need to bop with the same foot?*

A: No. I have never required that. But many dogs do develop a preference.

Q: *You initially teach the dog to target a center stanchion, if the ring has gating. What if there is gating but the stanchion is not in the center?*

A: This scenario is becoming less and less common. Even when the stanchion isn't in the exact center, it usually isn't off by very much. After the initial training is complete you can work on this scenario if you wish using the tools that I have given you in this book. However, I have not had much of a need for it even with the extensive showing I have done with multiple dogs. For more information see the section titled *Ring Barrier Types and Sight Pictures* in Chapter 10 of this book.

Q: *What if the ring barrier is just a rope or chain, which is common in warmer climates with lots of outdoor trials?*

A: The rope has to be held up by something, usually some sort of post or pole. You can teach the dog to bop the post. You can also use a stake pushed into the ground for the dog to bop to train for the situations where there is no center post. See the section titled *Ring Barrier Types and Sight Pictures* in Chapter 10 of this book for more information.

Q: *My dog is fearless and strong. I am afraid that he will knock over the entire line of gating if he hits it with his paw.*

A: You can teach your dog to bop softly. This is covered in Step 5, under the *Common Problems* section.

Q: *My dog is timid and nervous about gating, especially when it moves. What if I can't get him to touch it?*

A: Most dogs can work through this and doing so will increase your timid dog's confidence. Whether you ultimately decide to use the Go Bop! method to teach your dog the Go Out or some other method, if you don't get him very comfortable with the gating he might always be hesitant to go far enough towards a ring end with gating. So it is well worth your trouble to try. His bop may always be quite delicate, but that is OK. This issue is discussed in more detail in the *Common Problems* section of Step 5.

Q: *I see from the Table of Contents that this is a 30-step process. E-gads! How long is it going to take me to teach this?*

A: Don't be daunted by the length or number of steps in these instructions. I have provided as much detail as possible in anticipation of questions you may have. I have broken things down into many small steps so that going from one step to the next will not seem conceptually difficult to you or your dog. Most dogs grasp many of the steps, especially the early ones, within one or two training sessions. Other steps, such as those that involve building distance or fading the guides, will take longer. Overall I have found this method of teaching Go Outs to be as fast, if not faster, in the long run than other methods of teaching the concept. Of course it depends on a lot of factors, including how consistently you train, but most dogs can be reliably doing full length Go Outs in familiar places without props within a few months. No matter what method you use to teach Go Outs, it will take thousands of repetitions and experience in many different locations before your dog will be reliable on the first Go Out in a new location.

Q: *My dog was taught the Go Out using a different method. Can I teach him a touch based Go Out after the fact?*

A: Absolutely! As described in the Introduction, the first dog to whom I taught a bop already had her OTCH. Her Go Out had been trained initially with squeeze cheese on a stanchion. I was having trouble with her slowing down towards the end of the Go Out and/or anticipating the sit. So I took 6 weeks off from trialing and retrained her Go Out using a bop. When we returned to the ring the problem was resolved, and her Go Outs were better than ever! If you are retraining a dog that has already learned Go Outs, you can use the instructions provided in this book. Steps 1-9 in *Chapter 7 Teaching the Bop* will be all new material for your dog. You will also need to do Steps 10-21 in *Chapter 8 Teaching the Go Out* but these steps will likely go much faster if your dog was already doing full length Go Outs before. If you are already satisfied with your dog's sit at the end of the Go Out (the one that occurs well before the ring barrier in a real trial), then you can skip Steps 22-28 in *Chapter 9 Teaching the Pre-Barrier Sit*. Step 29 is optional for all dogs, although I find it to be a very useful tool to have. Your dog should already know Step 30.

Q: *Throughout the book you say to give the dog a treat after every successful repetition. Isn't it better to randomize the rewards so that my dog won't be disappointed in the ring when he doesn't get something after every Go Out?*

A: Don't get ahead of yourself. One of the keys to success with reward based training is that the dog needs to have a lengthy history of reward directly associated with the behavior being trained. The more rewarded repetitions you can get in the shortest possible amount of time, the better the behavior will hold up in the long term under stress. It is true that you shouldn't go directly from rewarding every behavior to asking for long strings of multiple behaviors before a reward is provided. It should be a process that gradually and variably stretches out the amount of work you ask for, in a way very similar to what I describe in Steps 15 and 17 for building the distance of the Go Out, or in my Heeling Log Book (see page 197) which lays out a system for increasing the number of heeling steps that you ask for. But this process should not begin before you have that strong history of reinforcement of the full skill, and it should pay careful attention to how well the dog is dealing with any given increment, as well as make sure that he is still receiving enough value for the overall amount of work you are asking for at one time before he is rewarded.