



Dogmanship - a user guide

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Dogmanship

What is it?

Dogmanship refers to a person's ability to interact with their dog. People who possess good dogmanship are hence able to get the most out of their dogs. This can include training, working or even just the overall quality of their dog-human relationship.

Why should we try to use good dogmanship?

- To avoid the development of canine behavioural issues e.g. aggression
- To reduce the incidence of dog relinquishment and euthanasia
- To better achieve training goals
- To enjoy positive, fulfilling relationships with our dogs

Existing research on dogmanship

University of Sydney student, Elyssa Payne, has completed a thesis titled 'Characterising dogmanship'. It explores what it means to be skilled with dogs and the human characteristics that may help or hinder us in our quest to train and bond with our dogs.

What does good dogmanship look like?

Here are some examples of behaviours that contribute to good dogmanship.



Positive reinforcement

Giving dogs resources they value (such as treats, praise or toys) in response to good behaviour has been shown to increase learning and promote a positive emotional state in dogs. Do you know what your dogs value most in life?



Affiliation

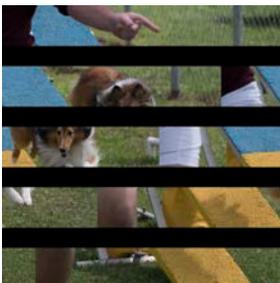
Stroking a dog can lower its heart rate and stress levels. Along with play, this can also encourage the production of hormones, such as oxytocin, and are likely to assist in the strengthening of the bond between dogs and their humans.



Capturing a dog's attention

Dog trainers who enjoy the most success are very good at capturing and retaining dogs' attention.

According to our analysis of YouTube videos, effectively timed food rewards and use of non-speech vocalisations (such as whistles or kissing noises) are useful tools for attracting dog attention.



Consistency

Giving cues (or commands) the same way, makes humans more predictable. This promotes better communication between dog and owner and prevents frustration on both sides.

Factors influencing dogmanship:

Research has shown that certain character traits may predispose an individual to have good (or poor) dogmanship. Some examples are detailed below.

Personality

- Individuals who have high conscientiousness (hardworking and driven) are more likely to have a greater understanding of training principles.
- Individuals scoring higher on neuroticism (tendency to experience negative emotions) may perform poorly in practical tasks with their dogs and underrate their dog's happiness



Emotional intelligence

- Dog owners' ability to recognise and respond to emotions in other people (emotional intelligence) may also have some bearing on their dogmanship.
- Results of a preliminary research project suggest that people high in emotional intelligence may be more sensitive to canine emotional state.





Is our dogmanship pre-ordained? The Reflective Practitioner

Although our personalities or emotional intelligence may predispose us to certain interaction styles, our behaviours are not fixed. Understanding dogmanship teaches us to be reflective practitioners when we interact with our dogs. Being a reflective practitioner means:

1. Observing the behaviour and emotional state of our dogs
2. Being aware of any traits (such as high neuroticism) that may bias our behaviour or understanding
3. Responding to our dog's behaviour in a consistent manner
4. Considering our dog's feedback and adjusting our behaviour accordingly

This approach allows us to hone our dogmanship and tailor our approach to suit a dog's individual needs



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