



Let's Play Fetch!

Fetch is a great game. Some dogs seem to be naturals at it, and others will never find it to be their sport. Some dogs think it's a pretty good activity but need a little training to get all the parts right.

If you can focus on two things while you're training fetch, your dog will be more willing to play, and after a time, thoroughly enjoy the fun.

First, see the situation from a dog's point of view. A dog's bottom line question is "what's in it for me?" Make sure your answer is something he really loves.

Second, be aware of what your body language is telling him. Dogs are masters at observing and interpreting everything we do.

Let's look at four pretty common scenarios and how to improve the dog's performance.

He'll chase the ball, but once he gets it he won't bring it back.

First, start by having at least two balls (tennis balls are a good size for most dogs). Throw the first ball. When he retrieves it and starts back to you, encourage him and show him you have another ball. His interest is in continuing to play, so as soon as he gets back to you, throw the second ball. He'll probably

be excited by that, drop the ball in his mouth and head out after the one you just threw.

Keep it light and fun. Remember to praise and tell him he's a good boy every step of the way.

He gets the ball and heads back to me, but stops a few feet from me and won't come any closer.

What typically happens here is that the dog sees his happy human playmate and is running back to him with the ball. If the dog hesitates, or otherwise disappoints its owner, he'll probably see that smiling face turn sour, maybe hear a harsh reprimand or worse.

To get a dog to approach us we must look approachable. Keep smiling and cajoling even if you don't feel like it. Remember, sometimes faking it gets us to our goal.

He drops the ball but when I go to pick it up he snatches it first.

If your dog is trying to introduce a game of keep-away let him know that you won't play. Turn your back on him to remove yourself. Disengage all taking, eye contact and touching. Many dogs will drop the ball and come around to find you and reinstate the relationship.

While the ball is on the ground, say "Leave it" (again in a natural voice), and immediately praise with "Good boy." Very slowly bend over to pick up the ball, repeating 'Leave it' and "Good boy" over and over.

If your dog just can't take it and impulsively goes for the ball, turn away from him and try again. Be patient—he is learning a new skill

He plays a good game of fetch, but when I try to take the ball out of his mouth, he wants to play tug.

Time to teach the command Drop. Present that second ball you brought right in front of your dog's nose and say "Drop" in a natural voice. Because the dog wants what you've just offered, he'll drop what's in his mouth for something better (a ball that's going to fly through the air!).

Praise him immediately and throw the second ball. His reward is not only to get the ball but to run and play again.

If your dog lies down with the ball he may be telling you he needs a break or is finished with this very aerobic exercise.

As always, be aware of your dog's physical limitations like age, fitness level or teething, etc. Like us, our dogs need to warm up and build strength and stamina over time.