Flyball Training Tips

This page is a collection of training tips that people have used to improve speed, reliability and correct problems. I have not necessarily tried these but have compiled them from *rec.pets.dogs.activities* or the flyball mailing list. In order to give credit where it's due I will attribute both the person who reported the tip as well as the person who originated it (if known).

- Training Videos
- Flyball Books
- On Your Mark, by Mike Randall
  This is still under some construction. Figures aren't all there and it is one big file (200k).
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Easy Retrieve

by Pam Martin, Copyright 1999

A fast and easy method of dog training seems to fit most people's lifestyle these days as we live in a very fast paced world. Our eager to learn little Jack Russell Terrier's (JRT) will agree that fast is fun and the only way to train.

An amazing technique called Backward Chain Training is shaping behaviors using food and positive reinforcements. Backward Chaining is teaching a chain of behaviors in the reverse order of which it will be performed. This approach to training is being chosen by more trainers as we move into the new millennium.

Teaching a retrieve backwards is by far one of the fastest and also an easy method in which you can use on puppies, with little to no stress on them. Most retrieve methods teach the "take it" first, but not so with this method. To teach the Backward Retrieve we will start with the "Out" which is the last command in the chain of commands for a retrieve. Right? "Take it" will be the last command taught which is the first order your dog will hear in the chain of events for a retrieve. Confused yet? Read on to learn more about the Easy Retrieve.

A retrieve will consist of an object (ball, Frisbee, dumbbell) being toss out and on the owners command "Take it" the dog will immediately fetch the object and promptly return to sit in front of owner presenting the fetch object waiting to hear the final command "Out."

Lets began with our canine student, a JRT puppy about five months of age named "Starr." The puppy needs to be hungry, as we will be using soft yummy treats for rewarding the right behaviors. We will also need to use something soft for the puppy to put in her mouth like soft ball; a tug rope or a washcloth rolled up tight bounded by a rubberband like a newspaper. Puppy may be teething and harder objects may cause pain. Only train on days when you see your puppy is using its mouths without reluctance.

We will place a leash on Starr so she can't leave the training session. A soft ball was chosen to be the object of retrieve for this training session. Not a large ball but one that fits in her mouth easily. We will also get down on the floor with her and have treats ready in a shirt pocket. The food is out of sight but I'm sure that Starr knows that treats are near as JRT's have a keen sense of smell. Gently put the ball in her mouth and allow her to immediately expel the ball while you say "Out" and give her big praise and food reward. It's only nature that if you place an object into an untrained dog's mouth chances are high that they will reject it fast. This is not a problem and is quiet normal behavior, just praise and reward. Repeat several times placing object in, then wait for object to be ousted into your hand. Repeat the command "Out" as the act of releasing is performed. More ...

Next step in the chain is for the pup to "Hold it" until she hears the command "Out." As you place the ball in her mouth gently hold her muzzle closed, just enough so the ball won't come out. Hold closed for an instant and then command "Out," quickly praise and reward. Again hold muzzle closed just a second longer, slowly increase the time from one-second then two seconds, three seconds and so on. You can praise her all the while she is holding the ball but make a big fuss over the "Out" command praising her highly.

"Touch it" is not a command, you will never say those words, but it will become a new behavior that Starr will learn to offer separately from the "out" and the "hold" command. Start this session by holding THE BALL high in the air as you are admiring it, as though it has great value. Slowly lower your hand, showing Starr the ball, praise and reward her for simply looking at it, in the beginning. If she makes any contact with the ball that would be great, exactly what we want, praise and reward! Get her excited about seeing the ball in your hand, but do not give any commands yet. Allow her to touch the ball with her nose if she likes. If Starr doesn't try to make contact I will accidentally bump her with the ball in my hand and make a big fuss over the ball touching her nose. After a few session like this, Starr will soon be touching the ball with her nose or pawing at the ball and all the while I'm praising her for her efforts. When I'm sure that she understands that making contact with the ball is right behavior, and in doing so she expects a food reward then we know we're on the right track.

We are now ready to forge onto the next level starting with changing the criteria and making Starr's task a little harder. Begin by lowering the ball to the ground keeping your hand on the ball and wait for Starr to make contact with the ball, praise her "good girl" and reward. Be sure to make this a lot of fun. Once she is doing this behavior reliable the criteria is changed again, a little harder still. Getting the puppy to pick up the ball from off the ground may be the hardest part. This phase of the training is the "Take it" concept.

I will only use the "Take it" command when I'm sure that IT, the "Take" behavior will happen, when I can predict It and It is a reliable act. Example: Every time I put the ball on the floor Starr will readily snatch up the ball. At this time I now can predict a "Take" and put the behavior on cue and add back the remaining commands in the chain of events, the "Hold" and then lastly the "Out."

Now that I have taught the behaviors I need to "proof them" meaning to make the commands stronger by showing Starr under what conditions she must perform them. Where and for how long must she holds the ball and what happens if she drops the ball. This is the trial and error stage where Starr learns the important concepts for each chain of events. Starr learns that she gets nothing if she fails to perform the last part of the behavior, placing the ball in my hand ... the "Out" and in order to do that she must pick up the ball off the ground. Before long you can place the ball on the ground and move away from it, just a step or two in the beginning until you are some distance away. Starr has to now "Go" and "Take" and as she returns command "Sit" in front facing you.

Finally you are able to throw the ball out and as Starr has one thing on her mind and that's the final part the "Out," ending with praise and rewards. Still as in each phase of the Easy Retrieve, it is your job to make sure you keep it simple and fun. Learning can be stressful so remember to always be patience and have fun and soon you could have a little retrieving STAR of your own.

Not letting go of the ball

[Marty Fulton](#) of Animal Inn says:
My BC, Pacer, thought part of the game of flyball was playing tug with the ball at the end of the race. I hold a tennis ball on

a rope for her at the end, and she drops the ball she has retrieved, then grabs the one on the rope. Then the tug game starts! Since she is last dog, this is a real problem, because if she has to rerun, I can't get the ball away. I'm afraid to send her with the ball on the rope, because her foot could get caught in the loop.

Anyway, I spent time *away* from the flyball environment, sitting calmly, giving her the ball, and saying "Leave it" while pinching her jaw and pulling the ball out. I repeated it many, many times before trying it at flyball. This worked fairly well, but she still put up a little struggle. Then the miracle happened! Someone else was running her, and she didn't let go of the ball when told to leave it, so the handler blew in her nose. She immediately dropped the ball and this has never failed to work since! I tell her to "Leave it!" right before blowing in her nose, and now she usually drops it at just the voice command.

[Roseann Vorce](#) adds a variation on this where you blow in the dogs ear instead of blowing on the nose.

[Kevin McNicholas](#) Tornados (BFA) has another tip: In practice at home and with other dogs, you can allow her to have her ball but make the ball you have much more interesting by bouncing it, catching it and throwing it to other dogs. When she drops the ball in her mouth you can throw her ANOTHER ball and give a new command, anything you have not said before. The whole idea is that YOU lose interest in her ball and SHE takes interest in YOURS. The whole idea is that YOU lose interest in her ball and SHE takes interest in YOURS.

Mouthing/Chewing the Ball

Some dogs will mouth or chew the ball all the way back from the box. This isn't really problem except that the dog is usually more concerned about the ball than getting back to the handler which results in a slow recall. To correct this you need to take the problem and the training out of the Flyball training scenario. Start retraining in the garden or in a field. Try putting the ball on a long rope (20 feet), throw the ball 15 feet, when the dog picks up the ball and starts to mouth it, pick up the rope and run as fast as you can away from the dog. Use common sense so that you don't pull the dogs teeth out with the ball. But if the dog is not holding the ball well it should be possible for you to get the ball out of the dogs mouth. If the dog does release the ball continue running away from the dog for another 10 yards.

The idea is that if the dog release its grip on the ball then you end up with it. This shoud hopefully make the dog think about holding a little better.

Improving Speed

[Kevin McNicholas](#) says: What you do at training sessions is far more important than actually having a training session. If you want to increase speed you should have training sessions with that in mind. Compare it to tennis players that wants to improve their service, they would practice serving in training. You need to practice speed training, leave the rest of the training on the back burner for a while or budget your time at each training session: 10 percent individual box training, 10 per cent team practice, 10 percent passing practice and reserve 70 percent of the time for speed training. In my opinion you must take this sort of approach to make any real improvement.

To increase speed you must increase motivation. Each dog is an individual and must be motivated in it's own way. One of the best general methods is to hold the dog at the box end (two rear feet on the box) and get the handler to call the dog back to them, when the dog has got half way back get the handler to run as fast as they can away from the dog, when the dog reaches the handler get the handler to provide a huge reward, ball, game, tug of war, food or whatever the dog wants.

It's a good idea to time all the dogs before you start a speed training regime, handlers are then motivated by watching the improvement of their dogs.

Having said all that it is also important to ensure that dogs are fit, ask the handlers to fill in exercise charts so that thh amount of 'free' and 'on lead' exercise can be monitored. Weight can also slow down the dogs, it can also lead to premature illness and injuries, be very critical of excess weight on any dog that you are expecting to compete as a canine athlete. Have dogs thoroughly checked, xrayed and passed as fit by a vet before undertaking any dog sport, if there is any underlying problem with your dogs health or physiology dog sports will reveal it, so find out first. Consider breed/type differences, just because some border collies will run all day that does not mean all dogs, even border collies will do it. Don't over do training with any dog, especially if it is a dogs that get bored easily. Always end on a good note at the dogs peak performance and most importantly keep it fun for the dogs and handlers.

Slow Outruns

If a dog is slow on the outrun but fast on the recall, try having the handler box load and someone else run the dog. The owner/handler runs back with the dog after it hits the box.

Faster Turns

Buc, a Border Collie on the Happy Hurdlers, is showing a swimmer's turn. With this technique, the dog gets all four legs on the box and gets a much better push off the box with his back legs. (More photos of dogs doing swimmer's turns)

Improving a dog's turn can have a dramatic effect on it's overall time. Remember, on the recall, they only have 15 feet between the box and the first jump.

Foundation Exercises and Channeling

Susan Garret of McCann vs McCann recommends that a good place to start is with a puppy. Whenever you throw a toy to be retrieved be sure you throw it into a corner so the pup must turn tightly to come back to you (the walls prevent a wide arching turn). Also never throw a toy without running away from the puppy -- to encourage the drive back and develop a strong chase instinct.

With adult dogs we set out broad jump board on their sides to form a V around the box so the dog must turn tight--but not so tight that it cause the dog to "back" out of the box to avoid the board. We do alot of one jump and the boxwork or simply the box alone and run away. This constantly patterns a nice tight turn and chase. If the dog tends to ram their face at the box you may want to put up a pylon or other soft barrier about 4-6 feet in front of the box to encourage a sweep by one side of the obstacle to the box and out the other side (cone technique). I also do alot of tug on a toy as soon as the dog comes back with the ball -- have the dog fly into the box and then fly back out to grab a favorite tug toy. The secret to a fast tight box is to have a **very** high, motivated dog going in so they will want to come out even faster. I would say the best boxes I have ever seen in flyball are by BC Sassy on Rocket Relay, BC Cat on Instant Replay, Am Staff Speedy on Rude Dogs and BC L.A. on our team (McCanns).

If you want to set goals with box work start timing the dogs when their nose breaks the plane of the jump before the box and stop the time when they break the plane of the jump coming back. A really good dog can do this (jump to box to jump) in about 1.65 seconds, a great dog can do it in 1.50 seconds and an unconscious dog like Sassy can do it in 1.35 seconds

Cone Technique

Sue Ethier of Rude Dogs has an interesting technique she learned from Marti McCann. A dog that comes straight at the box and hits it hard will turn slower than a dog who hits the box on the turn and banks off it much like a race car or bobsled. To encourage the dog to bank off the box, place a construction style cone about 6-8 feet in front of the box, depending on the dog. This idea is to have the dog approach the box already going into a turn; sometimes the cone needs to be moved according to the dog's approach. We just play around with it a bit until we find a spot that seems to help.

On Lead Technique

Russ Peterman recommends teaching them to get off the box as soon as they hit it. Rather than "pulling" them off the box, however, try using a short lead (about 6'). Get down to their level and as soon as they hit the box, pull them around in an arcing motion. Don't allow them to get the ball if they miss it. Just keep the momentum. Once instilled in their mind, they'll learn to scoop the ball as it comes out of the box, and come off the box more smoothly.

Conditioned Reinforcement

Mike Randall teaches the dog a conditioned reinforcement word (i.e. "ready"). As the dog hits the box, the box loader gives the conditioned reinforcement "ready" and then throws the ball in the opposite direction. Normally he does this without jumps. In competition, the box loader can give the dog a conditioned reinforcement.

Yell and Chase

The **Rocket Relay** uses the following technique. Have someone stand beside/behind the box loader. When the dog comes to the box, this person yells **"GO!"** and chases the dog back to the line. Denise Neuner of **Smack Dab** tried this with her Border Collie and reported that it worked great.

Offset Holes

Some people swear by multihole Flyball boxes where one or two of the holes is offset from center. The theory is that having the hole to the side encourages the dog to already be turned when taking the ball. It way also encourage a swimmer's turn by having a few more inches in which to get the back legs on the box. This is by no means universally accepted. Some people feel that the offset holes encourage a wide turn and others are concerned about the dogs getting their feet caught in the other holes.

Faster Returns

Finish Line

Your dog should think that the finish line is well beyond the actual finish line. Some dogs tend to slow down when they get close to their handler, make sure this happens *after* they cross the finish line.

Restrained Recalls

Take the dog down to the box and have the boxloader hold the dog. The handler goes back (well past the finish line) and has the dog run to them. We always start off practice with a few restrained recalls per dog.

Kevin McNicholas recommends a technique he learned from **Dianne McWhinney**:

Teach the dogs the restrained recall from the box, using the box as a sort of starting block. A holder (that the dog is familiar with) holds the dog by the collar and gently encourages the dog's rear legs on to the box. The handler is now at the other end of the course yelling the dog's name, showing it balls on ropes, or anything else that motivates that particular dog. This is to encourage the dog to run towards them at speed. Runners can be positioned on either side of the lane to chase the dog back or to let the dog chase them. Not all dogs like being chased, some prefer to chase.

We also use a series of chasers with some dogs, so that you get a relay of humans about 10 - 15 feet apart, chasing the dog along the lane.

With slow returning dogs we will not allow it to have an out run to the box until it's return speed is consistently improved. You will need to get an accurate time for the dogs return from the box and also the dogs time to the box and log the results.

Pull the dog out of competitions, practise *only* returns from the box and when the dogs time returning equals, gets close, or exceeds it's logged outrun time, then start doing complete runs again.

Passing

Some people recommend that dogs learn passing by giving them more room on the first/last jump. One way to do this is to remove one side of your jumps and place them such that you will have up to 48" between the sides. The sides can be brought closer together in small increments as the dog(s) progress.

Jean Matushek uses the following method for teaching inexperienced dogs to pass each other:

First (and most importantly) - make sure the dog has a reliable, motivated recall. Give the dog every reason to want to

return to the handler as fast as possible. Use treats, toys, chase or tug games to get that dog focused and back to the handler. Hopefully, well before you even start with passing, you've done a lot of motivated recalls down the lane of jumps (ie. box to handler). Many people make the mistake of grabbing their dogs when they get to them, but please don't let 'the game' end in such a manner. Praise and play with the dog to keep him excited about returning to you - don't just grab him and drag him back down to do another run (can be a big demotivator....)

Set up two racing lanes separated by baby gates and several feet (at first) and just practice motivated recalls with dogs running in opposite directions. Start out with one designated holder at each end holding a dog and instruct the owner/handlers to run down the lane to the opposite end and call their dogs, but not at the same time. Release the second dog only after the first has reached its owner. Some dogs will be distracted during the first couple of tries, but if you remember to keep this exercise fun and motivational, the focus falls into place. Some dogs will watch with great interest/concern as another dog comes racing in its general direction. Do not release these dogs until attention returns down the lane to its owner. If you release a dog whose head is turned toward another dog....simple physics: the body has to follow where the head is headed. Much better to wait the dog out and release it when his head is aimed at its handler. The 'freedom' to run is its own reward. Only practice dogs in pairs to begin with until each dog indicates that it will be reliable in this particular phase. Once the dog shows that it is keen to return to its owner despite the presence of a running dog in the other lane, then you can practice simultaneous releases from opposite ends of the lanes so that the dogs are running in opposite directions at the same time ('passing' each other along the way). As long as the dogs remain focused on the recall, you can start to move the lanes closer together until you have them side by side.

A totally separate exercise teaches the dogs 'in line' to honor the dog that is running. The running dog practices its recall (again I prefer to use baby gates) while the 'in line' dogs practice behaving themselves. Start with the 'in line' dogs lined up about 10 - 15 feet away from but parallel to the 'recall zone'. They don't have to be on a sit stay or down stay, just behaving themselves (ie. not lunging at the running dog). After each recall, each 'in line' dog that exhibits such self-control gets a quick release (after the runner has successfully run by) with praise and play and maybe even a treat and gets to take one step toward the lane. The barky lungey dogs need a little more work (try harder to focus the dog with treats or toys or whatever or increase the distance from the lane - remember, we don't want to worry the running dog...).

Only when each of these exercises are mastered do we start to put them together. It does require a little preplanning to figure out how many holders you'll need on each end and in what order you'll need to line up. The beauty of it is that you can begin to work on passing from day one rather than waiting until the dogs are 'doing flyball' before addressing the issue of passing.

Remember, dogs learn what they 'practice' and if you let them 'practice' lunging at other dogs, this will become a part of their game as they have come to understand it. If they practice the correct behaviors from the very beginning, that will become part of their game as they come to understand it.

Obviously not THE answer to passing. Just what I have come to support based on my experience. Also, just a quick summary; doesn't address every step in detail nor does it address the "Yeah, but what if..."s. And I still have people who will try to argue with me that training with gates is counterproductive (I won't argue - I'll just continue to do what works as long as it's fun for the dogs and their owners).

Hesitant Releases

Sometimes a dog hesitates on the release, usually by pausing and looking back at the handler or even spinning around. Sometimes this is due to separation anxiety, wanting to chase the returning dog, or wanting the reward before going out and back. There are several possible causes for this and things recommended to try and solve it:

- If the handler talks while releasing the dog, it's attention is focused on the handler. Try having the handler remain quiet and get the dog to focus on the box loader.

- The handler pushes the dog to get it to go - have the handler remove their hands and limit hand motion that might distract the dog.

- Make sure the handler keeps "rewards" out of site until the dog has returned. You may need another person to hold onto the "reward" until the dog is released.

- Have someone else hold the dog and position the handler 10 ft from the box, have the handler call the dog and let it do the box, when the dog has the ball, handler and dog return at speed.

- Get the handler to throw the incentive to the box loader who picks it up and pretends to turn it into a ball, which is then loaded into the box. When the dog gets the ball and returns over the line, the handler (magically) produces another incentive.

- If you think a problem may develop but you decide to try this, spend a lot of time transferring the dogs attention from the toy to the ball both on and off the practice area.

  Off the training field, play games with the dog with a 3 to 1 ratio of toy and then ball on rope. On the training field, focus the dog on the box by throwing the toy to the box loader who would then spend up to one minute bouncing a ball on the box, throwing it in the air, and catching it and at the same time calling the dog, by the time the dog is released the dog should have forgotten the fact that the toy is at the box and be tuned into the ball.

- The handler should hold the dog and when it is released start running towards the box, the dog will be unlikely to hang around spinning on it's own.

- There is also the possibility that a dog will spin on the line because they are chasing the returning dog. Try running the dog first and throwing a ball to the loader to focus the dog. Loud box loaders can sometimes help focus dogs.

Jumping Too High

- Nigel Bouckley says to use a small "hula hoop" fixed to the jumps. This forces the dogs to jump through it. Then gradually move the height of the hoop down, thus "flattening" the jumping pattern of the dog.

- Mike Randall says:
  1. Work on restrained recalls over low jumps (I suggest you use board jumps set 10 feet apart in lieu of flyball jumps). If necessary start with one jump, add a second, third and fourth.
  2. Use a target (i.e., toy, ball, sock) as reinforcement, remembering to keep the target low. Too many people "wave" the target too high, often over their head, causing the dog to lift its head, making it impossible to see both the jumps and the target, thus the dog will jump higher than necessary.
  3. When dogs carry an object (i.e., a tennis ball) in their mouth they tend to jump higher than necessary to clear the jump. Therefore, first work on restrained recalls to condition the dog to jump no higher than necessary with out a tennis ball. Master the jumps first, then work on the return run.
  4. Props (i.e., hoops) that force desired behavior or prevent undesirable behavior are not effective in shaping or conditioning desired behavior.

Introducing New Dogs to the Flyball Box

Bob Long recommends the following:

I start my classes with jump work in one area of the training grounds and box work in a totally separate area. I don't mix them together for three or four weeks. If your handlers insist on "box work" and you do not have a safe box ready yet, teach them the "step" exercise. I have used a carpet square with a firm backing leaned up against a sponge. Put an instructor behind the carpet square and the dog and handler six feet in front of it. With a ball visible to the dog in the instructors hand, encourage the dog forward with a word like "step". When the dog touches the carpet square, throw the ball to the dog. This is a basic behavior shaping exercise with the ball as the reward. Eventually the dog should pounce on the carpet square to get the ball. When your box is ready, transfer the behavior to the box by leaning the carpet square on the front of the box. Continue to use the instructor to toss the ball until the dog is happy with the presence of the box, then let the box throw the ball. At this point you can dispense with the carpet square.

Kevin McNichola adds:

I have a variation on the carpet square idea for conditioning dogs in the early stages of Flyball training.

Basically you get a large cardboard box from a store, the sort of box that a TV is packaged in would be ideal. Using heavy duty tape and a sharp knife, cut the cardboard box into a sort of flyball box shape with an angled front, cut an exit hole in the front. Leave a gap at the back so that you can reach inside and put a ball through the exit hole. Paint the front of the box the same colour as the box you are likely to use in the future.

The 'box' can be used indoors and dogs can be trained to become 'box' obsessive in their own homes, family members can become box loaders. It will not be long before the dog is bashing the cardboard box to get it's ball out.

Holding the ball

Sometimes a dog doesn't always hold onto the ball and drops it on the recall. Kevin McNicholas recommends the following:

> *I have seen this problem many times and it is usually the newer teams that have dogs that drop balls close to the last jump before the finish line.*
>
> *A few potential problems should be sorted out:*

1. Let the dog run on it's own and make sure **all** the dogs and handlers are away from the racing lanes, I mean 20 yards away. See how the dog performs with **no** distractions.

2. Handlers often **face** their inexperienced dogs when they return. Using the above system, get the handler to run as fast as possible away from the dog, keeping their back facing towards the dog, until it crosses the finish line. Dogs that are chasing will often **hold** better and longer but the handler must have the confidence to run away without looking.

3. Many dogs drop balls (or anything else) because the owners allow the dogs to 'spit' out things which the 'dog' has trained the owner to pick up, and throw again. Never never never accept a retrieve article, except if it placed in your hand by the dog. This can take some time to retrain, but it will improve the dogs holding skills.

4. Train the dog in the following way. The handler and the handlers family must **ignore** the dog for at least half an hour before a 'hold' training session. When the hold training starts the dog is thrown an article (ball, toy, cardboard tube, anything it can pick up). When the dog picks it up the handler starts to 'talk' 'praise' and generally be communicative with the dog, **if** the dog drops the article, the handler becomes very quite and totally (within reason) ignores the dog. The dog will 'work out fot itself' that holding an article 'turns' the handler 'on' and dropping it turns them 'off'. Use this system at least 2 times per day. Just before meals is often a good time to play this game.

5. When the dog eventually starts to hold the article to get attention from the owners, instead of taking the article, start gently stroking and patting the dog on it's side. Only when the dog is holding the article for about 30 seconds and being praised, stroked and patted should you think about taking the article from the dog.

Proofing Exercises

Proof for loose balls by piling them up along the jumps or dropping them as the dogs run by. Make the jumps a little crooked, or have a game of frisbee going next to the box. Bait some kong toys or sterile bones and put them on the course.

You want to have people sitting where the line and box judges are going to be to get the dogs used to having someone there; a lot of times this can distract new dogs.

Make sure you practice with multiple lanes have have the dogs switch lanes. Practice at a different location and if possible with another team.

Breaking Boards on the Jumps

If you want to make your jumps splinter proof, just wrap a layer of white duct tape, thinly, around the 1 and 2 inch boards.

Matting

For best footing good, wide rib, RUBBER matting is recommended since it offers extremely good traction. These typically run $400 - $600 per 75 ft. roll. Mats should be kept clean for best traction. Lisa Hamilton reports that Total Recall spent 3 hours mopping every roll 2 days prior to their tournament and then re-mopped them when they were in place on Friday night, and cleaned the box and release point areas with an alcohol based rubber cleaner that took up a large portion of the old residue from saliva, dirt etc. Any alcohol based cleaner should work, but it would be smart to test a small area first to make sure that whatever you are using leaves no residue on the matting.

To keep boxes in place, many teams use **Benchmate** which is a soft, pliable matting used by woodworkes to hold fine pieces in place in situations that a vise can't be used. It can be purchased in hardware stores for about $4 for a 2 ft by 4ft piece.

A different method is to cover the bottom of a the box with a product called **Spantex**. It is painted on an normally used as a deck or patio covering.

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Catch Me!

Objectives: To allow your dog to be caught and handled in a chaotic environment. To decrease the chance your dog will play keep-away in an emergency situation.

Steps:
1) You must have a recall command already taught.
2) Have someone hold your dog by the collar. Standing close by, show your dog a treat or toy to get his focus and attention, then turn and run away, calling their name.
3) As your dog gets close, spin around facing him and crouch down.
4) Offer the toy or treat as incentive, but keep it close enough to you so that your dog has to appraoch the vee of your legs as you are crouching. Use a happy voice if your dog seems wary.
5) Once your dog has at least reached the outer distance of your knees, reward with the treat or toy.
6) During each training session, ask your dog to come in a little closer to the vee of your legs. Reward any motion closer to you.
7) Once your dog is eagerly coming all the way in, start slipping a finger under the bottom of the collar. Reward the dog as you fondle his collar. DO NOT grab a hold yet.
8) Once the dog is allowing you to touch, grab (though not pull), and fondle the collar without moving away or showing any other sign of shyness or hesitancy, only reward the dog if you have a strong grip on the collar.
9) Now, alternate the sessions with you grabbing the collar and moving the dog away and grabbing the collar and quickly releasing to continue the session.

Remember!: Keep the training sessions short and always end on a good note while your dog is still enjoying the game. Be careful that the number of times you catch the dog and end the game or move him away is far lower than the number of times you catch the dog and then quickly release him to continue playing. You want your dog to always think this is a game!

NEVER use this game with a negative tone. You DO NOT want your dog to associate coming to you with punishment or fear. NEVER call your dog to you in order to punish him.

By consistently calling your dog to you with his name and turning to run away if your dog loses focus on you or seems reluctant to come, as well as always making your dog come to you and you never chasing your dog to get him, you can create a come command that can save your dog's life. Make come less of a command and more of a game – a game of chase and catch me – and your dog will be more likely to perform his come in highly distracting environments and with much more enthusiasm.

Variations:
A) If crouching is difficult for you, try running away to a chair and sitting. Spread your legs a bit so that the dog still has to come in close to you to get rewarded.

The "Clicked" Retrieve

Objective: To create the perfect "dead ball" retrieve.

Steps:
I am going to assume your dog does not know how to retrieve a ball. Even if your dog has played fetch before, start at step one and work through the steps in order. This game works best if your dog has been clicker trained, but can work just as well if you use a marker word like "Yes" instead of a click.

1) Start with your dog on a short a leash in a very boring environment.
2) Sit at your dog's level on the leash giving your dog about two-three feet of room to move.
3) Hold a ball in your hand. Whenever your dog looks at the ball, even glances in the direction, click and reward with a tasty, small, bite-sized treat. Repeat in quick succession 10 times. End the session.
4) Once your dog is consistently looking at the ball, move the ball in different directions. If your dog follows the ball with his eyes, click and reward. Repeat in quick succession 10 times. End the session.
5) Once your dog is following a moving ball with a great deal of focus and intent, hold the ball still and wait. If you are patient enough, your dog will eventually move forward and touch the ball with his nose or put his mouth on the ball. Click and reward. If you have waited at least two minutes and your dog has made no move to touch the ball, move the ball directly in front of your dog's nose and wait another minute. If there is still no response, return to step 4. Have your dog touch the ball with his nose or mouth in quick succession 10 times. End the session.
6) If your dog is touching the ball with his nose every time, pushing the ball a bit with his enthusiasm, stop clicking every time and wait a second. Your dog will probably push harder and harder. If you are patient enough, it is a good chance your dog will eventually put his mouth on the ball. If not, return to step 5.
7) Once your dog is putting the ball in his mouth, wait a split second and then let go of the ball and immediately click right as your dog drops the ball. Give a lots of treats one at a time quickly and repeat at least 10 times. End the session.
8) Repeat step 7 for a few days. You are teaching your dog a drop.
9) Now, is the time for patience. Offer the ball to your dog. When he puts his mouth on it, loosen your grip some, but do not let go. Have your dog stand still with the ball in his mouth for a bit longer than in step 7, then release and click as he drops the ball. Reward and repeat.
10) Begin alternating longer and shorter holds on the ball before you click and your dog drops the ball. Also, begin holding onto to the ball less and less. Slowly begin moving your hand away from the ball and still asking your dog to hold onto it until you click. Your goal at this point is for your dog to hold the ball in his mouth until you click or mark the behavior.
11) From this point, as long as your dog will hold the ball in his mouth until you click. Toss the ball a few feet away, hold your dog until the ball stops moving, then send your dog to the ball and have them bring it back. Your dog should always bring the ball back to you and drop it either at your feet or in your hand when clicked, marked, or told "drop."

Remember!: In all dog training, there is the tendendancy for a dog to move back a step or two before a huge leap in comprehension. Patience is the key. Wait for your dog to make the intuitive leap and it will happen. Some dogs progress more quickly than others while training the retrieve.

Look At Me

Objective: To increase your dog's focus on you.

Steps:
1) Ask your dog to sit in front of you.
2) Show your dog a tasty treat.
3) Move the treat slowly from your dog's nose to the middle of your forehead, between your eyes..
4) When your dog looks at you, mark and reward with the treat. Repeat 15 times. End the session.
5) Next training session, repeat steps 1-4 five times, then move the treat from your dog's nose in a different direction – not your forehead. The dog will more than likely follow the treat.
6) Wait until your dog looks away from the treat and at you, then mark and reward. Repeat 10 times. End the session.
7) Continue moving the treat in different directions, at different heights, and placing in different locations nearby. Reward your dog for looking away from the treat and at you. Increase the dog's external distractions as your dog becomes predictable in an environment.
8) If you dog stops looking at you, step back and return to moving the treat to your forehead until your dog is again looking at you consistently.

Remember!: You are rewarding your dog for focusing on you. Don't be surprised to find your dog paying more attention to you as you train this trick and afterwards. Even when your dog is performing this trick well, continue to practice and reward your dog at least once a week.

Variation:
A) If your dog is reactive (repsonds with barking, lunging, growling, or similar to other dogs), start at a non-reactive distance (at the distance your dog can see or hear other dogs, but does not respond with any of the above behaviors) rewarding your dog whenever he makes eye contact. As you progress and you notice your dog paying more attention to you than the other dogs, move a bit closer and begin again. The idea here is for your dog to not show any reactive behaviors. If your dog is showing reactice behaviors, you are too close, move back.
   a. For reactive dogs, you want to make everything a game. Encourage your dog to look at the other dogs, then back at you. Reward your dog when he looks back at you. Once your dog is performing reliably, you can give this "trick" a name.
   b. To name this "trick," start with your dog looking at another dog. Say, "where's the dog?" Then, wait till your dog looks back at you and reward. Repeat as often as necessary until you can say, "where's the dog?" and your dog will look around to find a dog, then looks right back at you.
   c. By changing the reactivity into a game, you change your dog's mental process. Instead of reacting to other dogs, now your dog looks forward to seeing other dogs and playing this game. Your dog is focused and calm instead of wild and crazy.

Monkey in the Middle

Objective: To teach your dog a quick recall.

Steps:
1) Have two people your dog is comfortable around standing about 6 feet apart.
2) One person holds your dog facing the other person.
3) The person not holding the dog calls the dog with his name. The person holding the dog releases the dog. The other person catches and rewards the dog.
4) Repeat, calling your dog back and forth between you and your friend. Always remember to catch your dog and hold onto the collar, before rewarding your dog.
5) Each time your dog completes three comes, both people take a step backwards increasing the distance.

Remember!: Keep the game fun. 10 repetitions three times a day is good. Squat down or sit while playing this game.

Variations:
A) Have one person hold your dog in a non-restrictive way. You stand facing your dog with either his favorite toy or treat in hand. Show your dog the toy or treat and then, calling his name, turn around a run away. Have the person holding your dog count to three then let your dog go. Wait until your dog catches up to you before turning around and rewarding your dog with the toy or treat.
B) Add a jump between you and your partner. Start in a hallway where the dog has no other option but to jump the jump. Call your dog back and forth. As your dog gets comfortable with this activity, move somewhere else in the house and continue. If your dog starts to run around the jump, either move closer to the jump until the dog jumps everytime or move back to the hallway. Only reward your dog if they take the jump.

Get It!

Objectives: To increase your dog's drive to leave you. To create a life-saving, quick response come command with your dog's name.

Steps:
1) Start by holding onto your dog in a non-restrictive way – around the chest, with a harness, by the hips, etc. Do not hold your dog by the collar so that he is choking when he pulls. You want your dog to pull in this exercise.
2) Show your dog a treat or his favorite toy.
3) Throw the treat or toy about five feet away. Wait until the toy or treat stops moving.
4) Chant "Ready, Set, Get It!" to your dog while gently pulling back so that you feel him tense and pull forward slightly in anticipation.
5) Release your dog on "Get It!"
6) As soon as your dog gets to the treat (and eats it) or the toy (and either picks it up or touches it with his nose) call your dog back to you with his name only. If needed, turn away from him and run in the opposite direction as you call him to get him to pay attention to you and come.
7) Make your dog come to you or catch you before you treat him with another treat or a game with another toy. Do not chase your dog to get him back to you.
8) Repeat. Add more distance (by 6 inch increments) between you and the treat/toy every three times your dog is completely successful. If your dog takes a step back, don't worry, just move closer next time and try again.

Remember!: Keep the training sessions short and always end on a good note while your dog is still enjoying the game. One of the best suggestions is to play this game while watching TV. During the show, ignore your dog until the commercials begin, then train. Stop training and ignore your dog again when the show returns from the commercial break.

By consistently calling your dog to you with his name and turning to run away if your dog loses focus on you or seems reluctant to come, as well as always making your dog come to you and you never chasing your dog to get him, you can create a come command that can save your dog's life. Make come less of a command and more of a game – a game of chase and catch me – and your dog will be more likely to perform his come in highly distracting environments and with much more enthusiasm.

Variations:
A) Once your dog is consistently leaving you without hesitation and returning to you quickly when you call his name, add a small jump between you and the treat or toy. This works best in a hallway with a jump that fills the hallway, so your dog only has one option and cannot choose to ignore the jump.
B) At meal times, place your dog's food dish at the end of the room, set up and hold your dog like above and send your dog to his meal instead of one treat. This only works if your dog gets regular meals and loves his food.
C) If your dog retrieves reliably, have your dog bring the ball or toy back to your hand before treating him for coming when called.