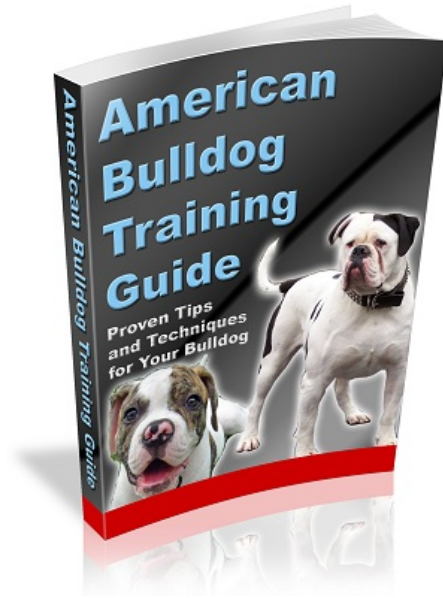


American Bulldog Training Guide



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Introduction

Because of their perceived stubbornness and high levels of energy people tend to think that American Bulldogs are hard to train, and for an inexperienced and uninformed trainer they would be right. With a firm hand, some convenient tips and a bit of guidance almost any trainer can successfully assimilate a new American Bulldog into their home. Because American Bulldogs were traditionally bred to protect property and catch livestock they tend to be exceptional guard dogs and fiercely loyal and protective of their family. Being bred as a working dog also means that American Bulldogs have a great deal of energy which can make the training process extremely difficult unless you can effectively channel that energy into other activities.

Recommended tools and materials

- **Appropriate sized leash-** Not only do you need to make sure your leash is long enough but you must also ensure that it is thick enough. American Bulldogs have a good deal of strength and can easily snap a leash that is too thin or made of flimsy material.
- **Appropriate sized collar or harness-** American Bulldogs traditionally have thick necks which, in addition to making it hard to find an adequate collar, can make it extremely easy for them to slip out of their collars. Until you get your American Bulldog fully trained it may be a good idea to use a harness instead of a collar in order to prevent any unintended escapes.
- **Treats to reinforce good behavior-** Treats are a great way to positively reinforce you American Bulldog during training.
- **Toys-** American Bulldogs have been historically bred as a work dog and as such tend to have a good deal of energy. Providing your dog with toys will give it an outlet through which to expel all of that excess energy. Toys are also recommended if you plan on leaving your dog alone for any significant length of time.
- **Correction collar (Optional but recommended) -** Also known as a choke collar, correction collars are not always necessary but they can be extremely useful for breeds such as American Bulldogs that traditionally have a high level of energy.
- **Pee pads (optional) -** American Bulldogs are generally more stubborn and harder to housebreak than many other types of dogs so you may want to think about using pee pads in order to make the process easier and more manageable for you.
- **Crate or kennel (optional) -** This will depend on whether or not you want to crate train your dog. Because American Bulldogs are a bit energetic you may want to seriously consider crate training your dog if you plan on leaving them in the house unsupervised while you are at work.

Types of Training

The various types of training include potty training, house training, crate training, socialization training, behavioral training, command training, obedience training and performance training. The different types of dog training can all be separated into three different groups, or levels, based on difficulty and the stage of the dog's development in which the training should take place. The three groups of training are basic, intermediate, and advanced, all three of which will vary in difficulty and length depending on the type of dog you have, the amount of time available and the amount of effort you put into the training.

Basic Training

The first level of training that you should introduce your American Bulldog to is basic training. During basic training you will establish a foundation of rules and proper behaviors from which all other training will be built upon. During this phase you will also begin to gradually build a bond with your American Bulldog based on trust, loyalty and obedience. During basic training, in order to adequately build that bond between master and dog, it is recommended that you avoid physical punishment for bad behavior at all cost.

Potty Training- Developmentally this is not the most important part of your dogs training, but for obvious reasons it is going to be one of the first types of training you introduce your American Bulldog to.

Potty training tips for your American Bulldog-

- Keep an eye on your American Bulldog. If it starts sniffing around like it is looking for a place to use the bathroom, quickly take the dog outside, or to a pee pad if you are using one, so that that your pup will know where he/she can and cannot use the bathroom.

- Take your Bulldog out at regular intervals, increasing in length as the dog gets older, so that your pup will have adequate opportunity to use the bathroom outside. Establishing a routine for yourself and your American Bulldog is one of best ways to potty train your dog.

- Consider crate training your dog. Dogs usually will avoid using the bathroom where they sleep and eat so if you crate train your dog, not only do you have a place to put him/her while you are away from the house but you also have a place to put them where they won't used the potty.

-Be Patient. The earlier you start the potty training process for your young pup the more frustrating it is going to be over time. Mall puppies cannot hold their bladder or bowels for very long, so they are bound to have an accident inside the house, even when you think training is going great.

- Consider hiring a dog walker. Establishing a set routine during the potty training process can be extremely hard, especially if you have work or other commitments during the day. If you can afford the added expenditure, hiring someone to take your dog out a few times a day while you are gone can make the potty training process much easier.

House Training- Although most people think that house training and potty training are the same thing, but the two are actually quite different. House training teaches your dog how to act and behave while he is in your home, which includes not using the bathroom in the house. House training your American Bulldog may not seem very important when it is a little pup, but as it gets bigger you will be glad that you set down these rules and guidelines.

House training tips for your American Bulldog-

-Do not let your dog on the furniture. This rule applies to all dogs, not just American bulldogs. If you let your American Bulldog sit or sleep on the furniture in your house as a pup it will be next to impossible to curb that behavior when he is grown.

- Set boundaries. Make sure your American Bulldog knows that everything in the house is yours and that there are certain things it is allowed to play with and certain things it isn't. If you get in the habit of letting your American Bulldog chew on old socks or shoes as a puppy when he/she gets older it will be extremely difficult to correct this behavior. Setting boundaries also applies to rooms or areas in your home that you may not want your American Bulldog to visit such as a nursery or office.

-Start Early. Unlike potty training, House training can begin the day you bring your American Bulldog home. If you teach your Bulldog pup what it is and is not allowed to do as a puppy you will have less problems with your dog as it gets older. Sure it may be cute to let the adorable ball of fur sit in your lap or lay on the furniture while it is a small puppy but as it gets bigger and starts to chew on things it won't be so cute anymore, and by then it will be nearly impossible to completely correct this behavior.

Crate Training- Whether or not your dog should be crate trained is completely up to you. Many people decide not to crate train their dogs because they think that it is somehow inhumane but in all actuality crate training is extremely beneficial to your dog and if done the right way can be a great investment of time. Crate training your dog also comes in handy during other types of

basic and intermediate training because you can use the crate for both positive and negative reinforcement.

Crate training tips for your American Bulldog-

-Do not use the crate as a method of punishment until your American Bulldog is fully trained. If you use the crate as a way to punish your dog's bad behavior your Bulldog will begin to associate the crate with punishment and negative feelings which will undermine the entire process.

-Start early, but do it gradually. When crate training your American Bulldog it is best if you start as early as possible but you also have to make sure that you don't try to do everything at one time. The best way to crate train your new American Bulldog would be to introduce it to the crate gradually and to not force your pup into accepting the new crate. Although it may take a bit longer, allowing your Bulldog to gradually get used to the crate is the best way to ensure that the dog is comfortable with it.

-Leave toys in the crate with your American Bulldog. American Bulldogs are extremely active and require something to take their attention. If you leave your Bulldog in the crate without any toys it may start to whimper or whine, which is behavior you do not want your dog to exhibit. Leaving toys in your Bulldog's crate also makes the crate seem more inviting to your dog because the easiest way to crate train a dog is to make the dog actually want to be in the crate.

-Do not isolate your American Bulldog while in the crate. Make sure you place the crate in a part of the house that is not isolated from you or your family members. People tend to put a dog crate in a room where nobody can see it because the crate is an eyesore but this can lead your dog to feel isolated when in the crate. Chances are if your Bulldog feels isolated from the rest of the family when it is in the crate it will not want to go into it.

Socialization Training – Due to their appearance and perceived aggression issues, socialization training is extremely important for your American Bulldog. Your American Bulldog must also have socialization so it knows how to act and behave around human and other dogs. It is especially important that dogs with high energy levels like American Bulldogs know how to behave around humans and other dogs because their playfulness and fast paced movements can often be perceived as aggressive behavior or lead to unintentional injuries, especially around kids.

-Start early. Like most types of basic training it is best to start socialization training as early as possible. The earlier you start your American Bulldog on socialization training the more time you will have to single out unwanted behaviors in social settings and correct them. It is also

important to start early because when you bulldog is a pup he poses much less of a threat to people and other dogs than he would if he were full grown. If you take a full grown American Bulldog into your home and he has not had socialization training you should be prepared for an extremely difficult time until you get your new Bulldog properly trained.

-Socialize your American Bulldog with other dogs as early and as frequently as possible. The more interaction your dog has with other dogs the more comfortable and less aggressive it will be in situations with other dogs. Taking your American Bulldog to the dog park or some other neutral environment where it can socialize with other dogs is great way to let your dog get used to being around other pets in a comfortable environment. Until your Bulldog is fully trained you should avoid taking him/her to any location where other dogs are present and may become territorial, such as a friend's house. Chances are your Bulldog will have a good bit of energy when you take it to the dog part and this energy can occasionally frighten people or other dogs. To avoid such situations you may want to tire your dog out by taking it for a run before you go to the park.

-Curb aggressive behavior as soon as you notice it. Part of socialization training entails that you should not let your American Bulldog exhibit any aggressive behavior towards people or other animals. If you let your dog get away with aggressive behavior it will begin to think that kind of behavior is appropriate or even desired. If you have children you should be especially adamant about curbing aggressive behavior from you American Bulldog. Until your Bulldog is fully trained and assimilated into your family you should be wary of any physical interaction between your American Bulldog and your small children.

-Avoid bringing other pets into your home if possible. American Bulldogs are bred as guard dogs and as such are naturally protective of their family and their territory. Until you can adequately stifle your dog's protective behavior you should avoid bringing other pets into your home.

Alpha Training – Alpha training can best be described as training your dog to recognize you as the dominate authority in the house, or in other words as the Alpha male of the house. During Alpha training it is best if you work in other types of training so that the lessons get subliminally ingrained into your American Bulldog's brain without you having to aggressively assert your dominance over it. Although they are at times stubborn American Bulldogs are also fiercely loyal to their family so Alpha training should be rather easy once your dog feels it is a part of your family.

Alpha training tips for your American Bulldog-

-Hit the ground running and never look back. Unlike most types of training which end after the training is complete, Alpha training never ends because it is never really complete.

Throughout your companionship with your new American Bulldog you must constantly reinforce the Alpha dog mentality you establish during Alpha training. After a bit of time many people begin to get comfortable and complacent with their dogs and they let things slide rather than addressing them and correcting that behavior. If you don't constantly reinforce your Alpha status in your home your Bulldog will gradually try to reassert its dominance. In reality this is more of a training phase for the owner than it is the dog because if you don't act like the pack leader your dog will not recognize you as such.

- Disguise alpha training as other types of training whenever possible. If your American Bulldog knows that you are actively trying to assert your dominance over him/her it is likely to push back, much in the way as a teenage does in the same situation. Establishing your Alpha dominance over your Bulldog is best done over time and as stealthily as possible. The good thing about Alpha training is that most other types of training actively reinforce what you are trying to accomplish so in many cases an owner can become leader of the pack through other types of training without the dog or the owner aware of what is going on.

-Ensure that your Bulldog knows that other members of your family are its pack leader as well. In essence your American Bulldog must acknowledge and feel as if he is the lowest rung of the totem pole, at the very bottom of your family's hierarchy. It may sound harsh, but establishing such an environment will allow your family and your American Bulldog to live in a much more happy environment. You especially have to watch your Bulldog around your small children because chances are it will try to assert its dominance over them and doing so will undermine your overall authority in the house. If your American Bulldog understands and accepts the social order within the house you will have much less behavioral problems than you would if it were constantly trying to establish itself as pack leader. Alpha training is also a useful way to curb aggressive behavior from your American Bulldog.

-Consider taking some classes, with or without your dog. The hardest part of alpha training is constantly acting the part of the Alpha leader in the house. By taking classes from a knowledgeable instructor you will learn how to better assert your dominance in the house with the correct commands, body language and tone of voice. For example it is best to use a deep firm voice when ordering your American Bulldog to do something, even if you do not naturally have a deep voice.

Intermediate Training

Intermediate training essentially takes what your dog has already learned and builds upon it and reinforces it. For the most part intermediate training ties into the Alpha training that

you have already given your American Bulldog. Make sure you have established Alpha dominance over your Bulldog before you concentrate solely on Intermediate training. Elements from all three types of intermediate training can and should be introduced to your dog at the Basic training level. Intermediate can be extremely stressful so you should be prepared to be patient with your Bulldog so that you do not lose your cool. Although it may be tempting, you should never use physical punishment in any aspect of American Bulldog training.

Command Training – Command training is a type of training you begin when you bring your new American Bulldog home for the first time. This type of training entails training your dog to listen to and obey vocal or physical cues when issued by you or a family member. Most command training is done in conjunction with other types of training because your Bulldog must be able to recognize and obey your commands in order for all training to be effective. By this phase in the intermediate training process both you and your dog should be familiar with such basic commands such as sit, stay, come and heel and what needs to be done when they are issued.

Command training tips for your American Bulldog-

-This is where the treats come in! Be sure to reward your American Bulldog with treats on occasion when it correctly carries out one of your commands. Like in most phases of training, command training will be much more successful if you use positive rather than negative reinforcement. Instead of punishing your Bulldog for something it did wrong it is much more effective to reward it for something it did right. In the absence of treats a soft pat on the head or scratch behind the ears with a few encouraging words will also suffice.

-Practice often and review what your American Bulldog has learned. Your dog isn't going to learn everything in one session so before you start you should resign yourself to practicing and reviewing these commands a good deal for the immediate future. When teaching your Bulldog a new command you should remember that repetition is key; the more you practice and repeat a command the faster a dog will pick it up.

-Don't go overboard. Many owners expect their dogs to learn every command in a short period of time and that simply isn't possible. If you drown your American Bulldog in command training sessions, chances are he will no longer want to participate in them and if your dog doesn't want to learn what you are teaching you are wasting your time. Training should be a fun and rewarding experience for your dog; much like dealing with a child if you make an activity feel like a chore they won't want to do it anymore.

-Actively teach your dog. You can't go into command training and expect to be able to issue your American Bulldog a command and have him/her immediately recognize it and follow it. You have to teach your Bulldog to associate a command with an action and in most instances

this is best achieved by actively helping them perform the action. For example if you are trying to teach your Bulldog to sit you should issue the command and then lightly push down on his hindquarters until he assumes the sitting position.

Behavioral Training- This is the type of training used to correct unwanted behaviors of your American Bulldog, such as chewing on things other than chew toys, begging for food at the dinner table, digging outside or jumping on people when they come into your home. Behavioral training is almost a mix of command training and obedience training because you have to teach your Bulldog to obey a command in order to curb certain behaviors.

- Do not use physical violence to curb unwanted behaviors like aggression. If you use physical violence to curb your Bulldog's unwanted behaviors there is no way to tell how he will react to it. Physical punishment can lead some dogs to be more aggressive around humans, which is exactly the type of behavior you are trying to avoid. From time to time your dog will do something like chew on the furniture or use the bathroom in the house and you will get angry. In situations like this it is best to keep your cool and wait to punish the dog when you are not so completely gripped by anger.

-Consistency is key. If you are trying to correct some aspect of your American Bulldog's behavior you should do it on a consistent basis. If your dog is chewing on the furniture and you want to correct that behavior you have to address it every time you see it, not just when it is convenient for you. If you notice that your dog is exhibiting unwanted behavior and you do nothing about it your Bulldog will take this as a sign that you approve of its behavior. Addressing a certain behavior in some instances and ignoring it in others will accomplish nothing but to send your dog mixed signals as to what it is and isn't allowed to do.

-Redirect annoying habits. One of the easiest ways to get rid of your American Bulldog's annoying habits, such as chewing on the furniture or digging hole, is to redirect that effort and energy into something else. In the case of chewing it is as simple as providing your Bulldog with a substitute for the furniture, such as a chew toy or bone. If your dog is digging holes in the yard it may have excess energy that it needs to get rid of. You can redirect this energy and effort by taking your Bulldog for a walk or run once or twice a day or find some other activity through which he can expel his/her energy in an appropriate manner.

-Do not let your dog whine or beg for anything. If you reward your dog with a pat on the head or scraps from the table when he whines or begs you are telling him that such behavior is ok. Although it may be cute when your Bulldog is a puppy, such behavior can get extremely annoying as your dog matures.

Obedience Training – Teaching your dog different commands is only part of the battle of intermediate training. Teaching your American Bulldog to obey the commands once issued is an

entirely different monster. Essentially obedience training is all of the other types of training mixed together. Your Bulldog must recognize your word as law and must obey you no matter what the situation. In reality obedience training is never really finished and you must continually reinforce it as long as you have your dog. If you fail to use positive reinforcement for the things your Bulldog does right and negative reinforcement for the things it does wrong then your dog will continuously try to test your limits. Obedience training is especially necessary because Bulldogs are so strong and have so much pent up energy. If you allow your Bulldog to grow into an adult without obedience training you are asking for more trouble than you can handle.

Obedience training tips for your American Bulldog-

-Your American Bulldog must respect you. If there is any easy trick to obedience training then this is definitely it. If your American Bulldog respects you it will be more likely to listen to your commands and follow your orders. Remember to treat your Bulldog as a pet, not as a best friend. A good parent does not try to be best friends with his/her kids so why would you do that with a dog. When it comes to training an American Bulldog it is best if your approach it with the mentality that the dog is one of your children and therefore you should treat it accordingly with the right amount of love and discipline.

-Maintain your Alpha position. Much like having a dog's respect, maintaining your alpha position over your American Bulldog is integral to the obedience training process. Be aware that your Bulldog will try to challenge your dominance and authority and you should know how to recognize those challenges and deal with them appropriately. If you make eye contact with your dog make sure that your dog breaks contact first as breaking eye contact is recognized as a sign of submission to canines.

- Use tools such as a leash and choke collar during training. Using these tools will allow you to better control your American Bulldog during training as well as to correct wrong behavior more aggressively than otherwise possible.

-Don't shy away from enrolling your dog in obedience classes. Some dogs need more guidance and a firmer hand than the owner can provide, this doesn't mean that you are a bad trainer just that your dog needs a little extra help. Obedience classes are especially recommended if you bring a mature Bulldog into your home and it has not had any previous obedience training.

Advanced Training

American Bulldogs are bred as work dogs, and because of that they tend to have a lot of energy and like to stay active. That energy and need for activity can cause endless problems around the house unless you give your Bulldog an outlet for that energy. As with the intermediate training, you should ensure that your Bulldog effectively grasps the previous levels of training before moving on to the advanced training.

Performance Training – Performance training teaches your American Bulldog how to perform a certain task or activity. Because bulldogs are so strong many owners decide to train their dogs to pull weight or run long distances with added weight. The American Bulldogs natural protectiveness and loyalty also lead many people to train American bulldogs as a guard dogs for their home or place of business. Unlike other types of training performance training is neither necessary nor recommended in all cases; whether or not you want to do it is basically up to you and your Bulldog.

-Conditioning is key. Ensure that you and your American Bulldog are physically and mentally prepared before you engage in any strenuous or physically demanding activity. If you are going to train your Bulldog to pull weights you need to make sure it is physically prepared for the task at hand. If your American Bulldog has been an inside dog for two years you can't come home one day and expect to take it on a 10 mile run or to the park to pull weights.

-Enlist a professional trainer. While this may not be necessary to train your dog for physical activities it is highly recommended if you plan to train your dog to be a guard dog. Guard dog training teaches your American Bulldog to be aggressive but only in certain situations and only towards certain people, such as intruders. To ensure that your guard dog is trained correctly a profession trainer should be hired or at the very least consulted before you commence training. When you are training your dog to be aggressive you have to be extremely careful about the limits you place on your bulldog, if improperly trained your American Bulldog may go into guard dog mode at a time or place where people could be hurt.

-Follow through. This is perhaps the most important aspect of performance training if only for the simple fact that an improperly or incompletely trained dog is likely to be worse off than a dog that was not trained at all. If you begin performance training and drop it half way through your Bulldog will have picked up new skills but will not know how to properly and safely implement them around others.

Good Luck with Your New American Bulldog!

There is no doubt that American Bulldogs can be extremely difficult to train, but if you stick with it and stay positive, what you can teach your dog is almost limitless. American

Bulldogs make excellent family dogs and are especially good around children. Remember that your American Bulldog is highly energetic and at times a bit hardheaded and should be dealt with and trained accordingly. As long as you maintain alpha male dominance over your American Bulldog, its training should go relatively smoothly.