



# The Ten Commandments

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Thankfully, truly modern thinking about canine behaviour means that we don't need to view ourselves as 'leader of the pack', ensuring subservience at every opportunity in order to instil good behaviour. However, this isn't licence to throw out all sense of consistency and boundaries of behaviour. Just like kids, dogs need rules – and we can't allow our own insecurities about whether our dog will somehow dislike us to prevent us from sticking to them!

Of course, all families will have their own rules – depending on lifestyle and personal likes and dislikes. Many people I know think it's OK to have the dog on the bed – others think that dogs should be downstairs – and whichever you choose is fine – provided that you make the rule and stick to it – if only for the sake of domestic harmony! However, there are some boundaries that I feel would make such a vast difference to the majority of pups' behaviour in their first year, that they really could be considered to be the holy grail of dog training!

## 1. Thou shalt not encourage biting

"Of course I wouldn't!" I hear you cry, as you wrestle with the puppy on the floor. He's only playing after all, as he bites your clothes and hands with wild abandon. Anyway, you are quicker than him, and can whisk your hand away or pull his legs out from under him as part of the game. Well, maybe you can now, but what are you really teaching your dog? The fact that he bites you in play won't be nearly such fun when he's an adult – and I bet you anything he'll then be the one to be punished for it.

Any game where the puppy is allowed to bite humans is an open invitation to bite humans – and that's it! How would you feel if your dog wrestled a visiting toddler to the floor in two years time? What will happen to your dog if he tries the same behaviour on an elderly lady in the park? Even less vulnerable people can lead to the dog's demise – I've known several instances where the dog had practised rough and tumble games with teenage boys only to become subject to being the victim of a beating when the same teenage boy and his friends had been on a drinking binge. No matter what the size, shape, temperament or breed of your puppy, don't ever let him or her think that fighting with humans is fun.

## 2. Thou shalt not feed your puppy from the table (or let him lick the contents of the dishwasher)

OK, I know that this one could be open to interpretation. Some people like to give their dogs left-overs. Others don't mind if their dog licks the plates before they go in the dishwasher. But – for the sake of all who may come to visit you, don't teach your puppy that food comes from hands – or worse – from plates while you sit at the dinner table or eat from your lap in front of the TV!

Dogs slobber. They put their mouths and noses where we choose not to! They eat unimaginable things! Not all people can overlook these fantastically canine features! While hardened dog folk may not be phased by a string of drool nine-inches-long dangling towards their thighs while sitting at the table for

Sunday lunch, the fact that the dog would happily remove the food from your very fork seems a step too far beyond the boundaries of basic social manners – no matter what the species!

Bear in mind that dogs learn exactly what you teach them. Feed them from the table, and that's where they will think good things come from - so don't you dare tell them off for 'stealing' food later – no matter how much you were looking forward to eating it!

### 3. Thou shalt not countenance chasing

To be specific – no chasing of people or other animals! Of course, this one's in here for all those people who are thinking that it's cute that their Collie puppy yaps at cyclists and joggers and wants to round them up – it's in his nature after all! Well, yes, chasing is part of all herding dogs' make-up – and it's precisely because of this that we need to ensure that they learn to outlet this behaviour only in appropriate ways. Dogs that chase people may look cute when they are 12 weeks' old, but they look dangerous and scary when they are three years of age.

So, how do you allow your dog to be a dog, yet still keep control? Dogs need to play with and chase toys – and this needs to become a trained response. In fact, chasing toys is one of the best ways to direct natural herding behaviour in dogs, because it is so addictive. Allow your puppy to become addicted to chasing people, horses, cats or even cars and you may well find yourself in trouble and on the wrong side of the law. Train your puppy to play with you with toys and you will find outdoor control a piece of cake.

### 4. Thou shalt not reward inappropriate attention seeking

Or... simply subtitled... don't let your dog train you! Right from day one, your puppy is working out what gets attention and what does not. In the first 24 hours of being in your home, he will already have worked out that barking gets eye contact and physical attention. Walking towards the back door gets a play in the garden. Picking up the kids toys gets chase games. Ragging on the doormat gets laughter. Biting people gets them excited. Playing quietly with your own toys gets nothing. It doesn't take a brain surgeon to work out what behaviours he will repeat and which he won't bother with again. Shame it will take the owners another six months to cotton on!

Life is simple if you think like a dog. What gets rewarded, gets repeated. Rewards come in the form of attention from humans – any attention will do if nothing else is going on. Humans act funny when they get excited – it's even worth being punished just to see them jump up and down! All humans have to learn is that if their puppy performs a behaviour that they don't like more than once, it **MUST** be being rewarded. Find out who, where, when and how – and stop it before it's too late!

### 5. Thou shalt not teach your puppy to pull on the lead

Oh for those first weeks back again! Trust me, it is so much easier never to allow your dog to pull on the lead than it is to undo the habit once it's established. Once your dog has learned the delights of pulling on lead, you are into the realms of undoing a rewarding behaviour. It will take much longer and be more of an effort for both you and your dog, when – frankly – you just want to take it for a walk.

Watching new puppy owners taking their dog out on the lead for the first few times is like something from a training handbook – written from the dog's point of view! First, the puppy teaches the human that it decides the direction of the walk. The pup simply has to lean in one direction, and the owner will follow. Secondly, the pup trains the human to follow at whatever speed he or she dictates. (Children are especially good at this and will walk, trot or run on cue!) Thirdly – and perhaps most important for male

dogs – it to make sure that the human will wait while you take as much time as you want to sniff or pee – no matter what the weather conditions or distractions of the day!

Eeeek! Sound familiar! Make a rule from day one that you will decide who walks where and when and at what speed. Your puppy will not hate you if you don't allow him or her to sniff that particular spot that they have in mind. Neither will they sulk if you choose to turn around and walk the opposite way rather than be dragged in the same direction. Lead walking is all about human choice. You can do it your way or the hard way – just be sure that you are actively choosing!

### 6. Thou shalt not allow the practising of rude behaviour!

Boy, this one covers a lot! What do I mean by a rude behaviour? Well, anything that you wouldn't want the dog to do in a public setting! Of course, this includes sexual behaviour, but more commonly it covers bad manners like jumping up, nudging people in intimate areas, mouthing, and climbing all over them as if they were part of the furniture. OK, you may find it funny to allow your Jack Russell puppy to sit on your shoulder like a bizarre parrot while you watch TV, but I'm not sure that everyone else will appreciate the humour of it in the same way – especially if they've just come to view your house or check up on your new baby. The arrival of visitors is nearly always likely to reveal those little habits which you keep quiet about at other times. If you don't want your dog to be facing the equivalent of a teenage ASBO in a few months' time, don't allow him to practise those very behaviours now!

### 7. Thou shalt not encourage barking

There he is, the little poppet, yapping for all his might at the sound of the front door bell. It's so cute, that you just can't help laughing and praising him for his efforts to be a big, brave guard dog! The only problem is, now he's older he seems to be barking in the garden at people going past the fence. The neighbours are complaining and you don't know how to stop it. You've tried shouting at him, but he just ignores you. When visitors arrive you can hardly hear yourselves think – so you shut him in the kitchen until they leave or he gets exhausted from making such a racket.

Barking is such a natural canine behaviour that encouraging it is usually totally unnecessary, and is frequently causative of other behaviour problems. Dogs are good at guarding property simply by being there. How are they to know the difference between the arrival of legitimate visitors and burglar Bill?

Encouraging dogs to bark by laughing, praising or by shouting (the dog simply thinks you are barking encouragement!) is making a rod for your own back and is not easily resolved when the dog is an adult and has learned the effects that barking has on human behaviour. Most owners actually want the dog to bark once or twice at the door, then be quiet and friendly – so why would you incite the dog to do more?

### 8. Thou shalt not chase after the thief

One for the gundog owners now... but not exclusively by any means! It is amazing that so many people are surprised when their dog picks up objects in its mouth! To me, it seems obvious that babies want to grab objects and explore them – so why would puppies not do the same? Of course, what really happens is that the puppy (and baby!) picks up an object for fun, but then watches what the reaction is around it. In this way, puppies soon discover what makes all the family stop what they are doing, look at it, talk to it and run around after it in a highly exciting fashion. Pick up a chew toy – no one even notices. Pick up a school book, a hair scrunchie, a pair of glasses, anything sharp, or drag a tea towel across the living room floor and the world suddenly becomes an emotionally-charged playground where the sport being played is chase me and tug! The best of these games usually end up in the garden (where the pup can easily dodge the slow-coach humans) or under the dining room table (where the object can be defended).

Sadly, these kind of ‘game’s often end in tears as one party suddenly gets too serious about ‘winning’. Aggression is often the result on both sides – with the dog then blamed for reacting in a way which was perfectly natural for him, but was clearly unacceptable for the human.

Learn this rule. If your dog likes to pick up objects that you don’t want him to have, it’s up to you to create a situation where he learns that bringing them to you is far more fun than keeping them for himself. Never chase your puppy for stolen articles. This simply makes them even more valuable. At best, avoid the situation, and at worst, create a distraction so that you can safely retrieve the item without any kind of excitement, fun or interaction. In the meantime, teach your dog a retrieve.

## 9. Thou shalt not laugh

... at stereotypical behaviours. Of course, you should laugh lots with your dogs. One of the best things about owning dogs is their wonderful capacity to make us laugh – I only have to watch my Golden Retriever acting the clown to feel uplifted about the world, but as laughter rewards and encourages dogs, you do need to exercise some caution.

Sadly, some of the worst examples of behaviours that have been rewarded by laughter have serious consequences for the pet. You only have to watch home video clip programmes to see vast numbers of stressed out parrots, anxious cats, frustrated horses and distressed dogs – and listen to the canned laughter that’s played over the top to realise just how misunderstood much animal behaviour actually is. Dogs that spin uncontrollably, that chase lights or shadows, that snap at imaginary flies and that lick repetitively may have been inadvertently encouraged to perform these behaviours as puppies to the extent where they cannot stop, or worse, may have an undiagnosed clinical condition which is only revealing itself in a behavioural fashion. No matter how entertaining our pets are, animal welfare must come first.

## 10. Thou shalt not be tempted to get another one... just yet!

Ah, you’ve followed all the rules and can be proud to be named as an angelic owner. As a result, you have the most perfect dog that anyone could hope for. He’s still only five months of course, but you just know that things are going to carry on just as they are. In fact, you are so inspired by the experience that you feel the need to get another puppy right now. After all, it will keep your older dog company and you will love to watch them play.

Well, just hold on! At five months of age your puppy is about to become a teenager. This is a fun and also a challenging stage, and your dog will benefit from having your undivided attention during this period as he succumbs to the interesting effects of hormonal changes. Getting another puppy at this stage spilt your time, attention and resources. Your *new* puppy will need separate walking, training and socialisation. Yes... separate! Many owners have this rosy view that they will be able to do all this with both dogs together – but this is woefully unfair on both of them, and on your future relationship with them. Of course, it can be lovely to have two (or more!) dogs together, but generally it is best to wait until one is fully adult, trained and settled into your home and routine before you get another – no matter how tempting!

Managed to abide by all ten canine commandments?  
Well done, and welcome to doggie peace and harmony!