

Sit, Stay, LEARN: Agricultural Education- An SAE Manual for Dog Obedience Training

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Introduction

Canine Obedience training is a bountiful career path that allows students to work with animals to work with both people and their pets. Being a dog trainer is just as much an animal job as it is a people job and experience in training and working with customers is the best way to get a company position.

This manual aims to provide an all-encompassing resource for Novice, Intermediate, and Advance FFA members looking to explore an SAE in Canine training. This manual serves the purpose of guiding members in starting a project. This guide is for students who have an interest in an animal project and should increase students' ability to obtain an SAE whether they have land/resources for livestock. Upon completing this project, students should have recorded hours and experience of dog training that could be used to fulfill experience hours for certifications in canine training. FFA provides students the ability to explore their interests in numerous agricultural fields. This manual will serve the purpose as a guide and resource compilation for students looking to gain knowledge and skills in a small animal field of canine obedience training. This manual will specialize in commands that can be used in entrepreneurship and placement projects for students looking to train dogs for basic obedience at home or in someone else's home. This manual will guide students on training tips, styles, and requirements as well as provide resource links for students to expand their knowledge further.

Background

SAEs or Supervised Agricultural Experience projects are a vital and mandatory part of Agricultural Education, which provides students a hands-on project that is typically separated into three categories: entrepreneurship, placement, and research (National FFA, 2019). According to the National FFA organization, there are 8,612 chapters in all 50 states, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, with 700,170 FFA members in total. Each of these members is required to have an SAE; however, many do not have the space, time, or resources for the typical projects like large livestock, mechanics projects, or other large-scale projects. While pets are not considered SAE projects, students can use what would be considered a pet and change it into a functioning SAE. Canine obedience training takes skill and patience and holds the valuable qualities most associated with larger projects.

Dogs are ingenious animals and can be trained for a variety of jobs and tasks from well trained and well-mannered pets to agricultural livestock herders and even police canine units and guide dogs for the blind. According to an article written on The Atlantic, dogs have been trained to assist and live with humans for over ten thousand years as the dog many call "man's best friend" was one of the first domesticated animals (Yong, 2016).

Today, dogs are the most popular species of pets in the American household, with numbers reporting 63.4 million dogs being owned nationwide (Bedford, 2020). Dogs are trained in various ways depending on their trainer's goal and the dogs' purpose. Dogs being trained for police work to go through entirely different training than those becoming seizure detection dogs, and these both are uniquely different from those dogs going to live their life in a home as a pet. These do have in common the goal of having a dog serve a purpose and be trained in the best way to fulfill their function.

When focusing on pets, it is a common mistake to think a pet does not serve a purpose in a home, so training is kept minimal, but this should not be the case. Not only does training a pet

to provide designated time for physical and mental stimulation as well as the possibility of a well-mannered "good dog" but can provide many benefits for the owner as well. Training builds a bond between animal and owner, and the absence of poor behavior allows both the dogs and humans to live together in a well-managed home. According to Vetwest, obedience training can be a fun way to exercise a dog and can be a social outlet for both parties involved; furthermore, it can also be a safety measure as even the best dogs can get spooked or decide to venture off.

Methods

The author started this project by researching relevant articles on dog training and obtaining and surpassing basic obedience. The first step for a successful project is to research dog breeds, ages, differences in sexes, and overall temperament that matches an individual's lifestyle. Training books, media, and research articles were all reviewed for their importance in the project. The author then found research articles on the importance of SAEs in high school programs and related the information to the creation of a manual. The author then discussed training with experts in dog training and volunteers within the shelter. The next steps were compiling the information found in the articles and developing the manual outline.

Since this manual will be broken down into the project categories, each will need to be outlined separately following an APA format and following National FFA guidelines for SAE. The first part of the manual will explain SAE and its importance. It should also outline the essential steps students must take to start an SAE, specifically a dog obedience training project. The manual will outline three possible sections, including shelter dog training, placement hired training, and entrepreneurship training for a show. The next section of the manual will be broken down into training and show requirements based on resources and article suggestions.

To create the manual, the author did a small-scale version of one of the possible SAE projects. The author adopted a six-month-old dog from San Luis Obispo County Animal Shelter based on the breed, age, and temperament of the dog. The dog was then allowed a full two weeks to develop a relationship and comfortability with the owner before any extra training began. The author referenced the following training material through the project and followed a strict positive reinforcement training model. The references included articles from various dog training websites and veterinarian articles, The ASPCA, The American Kennel Club, and books on positive reinforcement and basic dog obedience training.

In order to be more cost-efficient, the books were purchased second hands, and only free web articles were used. Through the author's experiences with the project, the manual will be adjusted to provide students a how-to guide on dog obedience training that could be used in a variety of Canine based projects.

The author used Microsoft Word to develop the top 10 training commands and compile information from the National FFA organization and websites like the ASPCA and AKC to find helpful information. The author took photos of their dog performing the ten commands and planned to insert them within the manual's final draft. The author used Grammarly to edit and spell-check the document and transferred the information to the platform Canvas, where they used the template "Navy Blue and Cream General Report" as the base of their design. The author developed a title and designed their final report.

Results

The project's result is an edited, designed, and ready-to-be distributed manual of dog training that includes links to resource guides, how-to videos and pictures, and the author's own experience of training a dog. The manual is broken down into eight sections and guides students through creating a dog training SAE. The sections include the following: Introduction, SAE Explanation, Safety, Equipment, Choosing a Dog, the Top 10 Commands to Teach, Recordkeeping, and Student Resources.

The central portion of the article consisted of the top 10 commands that students would be able to teach a dog, which would serve as the foundation for more advanced projects. Each command has a photo of the author's dog completing the command and the hand signal the author uses. The student resource section has more in-depth photos and videos for students to follow, as well.

Information about SAEs was found on the National FFA website, and the how-to guide for dog training was compiled as a result of several online training manuals. Upon completion of the manual, the author will distribute the document to future students looking to start a project in dog obedience and use it as a reference to create future manuals.

Conclusion

There are several types of training and a multitude of possible projects in which the students can participate. This manual should be able to guide students in creating their project but will need to be edited to their specific needs. The author's project spanned one year with one dog, depending on a student's project, the size and scope can vary as well as the results. The author started this project by adopting a dog at the local county animal shelter and began training about two weeks after adoption to allow the dog to become acquainted with them.

The author had to change their project multiple times to adapt to the dog's needs and abilities, moving from service dog training to basic and intermediate obedience training. As the project shifted, so did the requirements of the manual. If this project were to be recreated, the author recommends working with local trainers to get tips and help to evaluate the best way to train the individual animal as every dog is different.

The manual can be edited and expanded upon as well. Some future recommendations would be to take photos of each training cue's step-by-step process and compile those to go along with the written steps. Other cues could also be added to the manual for students looking for more intermediate and advanced cues to train once they have the first ten completed. Sample projects could also be added to help students who are just beginning and do not know where to start.

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