CHALLENGING YOUR CAT TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE AND RELIABILITY

Training Tips

By this time, your cat can probably perform a few behaviors, such as "sit," "touch" and "watch me," some of the time. However, you've probably found that with any small change in the environment your cat may "forget" what he's just learned. Teaching your cat the new behavior and its cue are only the first step. Your cat hasn't truly mastered these new skills until he is able to perform reliably, which is at least 90 percent of the time, in the presence of distractions.

Training Procedure

1. Mastering any new behavior usually involves these five steps:
2. Get the behavior.
3. Name the behavior, using a verbal or visual cue.
4. Make it a little harder, changing distance, duration, speed and precision, one aspect at a time and in **small** increments.
5. Add distractions.

Rules for Making It Harder

- Make <u>one</u> aspect of behavior harder at a time and in small enough increments so that the cat will succeed frequently.

- Temporarily make other aspects of the behavior easier. Once she has it, make the other aspects harder again.

  Example:

  "Sit" – your cat will hold a sit for sixty seconds while you stand right next to him, but you want to increase the distance you can move away from him while he sits:

  ○ Distance is the aspect of the behavior you are making harder and you need to increase the distance in small increments, so give your cue and move <u>one</u> step away from the cat.

  ○ Time is an aspect of the behavior you can make temporarily easier by decreasing the length of the sit to five seconds. Then, reward your cat for at least three or four five- second/one-step away sits.

  ○ Now, gradually increase the time while you remain just one step away from the cat. Do this until he can sit for sixty seconds with you at a distance of one step. Note that it may take four or five sessions to work back up to a sixty-second stay

at the one-step distance.

Adding Distractions

- Temporarily make the behavior easier when introducing a new distraction.
- Initially add small distractions that the cat is capable of ignoring.
- Gradually increase the level of distraction.
- Once he can easily resist the distraction, make the behavior harder again.