A person and dog with leashes

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**Chapter 12: Correction Technique & Application**

This chapter will describe, in detail, proper correction technique and give some tips on how to use correction appropriately. We’ll go over some specific scenarios and how to sequence your tools in the most effective manner. There are essentially three types of situations where correction will be warranted: distraction, non-compliance, and working errors. We’ll look at each separately and discuss the differences while working your dog versus heeling.

Let’s start with basic technique. Administering an effective correction is a skill that you will need to develop. Instructors can help you practice this skill Juno-style. Please do not “practice” on your dog, only give a correction when your dog’s behavior warrants it.

Any leash correction is essentially a sharp snap or pop of the leash with immediate release. It can be given with the leash in either hand and should always begin and end with slack in the leash, snapping tight for only a split second in between. It should be a loose, quick movement of the elbow and wrist, keeping close to the body. If the dog is already leaning in and putting tension on the leash, you will need to initiate the correction by first releasing tension on the leash very briefly, then snap and release again in quick succession. The intensity of this action can vary greatly depending upon the situation, your dog’s temperament, and their behavior in the moment. In some instances, a very slight movement of the leash will be sufficient. In others, you may need two hands on the leash to deliver a high level of intensity. Typically, the action of a correction should be quite quick and snappy. However, in some circumstances slowing the action down can provide a cue to help clear up confusion in your dog.

A harness correction (or harness “check”) is a mild correction given with the harness handle. The correction is given by using your left hand to check or snap back with the handle. Similar to a leash correction, if there is tension in the handle at the start, you will need to release the tension by pushing the handle slightly forward, then snap back. This type of correction is only used while working and will typically cause the dog to slow, stop, or back up. Harness checks should only be used in situations where this is the desired effect.

**Here are a few important things to remember anytime you need to use a correction:**

* Your correction should change the dog's behavior, not their demeanor. It should interrupt the unwanted behavior and give you a chance to offer redirection in the form of another command. You are essentially saying to the dog, “Don’t do that, but do this instead.”
* Never give a leash correction out of anger or frustration. A leash correction is just a way to let the dog know that what it did was incorrect. Correction should always be followed with another command (redirection) to remind the dog what the correct thing to do is.
* Concentrate on using more wrist action rather than swinging your arm. This keeps the correction quick and low to the body.
* Never use any form of correction other than those taught here at GEB. It is **NEVER** acceptable to hit, kick, or scream at your dog.
* Always remember to praise when the dog resumes appropriate behavior after receiving a correction. The more intense level of correction is needed, the more important it becomes to balance with praise. It’s vital that you help your dog return to their baseline emotional state.
* Never shout or raise your voice when giving a correction. Shouting a   
  command at your dog will not make it obey any faster and may even have the opposite effect.
* Keep in mind that people are watching you when you work with your   
  dog. Some can get very upset if they see you doing what they may perceive as unfair or even abusive treatment of your dog. If they see you balance any correction with praise, not only will your dog be better for it, but the public will be less inclined to see your correction as negative (and less inclined to call Guiding Eyes to complain).

Now, let’s get into some specific situations where the use of correction may be necessary.

**Non-Compliance**

This refers to any situation where you have given a command, but your dog has not responded. This happens for one of two reasons, either he did not understand the cues given or he was distracted. In either case, you may choose to administer correction for non-compliance before issuing the command again. When using a correction for non-compliance, it is extremely important to separate the correction from the command itself. The appropriate sequence should go something like this:

Command - (non-compliance) - Correction....... Repeat Command - (compliance) - Praise

Your dog may require a few cycles before compliance is achieved. Be patient and keep the sequence clean. If it becomes jumbled, your dog will not be able to learn from the exercise and compliance may decline even further.

Specific corrections for obedience commands are listed below:

* Sit: correction is a snap straight up from the top of the dog's neck
* Down: correction is a snap straight down toward the ground
* Heel: correction is a snap on the leash toward your left side, may be back, forward or to the side depending upon the dog’s relative position
* Stay: this correction is more complex. If the dog gets up or changes position, you should replace the dog in its original position using a leash cue, then repeating the original command and attempting the sequence again. If the dog breaks position and starts to move away from the spot it was told to stay, do your best to return it to the original place and position.

**There are also specific corrections for non-compliance with harness commands. They are as follows:**

* Right: leash correction is a snap to the right, given with the right hand
* Left: harness correction is a check straight back, given with left hand holding the harness handle
* Wait: harness correction is a check straight back, given with left hand holding harness handle
* Forward: correction is a short, light tug forward, given with the right hand. The motion should be straight out from the navel.

\*NOTE\* You should only use a correction for Forward as advised by your instructor. Your dog may be refusing forward for a good reason and you must be extremely careful not to override that by using unwarranted correction

The above corrections can also be used very lightly as a cue to help your dog understand your request. All corrections for non-compliance should generally be kept at low intensity. If your dog fails to respond repeatedly, you are likely dealing with a distraction issue and will need to handle it as such.

**Distraction**

This encompasses anything that might draw your dog's attention including, but not limited to: other dogs, cats, birds, squirrels, children, food on the ground, olfactory(sniffing), blowing leaves, balloons, clowns, etc. Of course, you’ve already been working on reinforcing your dog for ignoring distractions through the use of counter conditioning. But what happens when that fails, and your dog loses focus and engages with a distraction? That’s when correction becomes necessary.

You will likely encounter active and passive distractions when working with your dog. An active distraction is any situation in which your dog becomes overly excited, lunges toward another animal or person, or dives for something on the ground. Passive distraction is characterized by a lack of movement. Your dog may stop and stare at something or may seek another self-soothing activity such as sniffing. The use of correction in these situations is simply a way to communicate that the dog’s behavior is unacceptable or inappropriate in that moment. Some distracted behaviors are considered non-negotiable, such as lunging or diving for food. In these cases, a firm correction is warranted, putting a stop to the behavior as quickly as possible. You will never ask the dog to repeat this type of behavior so there is no concern of diminishing drive or initiative. You can also think of this as attempting to “cap” their intensity by administering a higher-level correction the first time. Try to avoid having to increase intensity over multiple corrections, as this will increase arousal and create a situation where you are “chasing” their intensity rather than putting a stop to it from the start.Multiple corrections can create reactivity in the dog as well as confusion. In situations where your dog loses all focus and completely engages with distraction, you may need to repeat the sequences of correction, redirection, obedience, and counter conditioning until your dog can successfully disengage and focus on you.

Timing of your correction is also vitally important. A well-timed correction catches the dog just as they begin to think about getting distracted. However, it is not always possible to recognize this moment. Do your best to recognize your dog's inclination to become distracted as early as possible. Then gauge the intensity of your correction to match your dog’s intensity in that moment. If you feel your dog’s head lift or ears perk up in response to a passing dog, a light correction can remind them not to engage. On the other hand, if a squirrel suddenly runs across your path and your dog immediately lunges for it, a higher intensity correction will be needed to reach your dog in that moment. When working your dog in harness, you can address minor distractions while still in motion by using a right-handed leash correction. Take the leash into the right hand and snap past your right hip, keeping close to your body. For more intense distractions, or if your dog makes an error due to distraction, you will need to stop and address the distraction before asking your dog to continue working.

The last key component when dealing with distraction is remembering to balance with praise. The more intense the distraction, and the more intense level of correction is needed to manage their behavior, the more important it becomes to balance with praise as your dog returns to their baseline emotional state. It is easy to forget this when you have had to work very hard to regain control over your dog, but keep in mind that many distracted behaviors are a manifestation of stress or confusion in your dog. While it's important to provide consequences to let your dog know what behaviors are unacceptable, it is equally if not more important that you provide support and reassurance to help them maintain even tempered stability under any circumstances.

**Reworking Errors**

These are errors that occur while working your dog in harness such as bumping a clearance or missing an elevation change or known landmark. Working errors are a normal part of the process of learning to work with a guide dog and will continue to happen from time to time throughout the dogs working career. Try to think of each error as an opportunity for your dog to learn. If you address errors consistently and effectively, you will find that they occur less and less often. While it is essential to let your dog know that they’ve made a mistake, it is vitally important to gauge the intensity of correction, balance with praise, and rework the error whenever possible. Systematic use of these techniques will allow your dog to learn from the error without losing drive or building unnecessary stress.

Reworking a Clearance Error

A clearance error can be anything from a light brush of your hand to a full body hit and is always more likely to occur in tight or congested environments.

* As soon as the error occurs, you should immediately stop all forward movement and administer a correction. For a minor error, a harness check may suffice. For a more serious error, use a left-handed leash correction, dropping the harness handle and keeping the leash in your left hand. Snap the leash straight back past your left hip.
* If it is safe to do so, rework the error by heeling your dog 4-5 steps straight back. Reset and send your dog forward again. Use upbeat verbal encouragement if you find that your dog is reluctant to try again, and praise generously when your dog successfully navigates the area.

Reworking a Missed Curb or Step

If your dog fails to stop for a change in elevation, it will often cause you as the handler to trip or at least take an awkward step. This may function as the first part of the correction, signaling that your dog has made an error. This will be less obvious for flush curb or other landmarks. Always gauge your correction based on your dog's response.

* As soon as you detect the error, stop all forward movement and administer an appropriate correction, harness check or left-handed leash correction.
* Next, bring the dog back to the place where they should have stopped. Have your dog sit or stand with their front feet on the step or curb and offer meaningful praise for a few seconds. It’s important to show your dog what they missed in this manner.
* Now, if it safe to do so, heel your dog straight back at least 4-5 steps, reset and ask your dog to work up to the target again. Use a targeting command (To The Curb/Steps) if appropriate, and verbal encouragement if your dog seems hesitant.
* Genuine praise and/or food reward should be given when your dog successfully stops at the target.

\*NOTE\* Use extreme caution when correcting for a missed up curb. It is unsafe to rework an up curb by backing into the street. It is best to use only a light harness check to correct for a missed up curb. Anything more intense is likely to diminish your dog's drive in the crossing and cause them to be hesitant or avoidant when approaching the curb. Some guide dog handlers choose to allow their dogs to run the up curb or pause only slightly to indicate before proceeding onto the sidewalk. Work with your instructor to determine what is best for you and your dog.

Generally speaking, guide work errors are due to a combination of both dog and handler errors, as well as environmental influences. Working errors may also occur when your dog becomes distracted. In these cases, you may need to address the distraction and regain your dog's focus in order to successfully rework the error. Instructors will work with each team to help mitigate any contributing factors and facilitate your overall success as a team.

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