

**Chapter 33: Working Your Dog at Night**

Working your guide dog at night can often be a very different experience than during the day. Some people are nervous or hesitant to be out traveling at night. For some handlers, streetlights and headlights from vehicles can disrupt any remaining vision you might be able to utilize during the day. This may affect how you communicate and work with your dog. For others, lighting conditions may have little or no effect on how you work with your dog. A dog’s night vision is very good. Dogs have what is referred to as “rod-rich eyes”. The rods are responsible for collecting light. For this reason, dogs can see quite well in dim or dark conditions.

Whether you are affected by the lighting conditions or not, you may have a different experience working with your dog after dark. While the environment stays the same, several things do change:

* Shadows may make things look different to your dog
* Your dog may be excited by the different smells and way things look at night
* The handler might be nervous about being out at night
* Handlers who may be able to utilize remaining vision during the day are not able to use it at night and must rely more heavily on the dog as a guide

Some common issues that are observed when first working your dog at night are:

* **Holding back in the handle more than you normally would due to being nervous or hesitant**. Holding back creates more tension in the harness. This sends a signal to your dog that you want them to pull harder which is often not what the handler wants in this situation.
* **Change in confidence/Wanting to walk slower than what is typical for the team**. If you wish to go slower at night you will need to communicate this to your dog by telling them steady and alternating tension in and out of the harness by moving the handle back and forth gently over your dog’s back.
* **Not trusting your dog.** This will lead to not following your dog correctly which could result in clearance errors or shorting of curbs.
* **Your dog may be more excited at night.** Being out at night sometimes has a different feel to the dogs and they get excited. Be sure to address any time your dog is walking faster than they should or pulling harder than they should.

While working your dog at night can have its challenges, it can also be a very rewarding experience. For some handlers it is one of the times where they may have to fully trust their dogs. There will be some mistakes made by both handler and the dog just like on any route. Be sure to communicate with your dog with both commands and praise. New mistakes may occur at night that are not happening during the day. Be patient with yourself and your dog and take the time to rework any errors.

Another important aspect of working at night is safety. At night, you and your dog will not always be visible to others that are out, especially drivers. It is highly recommended that you wear light/brightly colored or reflective clothing to make yourself more visible. The harness does have reflective tape on the handle and the body. You may want to invest in a light up collar for your dog to wear at night as well as look into having additional lights. You can use a battery-operated bike light, a head lamp, or research additional lights that can be added to your dog’s harness from websites online. These items that can improve your visibility as a team and increase your overall safety when traveling at night. Keep in mind that even in areas that typically have good sightlines for drivers during the day, headlights from oncoming cars can create a lot of glare and deep shadows that make it almost impossible to see pedestrians until it is too late. Use extreme caution and wear safety gear if you need to work your dog after dark at home.

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