Headquarters and Training Center

611 Granite Springs Rd.

Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

914-245-4024 or Toll-Free 800-942-0149

Client Experience Team

clientexperience@guidingeyes.org

Applicant and Graduate Support: 888-987-2188

Review of Guide Work Basics and Troubleshooting Guide

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# **Guide Work Basics**

* Continue to practice obedience exercises as well as the “close” command
* Be aware of what your dog is doing and what he/she feels like on leash and in harness. This will help you develop “dog awareness” and be more in-tune with your dog.
* Set boundaries with your dog and be consistent. This will benefit not only your guide work, but also your dog’s behavior in your home. Dogs thrive with consistency and structure.
* Before reaching for your harness handle, your dog should be in the proper position; on your left side and you should both be facing the direction in which you need to go.
* Be clear with your body language, this will be the strongest cue for your dog even if you use the wrong verbal command by accident
* Say your dog’s name before giving a command.
* Use the “Forward” command (or “Left” or “Right”) before moving from a stopped position
* When working, your guide dog should always be the one to initiate movement after a command is given. This is especially important for street crossings where he/she may need to respond to a traffic check and override your command.
* Remain in proper following position and avoid “over walking” your dog. Getting ahead will interfere with your dog’s ability to safely guide you.
* Use targeting commands, like “to the curb” and “to the door” so your dog knows what you would like them to indicate for you.
* Use heartfelt praise and treats when your dog does what you have asked or responds appropriately in a particular situation. This keeps the behavior strong and reinforces the behavior for the future.
* Your voice is your most powerful tool! Be aware of your inflection and adjust in order to give effective commands and praise.
* Make work fun for your dog! Remember, guide work is not in itself rewarding or fun. Only the handler can make it seem like a fun game for the dog.
* Think of your dog’s safety and well-being in any environment you may be thinking of going to. There may be times when it is appropriate for your dog to stay at home.
* Use common sense in the heat/cold. If it is uncomfortable for you, it is uncomfortable for your dog! Take water along on hot days. Rest in the shade or go into an air-conditioned building if necessary. Limit time outside during extreme temperatures.
* HAVE FUN WITH YOUR DOG!!

# **Troubleshooting Guide**

## **When teaching a new route:**

* ***Have you learned the route yourself first? Either using your cane or sighted assistance?***

It can be helpful to familiarize yourself with a new route first before attempting to teach it to your dog. Being able to give clear direction to your dog will help to avoid confusion and will likely result in your dog learning the new route more quickly.

* ***Have you introduced the route in small segments, gradually lengthening it once your dog is successful?***
When possible, break down longer or more complex routes into at least 2 different sections. Introduce additional sections once you and your dog are successful on the previous section.
* ***Have you tried to identify what your dog may find challenging--a complex crossing? Higher level of distraction?* *Unclear line of travel?***

Take extra time to work on challenging portions of a route. It may take your dog several repetitions to be successful. Additional time spent in these areas will benefit your overall route and success.

## **When teaching or locating a new target:**

* ***Have you heeled your dog up to the target while using your cane or sighted assistance?***

This is an important first step when teaching a new target. Start with using ‘touch’ with your fist located directly on the target. Return to this step if necessary while teaching and slowly build on success.

* ***Have you reinforced the target by using ‘touch’ and giving a food reward?***

It may take several repetitions over many short sessions for your dog to identify a new target. Using ‘touch’ and reinforcing with a food reward will help your dog understand that this new target is a point of interest

* ***Have you gradually increased the distance in which you ask your dog to find the target? (often referred to as back chaining)***

Try going back to a shorter distance where your dog is successful before attempting to build distance again. If approaching targets from a variety of directions, you may even want to start back at the actual target with a few ‘touch’ repetitions.

## **When making a stationary left or right turn:**

* ***Are you starting in the proper position?***

Before initiating a turn, start from a stationary position (‘wait’ position) at your dog’s shoulders with your left foot slightly forward.

* ***Are you using clear body language to indicate the change in direction you wish to make?*** Shift your position by sliding back and/or pivoting to give your dog space to make the turn. Body language is the strongest cue for your dog.
* ***What are you communicating to your dog via the harness?***

For right turns, there should be no tension in the harness. For left turns, you can start by adding slight pressure back in the handle or a few light harness checks if your dog has not initiated the back up for the turn.

## **When trying to regain control or resume working after a distraction:**

* ***Have you tried asking for a ‘touch’ to gauge your dog’s level of focus?***

If your dog cannot perform this simple behavior, try to create some distance between yourself and the distraction. Periodically ask for a ‘touch’ again to see if your dog responds.

* ***Have you tried doing a short obedience routine?***

If your dog cannot comply with obedience commands, they are not ready to resume working safely. Follow through with corrections as needed or put your dog in a control position (sit or down) until they can regain better focus on you.

* ***If your dog is still struggling to connect, has the distraction passed?***

In some cases, you may need to move yourself and your dog away from the distraction by whatever means necessary. Use caution as your dog is unlikely to guide you safely if they are fully engaged with distraction.

## **When reworking or correcting guidework errors:**

* ***Does the level of correction match the error?***

Depending on the type and level of error, different corrections and levels of correction will be appropriate. Corrections can range from a harness check for brushing lightly into something to a left-handed leash correction when making full contact with something or someone. Check with your instructor if you are unsure of what is an appropriate correction for your dog.

* ***Did you give your dog a chance to rework the error?***

For clearance errors, if safe to do so, heel a few steps backwards and give your dog a chance to successfully work past the obstacle. Encourage your dog if he/she seems hesitant and use verbal praise once you have passed it successfully.

For missed curbs or steps, bring your dog up to the target (keeping in mind it is NOT safe to rework a missed up-curb), have them sit or stand at the spot and praise them. Heel a few steps back and give them a chance to rework and indicate the target. Give genuine praise and/or food reward for success!

**If you still have concerns or continued issues after reviewing these suggestions, do not hesitate to reach out for further assistance. The Client Experience Team can be reached during normal business hours (8am-5pm EST weekdays) at 888-987-2188.**