

How To Behave So Your Dog Behaves--A practical and intelligent guide for dog owners

by E. Kathryn Meyer, VMD

The first thing that engaged me in Sophia Yin's *How To Behave So Your Dog Behaves* was its title. As a veterinarian who treats behavioral problems in dogs and cats exclusively, I strive to teach my clients that we can't use a magic wand to eradicate unwanted behavior in dogs. We have to first understand the behavior and then devise methods of changing the behavior in a positive way—usually by giving the dog a good reason to engage in an acceptable alternative behavior. If we read our dogs correctly, we can teach them what is desired and then use motivators specific to our individual dog and situation to reinforce the right stuff. Dr. Yin's book is aptly titled and provides a wealth of science-based information translated into witty and easily understood language, accompanied by helpful and charming illustrations.

To build a foundation of basic dog knowledge, Dr. Yin first educates the reader about the origin of dogs, their social behavior, and body language. Then, she introduces and explains the science of learning, its potential and its limitations. But the real gold mine for dog owners lies in the *Five-Minute Guides* covered in the last two sections of the book on *Basic Good Dog Behavior* and *Solving Common Canine Problems*. The first section gives the reader explicit instructions on how to teach very specific behaviors that are incredibly important to having a well-behaved, well-adjusted dog. The recommendations for "Say Please by Sitting" and "Walk Nicely on Leash" are the most effective tools I've encountered for creating a well-mannered dog—substituting specific and acceptable behaviors for unruly behaviors that are often unknowingly reinforced by owners. (Do you look at, speak to, and/or touch your dog when he jumps up on you? Bingo—you're rewarding that behavior!) Methods to train other very important basic behaviors, such as learning to focus on the owner with "Watch Me," coming when called, staying, and going to "your place" are also thoroughly described.

In addition to covering the prevention of problems, Dr. Yin also devotes a section to solving some common behavioral issues encountered by dog owners. The problems are briefly described and recommendations are outlined for such topics as Houstraining, Chew Training, Food Possessiveness, Aggression Toward Non-Family Members, and Barking.

For the intellectually curious, this book provides the reader with a goldmine of information about the natural behavior of dogs, learning theory, and applied animal behavior. Of particular note is the inclusion of two landmark scientific papers on animal learning by Keller and Marian Breland (1951, 1961), in their entirety, in an Appendix. Dr. Yin prefaces these articles by giving a brief historical perspective of "How the Science of Learning Made it to Animal Trainers" and then whets the reader's appetite by providing an interview with Marian and her second husband, Bob Bailey. I would encourage anyone with even a flicker of curiosity about animals and how they interface with their environment to read this section—paying particular attention to how the 10

years of experience training thousands of animals changed the outlook of the authors in terms of the role of instinct and limitations to learning.

If you are more utilitarian in your approach to reading this book, it will still be of great use to you. The reader can simply consult the “Five-Minute Guide” section on common behavioral problems to learn about a specific issue. A glossary is also provided, which will help the reader understand terms that may be unfamiliar. However, I would strongly urge the reader to review the entire *Guide to Basic Good Dog Behavior* section prior to addressing specific problems for best results.

“How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves” is a fabulous resource for every dog owner. All of the tools you need to allow your dog to be the best dog (and best behaved dog) he can be are at your fingertips. These approaches are truly a “win/win” for dog and owner alike.