

Basically, dogs have only two ways of learning: (a) trial-and-error and (b) emulation. Learning complex tasks (such as hunting) with trial-and-error takes a lot of practice and thus a long time unless you're hunting regularly. Keep in mind, any time you take your puppy for an off-lead outing in the field/woods, he will be practicing his hunting. It doesn't matter if he's hunting game birds, squirrels, rabbits or mice, because the skill set is the same. All of it is hunting. Emulation is quicker, but many people do not have a good pointing dog for their puppy to learn from. You don't want your puppy emulating a flushing dog, ill-behaved dog, nor a poor/inexperienced hunter. Even if your puppy learns much of his hunting behavior from an experienced dog, there comes a point at which you must hunt your puppy alone, else you'll probably find he'll continue to defer to the older, experienced dog and won't fully develop his own hunting skills. Therefore, the best way for a puppy to learn is through a combination of trial-and-error and emulation.

Whenever we are training our dog, we are using some sort of trial-and-error method (from the dog's point of view). There are 3 basic methods for training a dog: (1) Avoidance Conditioning, a negative reinforcement method (example: low stimulation e-collar training); (2) Compulsion, a negative reinforcement method (example: forced retrieve training using ear pinch); and (3) Operant Conditioning, a positive reinforcement method (example: clicker training). Compulsion has been the traditional method for training hunting dogs in the USA for over a hundred years. Avoidance Conditioning really only came into widespread use with the availability of e-collars capable of very low, continuous stimulation. Operant Conditioning has been used for a very long time to train horses, zoo/circus animals and military porpoise/seals/dogs, but really only came into use with hunting dogs in about the last 20 years. This is because we've learned more about how dogs learn and communicate in the past 20 years than we learned in the previous 100 years.

You can probably train a dog exclusively with any of these three training methods and eventually, if you are competent in the method and patient, your dog should end up fairly-well trained. However, if you combine methods the training will go more smoothly and quickly. In my opinion, the two best methods for novice trainers to use are Avoidance Conditioning and Operant Conditioning. Compulsion is the most difficult method to learn and execute properly. It takes years of practice with dozens (if not hundreds) of dogs to develop the timing necessary to use it successfully without being cruel. That is why most people send their dogs to professional trainers for Forced Retrieve Training. Avoidance Conditioning is generally pretty easy for just about anyone to learn, can get fairly quick results, and works with all but the most soft of dogs. You must be capable of "reading" your dog and timing is extremely important (as with all training methods), but mistakes shouldn't end up in cruelty. Operant Conditioning is the easiest method to learn and sessions are always pleasant for both trainer and dog, but it can take a fairly long time to train and proof complex commands/tasks/behaviors.

The first training book I ever owned was Gun Dog by Richard Wolters. I still have it in my arsenal, but I've since found a much better beginning training guide for versatile hunting breeds. For the all-important first year, my "bible" of training books is How to Help Gun Dogs Train Themselves, Taking Advantage of Early Conditioned Learning by Joan Bailey (<http://amzn.to/IWwL1a>). The initial chapters include information on choosing a breeder, when to bring puppy home, etc., so reading it now makes sense. If you follow the steps outlined in this book, you cannot go wrong in getting your puppy started on the right track. I've read most of the available books and watched nearly all the videos on training versatile gun dogs and believe this book is the best to get you started. Even though I do some things a bit differently than Joan recommends, I know if you follow her advice to the letter, you'll end up with a very well-trained dog. Although Joan does not use an e-collar,

her training methods using a prong training collar transition very well to the Avoidance Conditioning Method of e-collar training. It is easy to read, interesting and contains common sense techniques anyone can use.

Another book that will give you a lot of good information about training a versatile hunting dog is Training the Versatile Hunting Dog by Chuck Johnson (<https://amzn.to/2p0fxW0>). Most of it is very similar to what you'll read in Joan's book. However, there is a chapter on developing the pointing instinct with instructions you should expect to have to modify - using a bird wing on a fishing pole. Most Munster puppies do not point on sight, only on scent. They have such a strong chase instinct (which is critical for natural retrieving), they will try to catch anything they can see. Chuck also uses release traps when training with pen-raised birds. So long as you hide the trap well and the puppy never learns a bird is in the trap, this method can work well. Unfortunately, mechanical problems occur and a bird doesn't get launched, or the puppy gets close enough to see the bird in the trap before it's launched - and that puppy will never again point a bird in a release trap. It won't matter how many subsequent birds are launched correctly, your Munster puppy's high level of persistence will keep him busting in on birds in traps. Therefore, your best bet is to use flighty birds, such as pigeons or mature chukar that have simply been "set" in the grass. I agree 100% with Chuck on check cords - do not use them with your puppy as they only impede his learning. As soon as the check cord is removed, he'll try to catch the bird (and will likely succeed), because he hasn't learned (on his own) if he gets too close to a bird it will fly away. Check cords do not teach a puppy to point. *You* cannot teach your puppy to point. Your puppy must learn to "pause before pouncing" all on his own. In other words, let the *bird* train the puppy.

I am a HUGE believer in Operant Conditioning, especially with puppies. To get started correctly, you must first have a pretty good understanding of how and why the method works. Any book written by Karen Pryor on Operant Conditioning or Clicker Training will contain reliable information. She is a behavioral scientist and long-time animal trainer considered to be the preeminent "guru" of Operant Conditioning. Karen's book, Don't Shoot the Dog (<https://amzn.to/2AMAsiR>), is widely considered a must-read treatise on Operant Conditioning. Do not be fooled by the title - it's not about dog training per se. It's an in depth discussion about all facets of Operant Conditioning with lots of real-life examples. It's an excellent primer, but I think it contains more information than needed for the average person getting started with training a puppy.

Karen's book, Clicker Training for Dogs (<https://amzn.to/2ViSmDe>) is the one I recommend for your first clicker training guide. It is very easy to understand and a basic, simple guide to get someone started with clicker training. It gives clear instructions and examples on how to train basic commands and deal with common puppy behaviors. Another excellent beginning guide is Clicking with Your Dog: Step-By-Step in Pictures by Peggy Tillman (<https://amzn.to/2BrI4IT>). Peggy's book gives step-by-step instructions, with pictures, for training over 100 behaviors. There is a lot of this same information online for free, including You Tube videos, but I think it's worth spending \$10 to buy used copies of both books to have on hand. You are going to be amazed at how quickly and easily a puppy will learn simple commands using this method. It's almost magical. However, as with any training method, you must continue the training to "proof" your dog against the 3 D's - distance, duration and distraction. This is the part that can take a fairly long time. Fortunately, the proofing is fun for both you and the dog.

For retrieve training with Operant Conditioning, I highly recommend Absolutely Positively Gundog Training by Robert Milner (<https://amzn.to/2n6fvLZ>). Although the

advanced training chapters are meant for retrievers hunting from a duck blind, the book is an excellent overall instructional guide for using Operant Conditioning in training your puppy. There's no reason you cannot use his instructions for Whistle Stop as Whoa training, nor is there any reason a pointing dog can't/shouldn't Sit to Flush (Steadiness). Even in NAVHDA testing, a dog may Sit while being steady, whether in the field or in the blind. The only thing you should not use are the instructions for training a dog to quarter a field using handle signals, because versatile breeds do that naturally. This book will show you how to condition your puppy to obey commands and perform tasks using only positive reinforcement. This book is quick and easy to read - and inexpensive.

For more in depth, step-by-step instructions on training a dog to reliably retrieve using Operant Conditioning, I highly recommend The Clicked Retriever by Lana Mitchell. The book and companion DVD can be purchased at <https://www.dogwise.com/the-clicked-retriever/>. It is fairly expensive, but well worth it if you're serious about using a solely positive reinforcement method to train your puppy to retrieve to hand reliably. In my opinion, once your dog is trained to retrieve, you'll still have to use Avoidance Conditioning to proof your dog against the 3 D's when retrieving shot birds.

LIST OF RECOMMENDED BOOKS (in order of recommendation):

Must Have:

- (1) How to Help Gun Dogs Train Themselves, Taking Advantage of Early Conditioned Learning" by Joan Bailey (<http://amzn.to/IWwL1a>)
- (2) Clicker Training for Dogs by Karen Pryor (<https://amzn.to/2ViSmDe>)

Should Have:

- (3) Absolutely Positively Gundog Training by Robert Milner (<https://amzn.to/2n6fvLZ>)
- (4) Training the Versatile Hunting Dog by Chuck Johnson (<https://amzn.to/2p0fxW0>)

May Need/Want:

- (5) Clicking with Your Dog: Step-By-Step in Pictures by Peggy Tillman (<https://amzn.to/2Br14IT>)
- (6) The Clicked Retriever by Lana Mitchell (<https://www.dogwise.com/the-clicked-retriever>)
- (7) Don't Shoot the Dog by Karen Prior (<https://amzn.to/2AMAsiR>)