

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 4 basic conditioning methods for training a dog: (1) Positive Reinforcement; (2) Negative Reinforcement; (3) Positive Punishment; and (4) Negative Punishment. (See attached Operant Conditioning Principles.) Punishment (both positive and negative) has been the traditional method for training hunting dogs in the USA for over a hundred years. Negative Reinforcement using prong collars has been popular in Europe for some time, but really only came into widespread use in the USA with the availability of e-collars capable of low, continuous stimulation. Reinforcement has been used for a very long time to train horses, zoo/circus animals and military animals, 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.

In my opinion, using a combinations of all methods is best. You should always use Reinforcement Methods to teach and occasionally use Punishment Methods to stop and deter. Novice trainers will find both Positive and Negative Reinforcement methods easy to learn and use. Especially with Negative Reinforcement, you must be capable of "reading" your dog and timing is extremely important, but mistakes shouldn't end up in cruelty. Positive Reinforcement (example: Clicker Training) is the easiest method to learn and sessions are always pleasant for both trainer and dog. With all methods, it takes a fairly long time to train and proof complex behaviors. Using force and/or pressure (nice way of saying "pain") does not speed up the training process.

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. Since then, I've read most of the available books and watched nearly all the videos on field training versatile gun dogs and believe "How to Help Gun Dogs Train Themselves, Taking Advantage of Early Conditioned Learning" by Joan Bailey is the best book 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 hunting 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.

For free videos covering a wide range of topics using multiple training methods, including e-collar training, check out Robin MacFarlane's "How to Train Your Dog" videos and articles at:  
<https://www.gundogsupply.com/robin-macfarlane-how-to-train-your-dog.html>. As a general rule, I don't recommend using YouTube as a dog training resource. Sure,

there are a lot of good training videos posted there, but there's also a lot of junk.

Another book that will give you a lot of good information about field training a versatile hunting dog is Training the Versatile Hunting Dog by Chuck Johnson. 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 for using a bird wing on a fishing pole that you should ignore. 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, 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.

#### LIST OF RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

##### \*Must Haves\*

- (A) How to Help Gun Dogs Train Themselves, Taking Advantage of Early Conditioned Learning by Joan Bailey
- (B) Clicker Training for Dogs by Karen Pryor
- (C) Positive Gun Dogs: Clicker Training for Sporting Breeds by Barry & Emmen

##### \*Excellent Additional Resources\*

##### Age 8 weeks or older:

- (1) Training the Versatile Hunting Dog by Chuck Johnson
- (2) Clicking with Your Dog: Step-By-Step in Pictures by Peggy Tillman

##### Age 5 months or older:

- (1) Absolutely Positively Gundog Training by Robert Milner
- (2) The Clicked Retriever by Lana Mitchell
- (<https://www.dogwise.com/the-clicked-retriever>)

##### Age 9 months or older:

- (1) How to Have The Best Trained Gun Dog, Taking Advantage of Proven, Unique Training Methods, All Natural - No Expensive Electronics Needed by Joan Bailey

##### Any age:

- (1) How Dogs Learn by Burch & Bailey (somewhat technical with lots of real-life training examples)

Regarding "Force-Free Gundog Training: The Fundamentals for Success" by Jo Laurens. Although there is excellent training information in this book, most is not applicable to training a versatile hunting dog. This is a book for people who want to train for retriever competitions in the UK using 100% force-free methods.