

CERTIFIED DOG TRAINING INSTRUCTOR COURSE GUIDE AND SYLLABUS

Total Program Length: 23 Weeks



like no
other.



This course is grounded in evidence-based learning theory and prioritizes humane, least intrusive training approaches. Emphasis is placed on setting dogs up for success through thoughtful environment design, reinforcement-based teaching, and respect for emotional welfare.

PHASE 1A: CLASSROOM LECTURES: 7 WEEKS

FEBRUARY 10-MARCH 26, 2026

- Cohort 1 offered in person on Tuesdays, 6-9 pm
- Cohort 2 offered in hybrid format: Phase 1a and 1b offered virtually, Thursdays, 6-9 pm. Phases 2 and 3 must be attended in person.

Note: Students must choose either cohort 1 or cohort 2 and remain with that cohort for the entire phase.

MODULE 1: LEARNING THEORY FOUNDATIONS, OPERANT & CLASSICAL CONDITIONING, AND CANINE ETHOLOGY

LEARNED COMPETENCIES

Upon successful completion of this module:

- Students will be able to objectively define and analyze canine behaviour using observable, measurable criteria and avoid the use of subjective labels or constructs.
- Apply the Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence (ABC) framework to identify environmental triggers and consequences influencing behaviour and predict behaviour change outcomes.
- Demonstrate applied understanding of operant and classical conditioning principles, including Thorndike’s Law of Effect, reinforcement and punishment by effect, and the ethical use of positive reinforcement.
- Assess and select effective reinforcers, condition and use marker signals appropriately, and apply reinforcement strategies such as the Matching Law, reinforcement schedules, and differential reinforcement to teach, maintain, and generalize behaviour.

- Competency will be demonstrated in designing humane behaviour reduction strategies that minimize stress and unintended consequences, including appropriate use of extinction, negative punishment, counterconditioning, and systematic desensitization.
- Explain stimulus control, cue clarity, and generalization across contexts, and will integrate species-specific understanding of canine ethology, development, domestication, and breed predispositions into training plans.
- Accurately interpret canine communication and stress signals, incorporate welfare and enrichment considerations, and apply Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) principles.
- Finally, students will demonstrate the ability to communicate evidence-based training concepts clearly and respectfully to clients, adjust group class environments to support emotional safety and learning, and recognize when alternative training arrangements are required.

TOPICS

- Behaviour Observation & Analysis
- Applied Behaviour Analysis for Dog Trainers (ABC Framework)
- Operant Conditioning Principles
- Reinforcement Skills
- Behaviour Reduction Principles and Potential Fallout
- Classical Conditioning & Emotional Learning
- Stimulus Control & Cue Clarity
- Generalization & Maintenance
- Differential Reinforcement Strategies
- Canine Ethology & Species-Specific Understanding
- Canine Communication & Welfare
- Instructor & Client Communication Skills

MODULE 2: CANINE COMMUNICATION, HANDLING, EQUIPMENT, AND THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

This module focuses on the practical and relational skills required for safe, humane interaction with dogs in group training environments. Students will explore the human-animal bond, canine communication systems, and the interpretation of stress, fear, and escalation signals. Emphasis is placed on consent-based handling, appropriate equipment selection, defensive handling strategies, and risk mitigation. This module prepares instructors to interact safely and ethically with dogs while maintaining welfare, professionalism, and public trust.

LEARNED COMPETENCIES

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Explain the role of the human-animal bond in learning and behaviour
- Accurately interpret canine body language across emotional states
- Identify early warning signs of fear, stress, and escalation
- Apply consent-based interaction and greeting protocols
- Assess risk when approaching or handling unfamiliar or stressed dogs
- Select and properly fit appropriate training and safety equipment
- Apply defensive handling and bite prevention strategies
- Respond appropriately to loose dogs and emergency situations
- Follow established protocols after bites or scratches
- Maintain humane, least intrusive handling practices

TOPICS

- The Human-Animal Bond
- Canine Communication and Body Language
- Consent-Based Interaction and Risk Assessment
- Equipment Selection and Use
- Defensive Handling and Bite Prevention
- Incident Response and Reporting

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

This module emphasizes humane handling, consent-based interaction, and Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) principles. Student decisions must prioritize safety, welfare, and respect for the dog-human relationship.

MODULE 3: GROUP CLASS SAFETY AND OPERATIONS

This module addresses the operational, safety, and risk-management responsibilities of group dog training instructors. Students will learn to design and manage group classes that prioritize safety, welfare, and effective learning. Topics include client communication, facility setup, biosecurity, health screening, environmental modifications, ongoing behavioural assessment, and emergency response. Emphasis is placed on proactive planning, instructor authority, and ethical decision-making in group class contexts.

LEARNED COMPETENCIES

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Develop and communicate clear group class guidelines and expectations
- Create training environments that minimize risk and promote learning
- Implement biosecurity and sanitation best practices
- Assess vaccination and health requirements for participation
- Recognize signs of illness, stress, and over-arousal during class
- Apply environmental modifications to reduce fear and reactivity
- Conduct ongoing behavioural risk assessments
- Make informed decisions regarding class suitability and diversion to private training
- Respond effectively to dog-dog aggression incidents
- Communicate professionally and compassionately with clients following incidents

TOPICS

- Client Communication and Class Guidelines
- Facility Setup and Room Design
- Biosecurity and Health Policies
- Managing Arousal and Stress in Group Classes
- Dog Aggression and Emergency Response

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

This module prioritizes safety, welfare, and professional accountability. Instructors are expected to apply least intrusive, humane interventions while maintaining authority and responsibility for all participants in the training environment.

MODULE 4: CANINE AGGRESSION, RISK ASSESSMENT, AND HUMANE BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

This module examines canine aggression through a humane, science-based, and functional lens, with emphasis on safety, welfare, and preservation of the human–animal bond. Students will explore aggression as a natural component of canine communication influenced by genetics, learning history, environment, and emotional state. The module focuses on behaviour analysis, environmental management, risk assessment, and interdisciplinary collaboration to reduce risk and improve outcomes for dogs and their caregivers. Emphasis is placed on realistic expectations, long-term management, and ethical decision-making rather than “quick fixes.”

LEARNED OUTCOMES

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Explain the impact of aggression on the human–animal bond and animal welfare
- Describe aggression as a functional, context-dependent behaviour

- Apply behaviour analysis to assess aggressive behaviour
- Identify environmental and contextual factors contributing to aggression
- Conduct basic risk assessments using established frameworks
- Design management and behaviour modification strategies that prioritize safety
- Apply counter-conditioning and desensitization appropriately
- Provide practical, humane guidance to pet guardians
- Collaborate effectively with veterinary and welfare professionals
- Communicate realistic expectations regarding aggression outcomes

TOPICS

- The Human–Animal Bond and Aggression
- Understanding Canine Aggression
- Behavioural Models of Analysis
- Environmental and Contextual Factors
- ABC Framework and Functional Analysis
- Management and Behaviour Modification Strategies
- Working with Pet Guardians
- Case Applications
- Risk Assessment and Safety Planning
- Prevention and Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- Realistic Expectations and Long-Term Outcomes

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

This module prioritizes safety, welfare, and professional accountability. Instructors are expected to apply least intrusive, humane interventions while maintaining authority and responsibility for all participants in the training environment.

Foundational Dog Training Skills

This module introduces foundational training exercises that establish clear communication, engagement, and effective handler mechanics in a group class setting. Emphasis is placed on marker conditioning, attention-building skills, cue clarity, and reinforcement delivery. Exercises are taught using evidence-based, reinforcement-focused methods designed to support learning, generalization, and emotional safety for dogs and handlers.

LEARNED OUTCOMES

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Condition and apply a reliable reward marker
- Build voluntary attention and engagement
- Introduce and clarify verbal and visual cues
- Apply effective reinforcement placement and timing
- Support foundational handler mechanics for future training skills
- Teach a variety of exercises using luring, shaping, capturing and targeting

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Unit 1: Marker Conditioning

- Loading a reward marker (clicker or verbal)
- Verifying conditioned marker response

Unit 2: Engagement and Attention Skills

- Cued eye contact
- Name recognition and orientation response
- Auto leave it exercises

Unit 3: Foundational Stationing and Targeting

- Hand touch (nose targeting)
- Use of targeting to support movement and engagement
- Teaching duration on stations

Unit 4: Cue Introduction and Clarity

- Teaching behaviours using lure-and-fade
- Teaching behaviours using shaping and targeting
- Introduction and pairing of verbal cues with hand signals

Unit 5: Handler Mechanics and Reinforcement Delivery

- Leash handling fundamentals
- Marker timing
- Reward placement
- Reinforcement during stationary and moving exercises

Unit 6: Socialization exercises for puppies

- Handling exercises
- Novel sights and sounds
- Crate training
- Potty training
- Preparing for vet visits
- Impulse control exercises
- Basic puppy manners exercises

Skill Progressions

- Marker paired with reinforcement → conditioned marker
- Offered attention → attention on cue

- Single-cue name response → movement toward handler
- Lured behaviours → hand signal → verbal cue
- Stationary reinforcement mechanics → movement with clarity
- Close-proximity targeting → increased distance
- Behaviours under distraction

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

This module emphasizes humane, reinforcement-based training methods aligned with Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) principles. All exercises prioritize clarity, choice, and emotional safety.

PHASE 2: GROUP CLASS SHADOWING 6 WEEKS – MAY 12-JUNE 16, 2026

- Students shadow and assist a certified animal trainer during group class or one on one training sessions
- One 2-hour shift per week for 6 weeks (various shifts over evenings and weekends available)

Note: All students must attend in person

PHASE 3: PRACTICE TEACHING, PRACTICAL AND WRITTEN EXAM: INDIVIDUALLY SCHEDULED OVER A 4 WEEK PERIOD – JUNE 22-JULY 17, 2026

- Student leads 2 group training classes to practice teaching skills
- Practical and written exams scheduled:
 - 2 attempts for each exam permitted

Note: All students must attend in person – Various shifts over evenings and weekends available

CERTIFIED DOG TRAINING INSTRUCTOR COURSE OUTCOME

Successful students are awarded the designation Certified Dog Training Instructor.

