
TRAINING MY DOGS FOR THE CANINE GOOD CITIZEN TEST

by Patricia Franklin

When I began taking a basic obedience class with one of my first Cavalier King Charles Spaniels I discovered that training my dog gave me a different type of bond than I had with her previously. Yes, she was and still is a wonderful pet and companion, but training added a team-like dimension to our relationship. As I went on to train Shelby and my other dogs to earn their Canine Good Citizen certificate I found that the process was fun and rewarding for both me and the dogs.

The Canine Good Citizen Test is a certificate program developed by the American Kennel Club. It is not a "titled" performance event like obedience, rally, or agility, but a test to simulate everyday situations in a non-competitive manner. The test is designed to promote dogs with good manners out in public, at home with their owners, and around other dogs. The CGC is not just a test for purebred dogs. Unlike other events the AKC holds, the CGC is for pure bred dogs as well as mixed breed dogs. All interested dog owners can train their dogs to earn the CGC.

There are ten items in the CGC Test. The test is designed to be given by an AKC approved evaluator and the test is pass/fail. So training is advised before trying to pass the test with your dog. The items on the test are: 1. accepting a friendly stranger, 2. sitting politely for petting, 3. appearance and grooming, 4. walking on a loose lead, 5. walking through a crowd, 6. sit and down on command with a stay in place, 7. coming when called, 8. reaction to another dog, 9. reaction to distractions, and 10. supervised separation.

Some of these items are easy for a Cavalier to learn because of their happy, friendly personalities and others are more difficult for the same reason. The skills I found to be the easiest to train in my dogs were accepting a friendly stranger, that is allowing a stranger to approach dog and handler and the dog remains relaxed, reaction to other dogs, a person with their dog approaches and the dogs show just a casual interest in each other they do not go to the other handler or his dog. Appearance and grooming, that is allowing someone other than the owner groom the dog, and sitting politely with the handler while a stranger approaches and touches the dog. The skills that I found that were

more challenging for my dogs were walking through a crowd; this has the dog walking with the handler on lead while a number of people are in close contact and the dog remains relaxed and does not approach the other people. Supervised separation is difficult for cavaliers as this skill requires that the dog be left on lead with a stranger while the owner goes out of sight for a few minutes. The dog cannot show signs of stress or act out. The other skills on the test were somewhat challenging I think to all dogs, like walking on a loose lead with no pulling allowed, sits and downs with a stay, getting a reliable recall or come and reactions to surprising situations such as loud noises or unusual looking people or things.

You can choose to train your dog yourself for the CGC test but what I chose to do was to take a class at the obedience training center. I found it to be an easy way for me and my dogs to learn the skills with professional guidance. Also at the end of the six week class the class instructor gave the CGC Test and I knew right away if my dog and I had passed. This is a pass/fail test and the other dogs in my classes usually were very successful, but a few did fail. Another advantage of the class was the instructors could immediately tell those who failed what went wrong and how to correct it. Some chose to repeat the class and test again.

If you choose to train on your own for the CGC Test the AKC has a publication that you can order from their website at www.akc.org that will help you. After you have trained your dog and feel you are ready to take the test you can go back to the AKC website and look for dog related events or dog shows where the test will be given. There is a small fee for the test and dogs must show proof of inoculation.

I learned a lot about my dogs and myself while training for the CGC Test. We had a lot of fun and learned to work as a team. I became interested in Animal Assisted Therapy and found that the CGC Test is the foundation for most Animal Assisted Therapy exams. I now have two of my Cavaliers certified as Pet Partners with The Delta Society. I also found I really enjoyed training my dogs and have gone on to train competitively in obedience and rally.