

# The Focus Fetch: Learning to Listen Like a Dog

## Materials Needed

- One trained therapy/demonstration dog (and handler/trainer)
- Treats or favorite toy for the dog
- A small, soft ball or simple item the dog can fetch
- Whiteboard or large paper and markers (for writing objectives/criteria)
- Space for children to sit and move safely around the dog (a designated safety boundary)

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this 40-minute lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify at least two specific behaviors (visual or auditory) that show a dog is focusing on a command.
2. Practice giving instructions using two different communication styles (quick/direct and slow/calm).
3. Explain why adjusting communication style helps all listeners, whether they have two legs or four.

## Success Criteria

I know I succeeded when:

- I can tell the difference between "hearing" and "listening."
- I successfully give the dog a simple instruction (with help from the trainer).
- I can name one way I could speak more clearly to a friend or family member.

## Part 1: The Magic of Focus (Introduction & Hook)

**Time:** 5 minutes

### Hook: The Ultimate Listener

**Trainer/Educator Talk:** "Look at our dog friend today. What is the dog doing right now? [Wait for responses: sitting, lying down, looking at the trainer.] How can we tell that they are paying attention and really listening? What do you notice about their eyes or their body?"

Sometimes, we hear words, but we don't really listen. Listening means focusing our minds and bodies on the person speaking. Today, we are going to learn how to be incredible listeners—just like a dog! We'll learn how to focus, how to communicate clearly, and how to understand that different listeners need different kinds of instructions."

### Reviewing Objectives

*(Write objectives on the board/paper.)* "By the time we finish, we'll know the secret to the dog's focus, and we'll practice giving commands in ways that are super clear."

## Part 2: The Command Challenge (I Do & We Do)

**Time:** 25 minutes (10 min I Do, 15 min We Do)

### I DO: Modeling the Two Styles (The Trainer Demonstrates)

**Instructional Method:** Demonstration and Direct Modeling

#### 1. Style 1: The Quick Command (The 'Zoom')

- The trainer models giving a command (e.g., "Sit!") quickly, loudly, with distracting body language or while moving fast.
- **Observation:** Encourage learners to observe how the dog reacts. (The dog might look confused, hesitate, or only partially comply.)
- **Trainer explains:** "Did the dog understand me? Not really! Why? My words were fast, and my body was too confusing. That's how we feel when someone rushes us or gives us 10 instructions at once."

#### 2. Style 2: The Clear Command (The 'Calm')

- The trainer models the same command, but uses a calm, clear tone, pauses briefly before speaking, and holds steady eye contact (or visual focus) with the dog.
- **Observation:** Learners note how the dog's behavior changes (quick compliance, tail wag, focused eyes).
- **Trainer explains:** "That was much better! The dog could focus because I was focused. When we slow down, use a steady voice, and make sure the dog knows we are talking to them, it helps them listen much better. This is especially true for listeners who might need a little extra time to process information!"

### WE DO: The Focus Huddle (Guided Practice)

**Activity:** Trainer Switch Game

**Grouping:** Whole group observing, taking turns practicing in pairs (one child speaks, one child observes and gives feedback).

#### Steps:

1. **Preparation:** Establish the safety rule: only the designated "trainer" can approach the dog boundary, and only when the lead trainer says it is safe.
2. **Practice Round 1 (Clear Voice):** Four learners take turns practicing Style 2 (The 'Calm') with a simple command like "Stay" or "Down." The trainer helps guide their tone and body language.
3. **Formative Assessment Check:** After each child attempts, the group discusses: "How did the dog respond? Did they show 'dog focus' (ears forward, steady gaze)? Why or why not?" (This reinforces the success criteria.)
4. **Practice Round 2 (The 'Wait'):** Introduce a two-step instruction (e.g., "Take the ball, then give it back"). Have the learners practice giving the first instruction, pausing for five seconds (the 'wait' time), and then giving the second. This simulates giving someone time to process.

### YOU DO: Applying Focus to Friends (Independent Application)

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Activity:** Think-Pair-Share: Listening to Humans

**Instructions:**

1. **Think:** "We learned that dogs listen better when we are calm and clear. Think of a time you were trying to tell someone something, but they weren't listening well. What was confusing? Was it too fast? Too noisy? Too many steps?" (1 minute)
2. **Pair & Share:** Learners turn to a partner. One child shares their reflection, and the other child practices being a "Clear Listener" by facing them, staying still, and making eye contact. Then they switch roles. (2 minutes)
3. **Whole Group Share:** Ask two volunteers to share one thing they learned about listening to a human friend that is the same as listening to a dog. (Focus, clarity, calmness).

**Part 3: Review and Takeaways (Closure)**

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Quick Recap and Summative Assessment**

**Trainer Talk:** "We learned a lot about focus today! Let's see if we met our goals."

**Q&A Check (Alignment to Objectives):**

1. What are two things the dog did that told you they were really focused on the command? (Expected answers: steady gaze, sitting still, ears up.)
2. If you have a friend who needs a little extra time to understand instructions, what kind of communication style would you use: the 'Zoom' or the 'Calm'? (Expected answer: The 'Calm' style.)
3. Why does slowing down and being clear help everyone? (Expected answer: It makes the message easier to catch and understand.)

**Reinforcing Takeaways**

"Just like we had to be patient and clear for the dog to succeed, we need to remember that all people, including our friends and family, listen and learn in slightly different ways. Being a great communicator means learning how to change your style to help the person (or dog!) you are talking to."

**Dog Thank You:** Learners can calmly thank the dog for being a good listener and practice their calm voice one last time.

**Differentiation and Adaptability****Scaffolding (For younger learners or those needing more support, ages 6-7)**

- **Focus on Observation:** Younger children are primarily observers during the "We Do" phase. Instead of giving commands, their job is to use thumbs up/thumbs down to indicate if the dog looked focused or distracted.
- **Simplified Commands:** Use only one-word commands (Sit, Stay, Look).
- **Physical Cues:** Use visual cue cards showing the difference between the "Calm" voice and the "Zoom" voice (e.g., a calm face vs. a rushed face).

**Extension (For older learners or those needing more challenge, ages 10-12)**

- **Communication Analysis:** Have older learners track data: "When Trainer X used the 'Calm' voice, the dog responded in 2 seconds. When they used the 'Zoom' voice, the dog responded in 5

seconds or not at all." They analyze why the delay occurred.

- **Create a Protocol:** Task the group with designing a 3-step "Clear Communication Checklist" that would work for both the dog and a classmate working on a difficult project. (E.g., 1. Get Attention, 2. Speak Slowly, 3. Check for Understanding.)

### **Adaptability Across Contexts**

- **Homeschool Context:** The lesson can be adapted using a family pet or even a plush toy that responds only when the child uses a calm, measured voice. The "You Do" applies to parent-child communication clarity during chores or schoolwork.
- **Classroom Context:** The 'We Do' activity shifts to practicing clear instructions for a partner to build a block tower or draw a specific image, reinforcing that different people need different input styles to successfully complete a task.