



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

## Training Phase Descriptions

### **FORMAL GUIDEWORX TRAINING PHASES**

In an effort to keep raisers and leaders informed about the progress of dogs in formal training, Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) provides a weekly report showing the training phase of each dog. There are currently eight phases of training. A dog is placed in a phase once all of the exercises in that phase have been completed; i.e. when a dog is in Phase 3, it has completed all of the exercises listed in Phase 3.

The descriptions of activities included in each phase are listed below. Puppy raisers can track the dog they raised by the phase number and then refer to the matching phase narrative to better understand GDB's training process and the individual dog's role in it.

Guide dog training is a systematic and often seamless process; each dog is treated as an individual and progresses at their own pace from one phase to the other as skills are learned.

Phases generally last a week or so, depending on the individual dog. At times, it may seem like some dogs advance quickly through phases and others linger. Neither situation necessarily indicates success or failure in the program. If a dog remains in a certain phase longer than average, it may mean that the dog is working on proficiency in one area, or training or veterinary staff are investigating a potential behavioral or health issue that needs extra time. Puppy raisers are encouraged to be flexible and refrain from either being discouraged if progress seems slow or overly eager if progress seems quick.

Puppy raisers are also advised against plotting out on a calendar an anticipated graduation date. Once a dog begins formal training, it can last three to five months, and some dogs may be at GDB longer. GDB's training model allows Guide Dog Mobility Instructors (GDMIs) to spend comprehensive, one-on-one time, every day, developing each dog. Extra time spent in training likely means that GDB training staff like the dog very much and they are doing their best to give the dog all the love, care, and training that it needs to become a guide dog prospect.

In some ways, today's guide dog needs to be "Super Dog." The world has become an increasingly more demanding environment for guide dogs. Cars are faster and quieter, noise has increased (construction equipment, concerts, movie theaters), and intersections are varied with different designs of intersecting paths, slopes, and angles. Take a walk on a busy city street and study it from the perspective of a guide dog needing to travel it safely, calmly and confidently. Quite amazing, isn't it?

At times, dogs that may have been ideal guides in the more slowly-paced, straightforward world of yesteryear might be career changed today. GDB believes in the breeding of better dogs, having high screening standards for both health and temperament, and having raisers and instructors that are working harder than ever to prepare each dog... all in an attempt to keep up with a world that seems to be getting more complex.

In the following phase descriptions, GDB shares training exercises and verbal cues that are not taught in the raiser homes. The success of the GDB program depends on all raisers' support. It is important for puppy raisers to refrain from using these words and teaching these exercises in their homes. Raisers who attempt to give their dogs "a head start" by teaching the guidework discussed in this package may, in fact, negatively impact the dog's potential to become a guide. Raisers are expected to only teach the behaviors outlined by their leader, CFR and GDB puppy raising materials.

Dogs recalled intact (not spayed or altered) will be evaluated for breeding and will not show up on the weekly phase reports. The breeding evaluation process can take up to two months (or longer, depending on the circumstances). Not all dogs evaluated are chosen as breeders. Those dogs with mild health or temperament

issues that preclude them from breeding stock may still be eligible for training; if so, they are then neutered or spayed and prepared for a training string.

“Career change” dogs are those that are released from the program for temperament, behavioral, work or health reasons. GDB facilitates strategic placements of career change dogs as well as placement into loving, caring adoptive pet homes. Dogs can be career changed for many factors not in a raiser's control. A raiser's success is measured by the amount of love, effort, and time spent with their puppy, not whether the pup becomes guide or not.

Some of these dogs may be evaluated for a different formal career path such as helping someone with diabetes, seizures or hearing deficits, being a K9 Buddy dog for a young person who is blind or vision impaired not yet old enough to work with a guide dog, search and rescue, law enforcement, and even cancer detection. Many other dogs go on to do more “recreational” activities such as agility, tracking, or pet therapy with their adoptive families.

GDB is successful due in large part to its puppy raising volunteers. Puppy raisers socialize and teach very important fundamental aspects that are the foundation for a compatible guide dog. Mature puppies come into formal training reliable in the home, relieving on cue, responsive to obedience verbal cues, are comfortable in the environment, and loving and trusting of people. Puppy raisers are commended for their valuable contributions to GDB's mission!

### **PHASE ZERO: ARRIVAL PERIOD**

Before formal training begins, the new dog is introduced to the GDB kennels, campus walks and the formal training program.

#### **Health Screening and Kennel Socialization**

During this important transitional period, each dog receives a preliminary physical exam, performed by a Canine Welfare Training Technician (CWTT). The CWTT thoroughly inspects each dog from head to tail and checks the nose, teeth, eyes, ears, coat, skin and feet. Any ailments, abnormalities or concerns are noted and brought to the attention of GDB's veterinary staff. Most dogs that enter training are in excellent condition, although some may require medication for minor ailments such as an ear or eye infection.

During the first week on campus, dogs receive the following:

- Orthopedic x-rays
- A formal in-for-training physical by a GDB veterinarian
- An eye exam by a veterinary ophthalmology specialist
- An accurate weight

During the veterinary physical examination, each dog also receives any needed vaccines based on the veterinary records submitted by puppy raisers.

Once physical examinations are finished, each dog is formally assigned to a group of dogs (called a “string”) and a specific training kennel. Instructors train four dogs at a time, which enables them to get the dogs out approximately twice a day, every day, Monday through Friday. A string can range from 8 to 16 dogs, depending on the campus, staffing capabilities and overall class matching needs.

During this introductory period, each dog's personality and manageability are evaluated to help prepare instructors in how to motivate and teach each dog most effectively.

Phase Zero normally coincides with the team of instructors returning from a session in class followed by visits to clients in their home areas. Prior to the team's return, CWTTs, core support instructor staff, and qualified volunteers care for the new dogs helping them to adapt to the kennel environment in an engaging and positive manner. Dogs are initially put into a kennel by themselves, which is conducive to cuddling and ice cube enrichment. Once x-rays and physicals are done, dogs are often paired (“doubled”) together in a kennel.

## **Week Zero Activities**

- Walks on campus and playtime in an enclosed grass paddock
- Doubling kennelmates that play well together
- Daily grooming
- Medication administration, as needed
- Human and dog interactive play or cuddle sessions
- Introduction to group community run playtime
- Kennel enrichment activities

Kennel enrichment is anything that stimulates the senses and puts the dogs at ease in a kennel environment. The primary focus of the CWTTs is to care for and provide kennel enrichment for the dogs. Some enrichment activities take place daily for every dog, other activities are done intermittently, and others still are targeted towards specific dogs (for example, dogs that are slow to adjust to kennel life; boarding or retired guides; career change dogs, and breeding stock dogs waiting for homes). Kennel enrichment activities are continuously evolving and the CWTT staff is always coming up with ways to entertain and stimulate the dogs. Enrichment activities are many, including:

- Bones and chewable toys: food stuffed Kongs and ice cubes
- Hanging toys with or without food in them
- Plush and squeaky toys – closely monitored (not recommended for raisers or clients)
- Baby pools filled with water or a toy and/or playground equipment
- Scents: vanilla, peppermint, anise, lemon, almond, etc. sprayed in the kennel
- Bubbles, mirrors, wind catchers, sound machines, music
- T-Touch, Pilates, massage and Reiki
- Behavior training for dogs that need additional socialization, or for career change
- dogs or breeder dogs awaiting placement
- Exercise: walks, treadmill, enclosed grass paddocks
- Cuddle time

Training staff carefully observes each new string of dogs to make sure that each dog makes as smooth an adjustment to the kennels as possible. Selected dogs may receive any additional attention in the following areas as needed:

- Agility programs
- Extra play sessions in community run
- Frequent walks on campus
- Consistent, supervised time in offices
- Overnights spent supervised by training staff in the student residence
- Any specialized programs specific to the needs of that dog (vet care, extra time in the office, etc.)

## **PHASE 1: FORMAL TRAINING BEGINS – ON CAMPUS AND IN TOWN**

### **Food Reward and Clicker Techniques**

Food rewards are used in the GDB training program as a powerful motivation and reinforcement tool for learning and maintaining desired behavior.

Clicker training is the popular term to describe a training method that uses operant conditioning -- the animal intentionally performs a behavior in order to gain a desired reward. GDB uses clicker training as a tool for teaching various aspects of guidework and obedience responses. The clicker serves as a “marker” for the exact behavior the instructor would like to see the dog perform and repeat (e.g. targeting a curb, stair, escalator, elevator, crosswalk button, seat, etc.). It is a positive reinforcement-based system that associates high value rewards (food) with desired behaviors. The use of the clicker in guidework training encourages the dog to be an active participant in the learning process.

Enjoyable consequences (“rewards”) and the entire reward process is called “reinforcement.” Clicker trained dogs will actively try to learn new behaviors and will remember those behaviors years later. Clicker trained behaviors are performed by the dog with confidence and enthusiasm because the dog plays an active role and has control over when it receives rewards. They are enthusiastic because they understand that their performance will be rewarded with something very pleasurable.

With these training techniques, dogs in training learn faster and demonstrate higher levels of confidence in the work, and clients experience quick and encouraging results with food use as a supplement to praise.

**NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, puppy raisers do not use the clicker with their puppies. This allows dog to enter training with a 'clean slate' regarding clicker associations.**

### **Obedience Responses and Teaching Focus Around Distractions**

In order to both successfully teach guidework and for the client to easily manage their guide, collar response is important. Collar response means that a dog readily follows or yields to even slight tension on the collar. For example, it is a useful tool that allows the instructor to physically cue the dog from its following position to move left or right in guidework. Alternatively, it discourages a guide from pulling in the collar on leash with a client.

### **Formal Obedience**

The verbal cues “sit,” “down,” “heel” (both moving and stationary), and “stay” are introduced as precise positions in relation to the handler. Precision is important so the dog does not interfere with or disorient the client. The “come” recall is practiced on leash in a variety of areas and off leash in enclosed areas.

Focus is taught before and during basic obedience work. Distractions are used to teach focus and concentration toward the job. Distractions may include: other dogs, food, solicitous people, scents, and balls. Any dog that demonstrates below average ability to progress around distractions may receive additional attention in the following areas: different types of play sessions; higher value food reward to increase the dog’s motivation to work for the handler; extra time relaxing with their instructor to develop a closer relationship; extra abbreviated obedience sessions without distractions to improve collar response.

### **Food Refusal Protocol**

All dogs learn how to politely accept food rewards and how to refuse food in all other situations. This specialized food protocol training is designed to handle the delicate balance of using food as a motivator while ensuring that no negative behaviors develop around food. In addition, the dogs are taught how to avoid and refuse food on the ground or offered by others.

### **Socialization**

Dogs are introduced to riding in the van crates prior to actually riding in the training vans. A configuration of crates, identical to those in the vans, is located in the kennel complex. All dogs are introduced to jumping in and out of this “mock” crate set before being put in an actual training van. Dogs then experience loading and unloading from crates in the van, riding comfortably and quietly, and waiting quietly in the van for their turn at a training route. If a dog makes a slow adjustment to the van crates, they are given additional or specialized socialization programs.

### **Body Handling Acceptance**

Dogs are exposed to comprehensive, hands-on body handling, which includes grooming and paw handling, pilling, bathing, ear and teeth cleaning, feeding, and play sessions that are conducive to interaction with a handler who is vision- impaired (e.g. no excessive vocalization, no jumping up or running into a person). Any issues with body handling are evaluated and programs developed to improve issues are implemented as needed.

### **Introduction to the Harness**

Dogs are given a calm introduction to being harnessed. They initially stand, then walk around in harness as well as wear it in relaxed settings. Dogs with above average sensitivity to wearing the harness are put on a socialization program to improve their response and comfort level while wearing the harness.

### **Treadmill Training**

Treadmill work introduces the dogs to the biomechanics of pulling into the harness and how to maintain a lead. Dogs are introduced to the verbal cues of “forward,” “halt,” and “hopp-up” as they learn to pull with a straight body position. A comfortable gait and speed are identified for each dog. Most dogs adjust quickly to the treadmill through a systematic and careful introduction, food reward use and lots of support and praise. Staff ensure the dogs are not only safe, but also enjoy their time on the treadmill. The introduction techniques are so successful that it’s common to see dogs trying to get on the treadmill whenever they walk past one!

Dogs receive two treadmill sessions before beginning harness workouts (pattern training) downtown with their instructors.

**NOTE: Do not put pups on treadmills or escalators.**

### **Pattern Training**

Pattern training is a method of introducing guidework behaviors to the young dog in a very positive manner. The instructor cues the correct guiding behavior to the dog, allowing the dog to complete the exercise without any mistakes. In this way the instructor keeps all guidework-related learning very upbeat for the dog. Obedience is used during guidework to regain attention on the work as needed. Once the dog is attentive, guidework pattern training resumes. Pattern training lasts for several sessions (approximately two weeks) and is gradually weaned off as the dog gains a better understanding of its responsibility. During pattern training, dogs are worked in a variety of environments, even challenging areas. However, advanced environments, such as heavy urban area with crowds, loud noise, etc., are avoided.

Dogs are introduced to the following guidework behaviors during patterning:

- Stopping at streets, regardless of the type of curb or wheelchair ramp
- Clearing for the handler on the right and left sides as well as above dog's head
- Crossing streets on a line that efficiently reaches the up curb on the other side
- Maintaining consistent pace and drive with the verbal cue "forward"
- How to respond to the various uses of the 'hopp-up' verbal cue – resuming or increasing pace; moving closer to a stopping point; or for re-focus
- Stopping and standing calmly after the verbal cue "halt"
- Leading the handler in a 90 degree turn to the right and picking up the new travel line on "right"
- Leading the handler in a 90 degree turn to the left and picking up the new travel line on "left"

### **Up Curb Exercise #1**

Dogs are taught to target up curbs via clicker training and food reward by placing their front feet on the curb. The first up curb exercise is done on campus, and subsequent exercises are done on route in town.

### **Developing Physical Agility**

- **Back Up Chute**  
Dogs do not know how to naturally move backwards. Coordination training in how to physically back up is introduced at this time and continues for several weeks to prepare the dogs for future traffic avoidance training. In traffic avoidance, dogs are taught to speed up or stop, hold, and back up (if needed) in a straight line while facing the oncoming vehicle. The backup chute activity teaches dogs the mechanics of backing up in a very positive and fun way.
- **Obstacle Course**  
On campus obstacle courses are convenient opportunities for the dog to learn how to safely navigate past objects. The instructor patterns the dog to move past the obstacles with caution. Dogs are encouraged to walk slightly ahead of the instructor. Early on, the courses are designed so that new dogs do not need to stop on the course.

## **PHASE 2: IN TOWN AND RESPONSIBLE LEAD**

### **Obedience and Distraction Training**

General collar responses and formal obedience responses continue to develop. More challenging distractions are introduced at a closer proximity, including: various dog breeds, food, solicitous people, and unusual scents.

The verbal cue "over here" is introduced. This cues the dog to move from heel position, behind the handler's back, to the right side of the handler in order to walk safely through a door that opens to the left (hinge on left). This is also helpful when going through revolving doors and store turnstiles.

### **Body Handling Acceptance**

Body handling acceptance continues to be developed and improved. Grooming, pilling, bathing, ear cleaning, teeth cleaning, feeding, and playing are done to simulate client handling. The dog is taught to lie down and roll over in a variety of settings for inspection and care as needed.

### **Kennel Adjustment and Routine**

CWTTs continue to focus on kennel enrichment activities, relaxing time in community run, grooming and campus walks. Specialized programs continue, such as kennel enrichment, harness socialization, etc.

### **Wearing the Harness**

By now, the dogs are comfortable wearing and working in the harness. Any dogs with sensitivity to wearing the harness are put on specialized programs.

### **Pattern Training Progression**

Instructors now allow the dog more freedom to make decisions and make some mistakes. When errors begin to occur, instructors show the dog the correct answer before the dog gets confused. Basic level guidework responses are directed as a client might do. The dog experiences all guidework behaviors and the instructor still patterns any advanced responses.

Guidework responses progress to the extent that the dog can respond to each verbal cue consistently with minimal leash gestures or leash use, and maintain a straight line of travel with the instructor under blindfold. The dog learns to ignore the handler's body position or movements, and to compensate for same as needed.

### **Planned Dog Distraction Route**

While everyday routes in town present natural distractions to the dogs in training, these distractions are variable and often unpredictable. Also, not all dogs may have the opportunity to encounter that same distraction nor have the ability to use it in a productive manner. For example, if a pet dog comes around the corner suddenly yet also leaves suddenly, the dog in training does not have an opportunity to either make a choice to ignore the distraction or re-focus in the midst of that distraction. To afford all dogs in training the opportunity to develop this important skill, instructors work a route that includes two or three "set up distractions"— staff-held pet dogs in pre-determined areas on a route. These distractions can be seen from a distance, and the dog in training learns to remain focused both leading up to and passing the distraction.

### **Up Curb Exercise #2**

The second up curb exercise is incorporated into a route in town. This exercise teaches and reinforces the "curb" verbal cue, which is used only in the street to indicate to the dog to move to the up curb as efficiently as possible.

### **Physical Agility**

Programs continue as in Phase 1.

### **Obstacle Course Progression**

Most dogs are ready to guide through the clearance course, and are collar cued by the instructor to move as a finished guide might move. If not ready to work in harness, dogs continue to walk through the obstacle course on leash. NEW! Course design becomes more difficult, requiring more angled clearance moves by the dogs but not requiring a stop.

## **PHASE 3: PRELIMINARY TESTING**

### **Notable Accomplishment - Preliminary Obedience Testing**

Focus and responses of the following are assessed. Experienced GDMIs will assess these areas independently, while Apprentice GDMIs will complete a formal test.

- Dogs are expected to understand and respond to "sit", "down", "heel", "come", and "stay" amid mild distractions with consistency and a single verbal cue
- Demonstration of food refusal
- General ease of body handling

### **Obedience and Distraction Training**

Collar and praise responses continue to develop. Reliable responses and focus continue to develop in various environments (formal, informal and during guidework). Dogs generally require minimal repeat verbal or leash cues. Instructor starts to mimic client handling more.

### **Notable Accomplishment - Preliminary Blindfold Testing**

Dogs must demonstrate an understanding of safe guidework skills and focus on work and handler. Experienced GDMLs will assess these skills independently during daily workouts, while Apprentice GDMLs will complete a formal test. The instructor works a dog under blindfold on an urban/suburban area route, a distance of approximately 8-10 blocks.

Dogs that pass preliminary blindfold testing progress to advanced guidework training. Dogs that do not pass or demonstrate major weaknesses in the basic fundamentals are given additional training time and are re-tested when ready.

### **Difficult Distractions**

Continues as in Phase 2.

### **Body Handling Acceptance**

Continues as in Phase 2.

### **Guidework Training**

The dogs are comfortable wearing and working in the harness. Individual dogs that still have problems wearing a harness would be a concern, but are still kept on socialization programs to improve behavior.

### **Pattern Training**

Most dogs assume the majority of the basic responsibilities of guidework at this point and no longer need patterning. The dogs generally respond to “forward,” and lead out and maintain drive on their own or with an occasional leash or verbal prompt as needed. They respond to turn cues; pivot and drive out of turns; and they maintain line during movement. Responsibility in work responses is gradually increased and tested.

### **Responsible Lead Session**

In order to reinforce what the dog has learned, responsible lead lessons for each dog occur at the end of pattern training. This session occurs on a long straight path. As in the planned distraction route, responsible lead involves “set-ups” as a means to reinforce a dog’s good focus past distractions or remind a dog how to achieve the same.

### **Up Curb Exercise #3**

The third up curb exercise is incorporated into a route in town.

### **Physical Agility Programs**

Continues as in Phase 2.

### **Sidewalkless Technique Introduction**

Dogs learn how to work in areas without sidewalks or a reasonable shoulder on which to walk. The travel line is the left side of the street facing oncoming traffic. Dogs learn how to respond to intersecting streets and parked cars along their travel line.

### **Intelligent Disobedience Training Begins**

All dogs guide in harness through a challenging obstacle clearance course with leash cues as necessary to move as a finished guide. Course design becomes increasingly more difficult, requiring problem solving skills.

Some clearances require a stop. Intelligent disobedience responses are introduced after successful preliminary testing. Intelligent disobedience is when a guide dog purposely does not respond to a handler’s guidework verbal cue because it is either unsafe or impossible to follow through with the response.

Addressing errors is now introduced for basic clearance work. Dogs are given an opportunity to re-do the area (“re-work”) after being shown the error.

### **Obstacle Course Progression**

All dogs guide in harness through the obstacle course with leash/collar cues as necessary. Course design becomes more difficult, requiring even more angled clearance moves by the dogs.

CWTTs continue to focus on kennel enrichment, relaxing time in community run, grooming and campus walks.

## **PHASE 4: BUILDING WORK**

### **Formal Harness Training**

The dogs now have full freedom to make decisions and some mistakes with normal guidework responses. When errors occur, instructors continue to show the dog the correct answer before confusion sets in. Instructors still pattern challenging and advanced guiding decisions and responses. Dogs are worked past open parking lot areas and difficult travel lines to further establish responsible line stability. Working past challenging animal and food distractions continues.

Instructors often “spot” each other (for safety), and practice short blindfold sessions with their respective dogs. This gives them valuable information regarding what guidework behaviors are strong and what need further development in an individual dog. Practice routes that follow these blindfold sessions focus on development of needed areas and reinforcement of established responses.

After preliminary testing, more extensive work inside buildings begins.

### **Body Handling Acceptance**

Continues as in Phase 3. NEW! New handlers are added to assess the dog’s comfort and willingness with strangers.

### **Physical Agility Programs**

Continues as in Phase 3.

### **Obstacle Course Progression Continues**

NEW! An overhead clearance is any obstacle that is above the dog’s head. Dogs are initially taught to target this type of clearance. The dogs are then taught to look up for overhead clearances through a graduated approach (teaching bar starts low, and is gradually raised as dog gains proficiency).

### **Escalator Introductions and Training - Boarding/Riding/Exiting**

Dogs are taught how to safely step onto moving stairs (escalators), acquire a safe stance, ride the escalator in a stationary position, and exit safely with the appropriate energy.

**NOTE: Puppies are NOT to ride escalators.**

### **Socialization**

Extra socialization assignments are done with individual dogs as needed. Some examples: harness or surface sensitive dogs; dogs that are reluctant to relieve on leash; or dogs that have questionable kennel behavior that needs “proofing” or further development in a “house” (office or dorm) setting (dogs that vocalize on tie down or crate, chewing propensities, etc.).

CWTTs focus on additional relaxation sessions for all dogs as training progresses. These sessions could include one or several of the following activities: community run time, kennel enrichment programs, grooming, individual play sessions, office time at staff desks, and relaxing campus walks.



## **PHASE 5: TRAFFIC TRAINING AND CITY WORK**

### **Advanced Obedience and Distraction Training**

New animal and common dog interest distractions (scent, cat, etc.) are sought out and responses are evaluated.

Distraction interests for individual dogs are worked on separately (i.e. squirrels for some, birds for others).

### **Advanced Guidework Training**

Routes continue in suburban areas and may progress to downtown urban areas. Building exposure continues (stair work, elevators, tight clearance work on slick floors, etc.),

Focus on improving any weak responses noted at preliminary blindfold testing and working the dogs at a pace and pull that is appropriate for a client.

### **City Routes (San Francisco/Portland)**

New work areas include difficult crossings, clearances, and challenging line and curb approaches, animal distractions, surface issues, and pedestrian islands.

- Heavy urban environment: crowded sidewalks, heavy/close traffic, different pedestrian climates
- Large government and business building work
- City bus ride

### **Intensive Indoor Mall and Store Training**

- Slower pace for more cautious work past store displays and shoppers
- Crowded aisles
- Elevators
- Multiple stairways (up and down)
- Various colors and textures of slick, shiny floors
- Patience is reinforced for standing in line, working with a cashier, etc.
- Work past food held low, on seats/benches, or on ground (food court)

### **Notable Accomplishment - Traffic Introduction and Training**

First, during an exposure lesson, dogs are introduced to traffic safety problems and shown how to respond to them via leash and collar cues. Dogs learn to stop, hold their line when stopped, and back up on their line when a vehicle gets too close. They are also introduced to increasing their pace for any vehicle that approaches too close to the rear of the team.

During a subsequent lesson, dogs are taught responsibility in making emergency decisions with traffic problems. Dogs learn to decide when to stop, hold their line, back up or even move forward on their travel line for safety of the team. Dogs learn to maintain position, face the vehicle, and to proceed on the original line when danger has passed. Lots of support, praise and food reward are provided on these routes to reinforce the decisions and instill confidence in the dogs.

For dogs that need to either build confidence or create more of a buffer from the vehicle, supplemental training in backing up are done on campus (with a large cardboard or slow moving vehicle).

### **Total Barricade Training**

Dogs are taught to show the handler any objects (most often parked vehicles in driveways) that completely block the travel path (sidewalk), and are then taught how to work safely around them.

### **Obstacle Course Progression**

Dogs guide through challenging clearance courses as more finished guides. Course design becomes increasingly more difficult and requires continued development of problem solving skills and intelligent disobedience responses.

Advanced clearance problems that were first introduced to the dogs on the campus obstacle course are now sought out on real environment routes. Situations continue to be set up to reinforce both cautious navigation and intelligent disobedience.

### **Body Handling Acceptance**

New handlers are regularly added to body handling sessions. Any issues that are still present at this stage are concerning and may interfere with a dog's viability as a guide dog.

### **Light Rail, Subway systems**

Dogs practice edge avoidance when train is absent, and boarding/riding on available trains.

### **Socialization Programs**

As training progresses, individual dogs may require supervisor-directed specialized socialization programs to overcome any fear, distractive, or other type of reaction as needed.

CWTTs continue to focus on kennel enrichment, relaxing time in community run, grooming and campus walks during the progressively more challenging stages of formal guide dog training.

### **Vet Meeting – Review of Health**

Each dog's health history to date is reviewed by the staff vet. Viability for care by a client is assessed. Health release decisions may be made for individual cases on some dogs; however, most dogs have timelines for improvement or other medical procedures/testing prior to such a decision.

## **PHASE 6: URBAN CHALLENGES**

### **Obedience and Distraction Training**

Continues as in phase 5.

### **Advanced Guidework Training**

Dogs work in both residential area without sidewalks and downtown urban areas with challenging environments. Focus on working the dogs at a pace and pull that is appropriate for a client.

### **Introduction of Revolving doors.**

### **Platform Edge Intro and Exposure Work**

Dogs learn to avoid significant drop-offs that mimic subway and rail platform edges.

### **Obstacle Course Progression**

Continues as in phase 5.

### **Pre-Matches for Select Clients**

Dogs are identified for applicants with special needs or requirements in a guide.

### **Socialization Programs**

CWTTs continue to focus on kennel enrichment and relaxing time away from guidework lessons (community run, grooming, play sessions, campus walks, dog massage, Reiki).

## **PHASE 7: ADVANCED TRAINING**

### **Obedience and Distraction Training**

Continues as in phase 6. Dogs are handled by different instructors to teach them good responses are expected with new handlers.

### **Guidework Training**

Advanced training includes work in both suburban and urban areas, and requires forward- looking decision-making (initiative). These routes can consist of:

- City traffic patterns
- Difficult crossings
- Difficult clearance situation
- Areas with a challenging line
- Animal distractions

- Surface issues
- Curb approach challenges
- Pedestrian islands
- Crowded sidewalks
- Different pedestrian climate
- Additional city bus exposure
- Additional rapid transit ride exposure
- Additional and multiple escalators
- Rounded corners

### **Escalator Training Continues**

Dogs now independently board, ride and exit.

### **Platform Training Continues**

Avoidance of drop-off edges on pedestrian platforms of subway and rail systems and boarding and exiting trains.

### **Overhead Obstacle Clearance Training**

Advanced overhead training occurs both on campus and in town, when available.

### **Socialization**

Continue as in previous phases, as needed.

## **PHASE 8: FINAL TESTING, FINISHING, AND PRE-MATCHING**

### **Notable Accomplishments – Final Testing**

- **Final Obedience Test**  
The instructor is under blindfold, and performs a series of obedience exercises with the dog, which includes an off-leash recall in an enclosed indoor setting.
- **Final Blindfold Test**  
Instructor works a route under blindfold on an urban street and sidewalk route of 40 to 50 minutes in a challenging work area. Dog performs sits and downs in harness at any point on route.
- **Final Building Test**  
Instructor works a dog under blindfold through a mall setting. Each dog is tested on their overall caution and work on escalators, elevators, stairs and focus past food court areas.
- **Final Traffic Test**  
Instructor is under blindfold on a guidework route, and encounters several staged (choreographed) traffic checks that require the dog to demonstrate all types of traffic avoidance responses. Instructor is spotted by a teammate, but is not cued to the traffic situations in order to simulate client travel.

NOTE: Dogs that pass these tests are considered “class ready.” These dogs are fully qualified and ready to be issued to a client.

### **“Finishing” Routes**

Dogs work on relaxing residential or country routes, sidewalkless areas, and less difficult/more straightforward routes for confidence building before class. Obedience responses are maintained and practiced in a variety of areas with a variety of handlers.

### **Practice with Less Experienced Handlers**

With either supervisory and/or instructor oversight, unfamiliar (and often novice) handlers (O&M seminar or lifestyle workshop participants, mock student instruction practice for apprentices, etc.) work dogs that are (or nearly) at class ready status. This serves two purposes: it gives the handler an opportunity to experience what it feels like to work a guide dog and it gives staff a chance to assess the dogs’ abilities to successfully and reliably transfer to a new handler both from a work performance and manageability perspective.

### **Specialized Training**

All dogs are introduced to hand and chair targeting. Instructors introduce pole targeting (for crosswalk buttons) on a few different routes.

If needed, select dogs may do custom work for identified clients (slower pace or fast pace, compromised balance -- client who travels with a support cane, toed-out gait, etc.)

### **Pre-Class Physicals**

All class ready dogs receive pre-class vet physical exams, which includes a height measurement at the withers (ground to shoulders).

### **Final Class Preparations**

Instructors size all dogs for new class collars, boots, head collars and harnesses. Pre- matches are done based on information gathered from home interview and pre-class phone call meeting.

### **Student Residence Exposure**

Dogs are walked through the Student Residence building in preparation for their in- residence training.

### **Socialization**

All specialized programs are complete for class ready dogs. CWTTs focus primarily on relaxing walks, kennel enrichment and play sessions for the dogs.

## **CLASS**

By the time the dogs finish their final exams in Phase 8, blind and vision-impaired clients have already been scheduled to arrive for the next class. Instructors conduct pre-class phone meetings to confirm the pre-matches between client and dog. Matches are finalized once students arrive at campus and class training has begun. To make the best matches possible, GDB has more dogs than clients. This means that there are always a handful of dogs remaining for placement in a future class. These dogs continue in training with the next group of instructors and dogs.

There are different class-training program options available to clients. GDB offers two week classes for in-residence client training.

On occasion, for either health or other compelling personal reasons, some clients do best with training in their own home area. In these instances, the client does not train at a GDB campus. This is called an in-home training. Most in-home training clients do not participate in a formal graduation ceremony, unless they live close to one of our campuses and are able to attend. Whenever possible, the raisers are given the opportunity to visit with the dog they raised prior to the in-home if the client is unable to attend the corresponding graduation ceremony.

Accepted applicants receive their instructional lectures prior to their class instruction. These lectures include the following topics:

- Creating a Safe Environment for Your Guide Dog
- Equipment
- Promoting Independence
- Transitioning to a Successor Guide (for returning students, also called 'retrains')
- Welcome and Dormitory Orientation
- Communicating with Your Guide Dog
- Managing Your Guide Dog, Obedience
- Guidework
- Class Feeding, Watering and Relieving
- Street Crossings
- Playing with Your Guide Dog
- Addressing Guidework Errors
- Orientation and Learning Routes
- Advanced Management

- Working in Buildings
- Total Barricades and Traffic Encounters
- Dog Encounters
- Leaving Your Guide Dog Alone
- The General Public
- Customizing Your Dog's Vocabulary
- Special Travel Conditions
- Working on Platforms
- Working without Sidewalks
- Transitioning from Our Campus to Your Home
- Care of Your Guide Dog
- Going on a Trip with Your Guide Dog
- Working Rounded Corners

GDB also has additional lectures that discuss client services; veterinary information – both care and veterinary financial assistance; alumni association and donation information.

Depending on whether they are training in California or Oregon, clients begin training with their new guide dogs in residential areas of San Rafael or Gresham, respectively, and then transition to routes in San Francisco or Portland. The new teams encounter many different situations together: public transportation (cars, city buses, light rail systems, and ferries), heavy traffic, construction, escalators, areas with no sidewalks, etc.

GDB clients come from many different geographical areas and walks of life. Clients customize their training and do routes that are similar to their home areas. The lecture titled “Special Travel Conditions” offers tips to help prepare clients and their new guides to travel in extreme climates (snow travel or hot temperatures).

Class instruction and graduation are a culmination of a lot of hard work by many people. From staff who breed these special dogs, to the volunteers who love and house the breeder dogs, to the volunteers that socialize the young puppies and work in other areas on campus, to the immense efforts and commitment of the puppy raising community, to the dedicated and talented training and client service staff, and to our generous donors...it takes an involved and caring community to create and support, a guide dog team. All of these efforts provide the foundation to shape a wonderful dog into a highly trained guide dog and companion, and then pair that dog with a partner to become an effective team. This is the mission of Guide Dogs for the Blind.

## **GRADUATION AND MORE**

See Beyond Puppy Raising in the After Puppies Are Recalled to Campus section of this manual.