



# K-9 TRAINING RECORDS

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**I** am asked by K-9 Trainers, Attorneys, Department leaders to review training records to help determine if a police K-9 team was adequately trained, performed within the scope of their training and if they properly advanced their training beyond basic certification standards. Let's take a look at what is involved in preparing a terrific training record and why these documents are so important towards establishing you and your dog as a trained and professional tool.

You would think that your training records are likely to begin with Basic Training or the K-9 Academy, but really, your training records begin with the birth of the dog and any record that the dog might come with, including training it might have received prior to being purchased or adopted. Many dogs are imprinted or even have titles for certain skills such as tracking, obedience, protection and so on. Make sure you get these records, or ask for them to be produced, acknowledging the training and type of registrations/certifications earned.

Next, your head trainer hopefully has mapped out most basic training days to include what classical and operant conditioning techniques are being used. Oh, are you forgetting to log all those training hours you spent BEFORE the first day at K-9 school? You know, those days of house breaking, socialization, obedience and so on? You might even have your first official call for service built in there with a K-9 demo/introduction or two to the Chief, Mayor, local newspaper or the community.

But, back to the Training Academy, are you logging the books you have read? How about the K-9 policy? I bet you needed to read before getting this dog team. Did you include that? Are you including the articles in K-9 magazines? How about the articles in newspapers from around the world via a simple daily Google alert? How about the time you spent watching other teams work? Training time does not have to be in a classroom but often takes place on the training field listening to others. Yes, of course, there is the leash time or hands-on field work you will document. Don't forget to include the C/R part (you know, Critique and Repeat). Those instances where you performed a task and were critiqued by the trainer and asked to do it again. Critique and Repeat. This can be much of a documented task if, for example, you were concentrating on one particular task many, many times that day.



There are the legal talks with prosecutors, defense attorneys and supervisors about deployment, liability, tactics and policy. Are you logging the important K-9 use verbal announcements in training to show how you provide them as a routine? Are you logging distractions such as unfamiliar smells, noises, crowds of people, animals, favorite toys in close proximity, places, etc? Can you show that your dog can work through distractions and remain reliable?

How are you documenting? Are you using a vendor supported K-9 software management program that can be terrific so long as you are putting in the right data and the program supports you putting in the needed data? These 'canned' programs are also great with establishing a timestamp to show the training was logged in a timely manner and not subject to 'wet-ink.' These programs are also terrific with certifying that the supervisor reviewed and signed off on the training on a specific

date. Lastly, some of these professional software programs allow the head trainer to create a base event of the training that day that you can simply add to or delete parts to customize it to your day. These base events also help to insure consistency amongst the group's description and content for the day. Do YOU have a training log or resume showing that you too are a trained professional? Are you logging all your tactical training hours or scenario-based skills that are not just those with



the dog? Are you able to work a dog effectively while involved in a high stress call? What is your training not just with the dog but overall as an awesome police officer?

Let's look at a typical day for a K-9 training log. First, begin with the day away from work. I would begin the log with some shaping behaviors, perhaps those done before breakfast. Document your verbal recall work maybe, perhaps that verbal sitting the dog command you gave at some

point outside, maybe just allowing other family members to leash up the dog. My point is that there must be some training going on before breakfast that you might not be thinking about right now as 'training.' Next, perhaps a formal training session such as setting out a hide and the dog getting breakfast as the reward. Maybe a short track with breakfast along the track and at the end. As the day progresses, there might be a time when the dog is being matched with a command when relieving themselves so that you can better prepare the dog for the actual call for service and getting them 'relieved' before deploying them. You are shaping behavior all day long and should document that as the day moves

along. Not all training deserving of being in the training log has to take place in a formal setting or at the Academy.

The formal training day brings all what was already written plus a chance to debrief verbally with the trainer(s). What did they advise for progress and will you be able to show those techniques on future training logs? Are you being responsive to the trainer's advice for progress? What about written tests? Please make sure you are documenting these and that at some point you can also show knowledge and compliance with department policy.

Make sure that your K-9 training is in line with your department policy. Regional or private vendor training sites might not





be aware of your department policy and could be training in an action that is not allowed by your policy. An example might be the protection work deployment without first giving a verbal announcement.

Your dog should also have his own resume or C/V. Here you will document the dog's vaccinations, weight, calls for service, certifications and training to include

'outside' training such as a seminar or conference. Learning how others train or seeing how other dogs OUTSIDE your training group can be incredibly helpful in your progress as a handler/future trainer. Make sure you are logging these, the names of other trainers involved and some of the observations you made.

Some log videos of other dogs watched as training. There are

videos that show an example of how the dog tracks in various conditions or perhaps indicate contraband hidden inside a car that is placed alongside a busy highway. Some people video the dog during a recall exercise or even a complete K-9 demo to show how the dog performs many tasks with many distractions around. Make sure your video is unedited and honest to be reliable. Also be aware of the videos that might be out there that show the dog performing poorly or unusually. Make sure you have many videos showing how the dog has improved since that day.

Training logs are only as good as you make them. They should provide a path showing how the dog progressed or at least showing how some tasks were simply acquired through one or a few training sessions, while others might take a long time or still in-training. For example, coming when called might be simply trained in a familiar environment with no distractions but you are still working on the 100% recall when it comes to an unfamiliar area with distractions. In the end your training records need to be a reliable and timely source of information. Did the dog perform within the scope of his training and was due diligence used? The dog's performance need not be perfect in training when initially starting new skills, but make sure your records uphold the highest of ethics to include accuracy, honesty and reliability. 🐾

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Professor Ferland consults and presents college level criminal justice courses, was the National Executive Director of the United States Police Canine Association, is a nationally certified Police K-9 Trainer/Judge, was a dog handler for 15 years and previous Head Trainer of the N.H. Police K-9 Academy for 10 years.

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