



The Retrieve

What is it?	Why do it?
A tennis ball or other item is thrown or placed at a distance from the dog. The dog learns to rush out at speed to the item and bring it back to handler.	Needed for flygility. Retrieve a useful skill in general and makes it easier to use toys in other training without having to go get them yourself!

NB: Each of the following steps may take several days or weeks. Do not progress through the steps until your dog is consistently performing the previous step with enthusiasm and speed.

Introduction to the Retrieve

Being able to throw a toy to get the dog to work away in front of you is helpful in agility – obviously it will be easier on you if your dog will bring a toy back! The retrieve is also important for flygility as the dog needs to want to return the tennis ball to you.

To teach the retrieve, use an object that will be comfortable in the dog's mouth – nothing too big or awkward. Even a piece of an old towel tied up will do.

There are many approaches to teaching the retrieve, the notes below use a 'back chain' method which means you start with the last thing you want the dog to do, and work backwards adding to it, until the dog can do the whole exercise from start to finish.

Step 1: the 'Give'

- 🐾 Put the retrieve object into your dog's mouth very gently. Don't use a command and don't make a big deal out of it. When you have put the object in, your dog will probably spit it out – reward this behaviour. Repeat this until your dog realises that giving you the object is the idea.
- 🐾 Add the command "Give," before you let the dog spit it out. Start to only reward when the spitting out is done on cue.
- 🐾 At first you will have to be quick to get out the word 'Give' before your dog drops the object. Start to require your dog to hold the object a little bit more each time before you command them to 'Give'. If there is any reluctance to hold the object, you may need gently hold the dog's mouth closed on the object for a fraction of a second, then ask them to release it ("Give"), click and reward.
- 🐾 Repetition and taking things slowly is important to get a happy retrieve.
- 🐾 If the dog drops it before your 'Give' command it is YOUR fault for not getting out your command in time – don't reward the dog but don't punish it either and that means not letting your disappointment show. Be quicker with your command next time. Try to be more patient and progress more slowly.
- 🐾 Keep practising to get your dog holding for longer periods before dropping the object into your hand on command.



Step 2: the 'Fetch'

- ✎ Forget the 'give' command for a while now and work on the next stage – the 'fetch'.
- ✎ Hold the retrieve object out in front of your dog's nose (about 2 inches away). If they show interest in the object and (ideally) move towards it to grab it, reward. They may not go so far as to actually grab the object initially so reward whatever interest you can get, and gradually expect more before rewarding so that your dog makes more and more contact with the object before it gets rewarded
- ✎ Practise until your dog will reliably walk a few steps towards the object and grab it.
- ✎ Introduce a command word like "get it" "bring" "fetch" or "hold" etc. This command will be the one you use when want your dog to pick up any object, eg if they drop the ball on the flygility course you'd use this command to encourage them to pick it up again.
- ✎ Start to place the object on the ground before commanding your dog to fetch – you may need to do this gradually by holding the object lower and lower until it's close to the ground, and then gradually having your hand in less contact with the object. Ultimately you should be able to be a few steps away from the object when your dog fetches it.
- ✎ Remember to go back one or more steps if your dog struggles with the next level of difficulty – getting the foundations right is vital.

Step 3: Putting it all together

Once the 'Give' and the 'Fetch' are happening on command reliably as separate exercises, put them together. The tricky bit is that you now need to **STOP** rewarding just the "Fetch". You are going to start rewarding just the last part of the chain, the "Give."

- ✎ Put the object on the floor and say "Fetch" your dog walks out and takes it. You DON'T give a reward (however, you can say, "Good dog!"). Let your dog bring it to you, hold out your hand and place it on the object, say "Give" and give a big reward. Do it all very quickly because you don't want your dog to have to perform a long "hold" the first time they put it all together.