

At this time, your dog may have been in training for roughly 10 to 14 weeks. Always remember that all dogs are different and that speed through the phases may be no indicator of future success. Advanced guidework and obedience training will take place in Phase Eight.

Developments of precise on-leash obedience responses are being worked on daily. New handlers are still being introduced to your dog at this time, and off-leash formal obedience training continues as well.

Guidework has reached an advanced level, and your dog is regularly working in a variety of environments, such as country areas, suburbs, and sidewalkless areas. Your dog is also now working in the big city! San Francisco and Portland become the training grounds for working on more challenging concepts with a host of new types of distractions, scents, surfaces, street crossing and curbs. The traffic here is very heavy and very close, and the sidewalks are densely crowded. This is the environment where your dog can really show all he knows, and it is a great accomplishment.

Your dog is also learning to avoid platforms and drop-offs, such as the type at subways and rail platforms. While learning to avoid these dangerous areas, your dog is also being exposed to riding on these subway and light rail trains. The dogs ride in a similar fashion as they did while riding in a car with you; sitting quietly between the knees of the handler and patiently waiting until it is time to get off the train. All of the traveling you did with your puppy really pays off here, as these trains can be crowded, so waiting calmly is very important.

When working in more populated areas, it is common to need escalators to get around in buildings. Your dog is learning how to board, ride, and get off escalators in Phase Eight. The dogs must learn to remain still on the ride both up and down, as well as getting on and off safely. Intensive indoor mall training with a wide variety of training opportunities including slick floors, food courts and crowds is also being worked on.

Please, under no circumstances should you ever take your dog on an escalator, leave this to the professionals. Don't risk injury or the creation of fear response to escalators. We depend on your help by following the guidelines that we give you. A raiser, who in an attempt to enhance a puppy's chances by teaching training other than that described in the Puppy Manual or by staff or leaders, can actually develop behavior in the puppy that could lead to a career change.

Your dog is advancing in all kinds of ways at this point in training. All elements of his previous training have reached an advanced level. This includes the sidewalkless areas as well. He is expected to maintain a travel line on the extreme left side of the roadway with no sidewalk or reasonable shoulder to walk on. He also has to work around or up to various obstacles in his path, such as parked cars and trashcans, and resume travel on the far-left side of the road.

Your dog is very close to reaching the end of training, and Phase Nine is the "Beginning of the End....."

We're so close to the goal. Your dog has now been in training for roughly 13 to 14 weeks or more. This is the almost the final stage in the process of preparing a dog for placement with a student in class.

"Final obedience testing" is done during this phase. With the instructor blindfolded, your dog undergoes an extensive obedience test. All dogs must pass final obedience in order to qualify to take the final blindfold guidework test. The dog has to rely on the months of training he has received, and has no cues other than the verbal command and the appropriate hand gesture from his instructor to execute the desired response. The testing is done on campus, with a variety of distractions, possibly food, or a staff dog not affiliated with the program. The string supervisor will assess your dog's responses and positioning on leash to sit, down, stay, and the formal recall. The supervisor will also evaluate your dog's acceptance of a complete body examination and response to the informal recall command. The final exercise is the off-leash evaluation. During this part of testing, the instructor removes the blindfold and leash. The same exercises are performed as on leash, with the addition of a long down stay with the instructor out of the dog's sight. There are several distractions to contend with during this long down, such as people, dogs and toys. If your dog does not quite make the grade, he could be passed back to another string for more training and development.

During your dog's final obedience testing, lessons learned in your home make it more likely that your dog will pass. Puppies who learn to respond appropriately and consistently to on-leash commands at home, at meetings, and in public, as well as puppies who are familiar with being physically handles because they have had their nails clipped regularly and have had their ears checked, will all have a greater chance of passing their final testing.

Phase Nine is made up of quite a few evaluations and tests. "Final building testing" is also done at this time at a mall in San Rafael or Gresham. During this test, the instructor is blindfolded once again and a head collar is placed on your dog. Your dog is then tested on escalators, elevators, stairs, stores, and through the food court while wearing the head collar. What is expected of your dog is a demonstration of caution inside the mall and stores, walking up and down stairs without difficulty, riding comfortably in elevators and confidently boarding, riding, and exiting escalators. **(Please do not ever socialize your puppy on an escalator-see Phase Six)** As with the final obedience, your dog must pass final building testing before being considered ready for class.

Training continues, even during a phase like this one with final testing. The work routes continue to be advanced and lengthy to prepare your dog for "the real world." Your dog is challenged and his problem solving skills are put to the test. Street crossings are off set, curbs are not directly across the street, and loose dogs and cats can be in any neighborhood! To further challenge your dog and assess his abilities, an unfamiliar or novice handler will work him. (i.e. a new apprentice, or a new student in class.)

The third test of Phase Nine is "final traffic testing." The instructor is again under blindfold while the supervisor drives a training van in an effort to simulate "real life" traffic situations and your dog's responses are evaluated. Once again, your dog must pass this test to be considered ready for class. Not doing so can result in your dog being passed back. Retesting occurs after more conditioning, training, and responses have improved.

Are you getting excited? The instructors and their supervisor are too! They share your hopes and anxieties about your dog's future. Remember to breathe though, there is still a lot more work to do, one more VERY important test and class!!

Training Phase 10

Your dog has now been in training approximately 15 to 16 weeks. This is the final phase of training and your dog is being prepared for class. The months of love, support and basic training that you gave your puppy, plus the months of love, support and formal training that the IA's and Instructors have put into your dog now equal a class ready dog.

Your dog's obedience responses are now finely tuned and more precise than ever. He continues to become more and more reliable both on and off leash. The guidework routes are more advanced, and he is receiving little or no "help" with problem solving; he has become a responsible partner to his handler. The Instructors are now working on "finishing routes", which include relaxing residential routes, and sidewalkless areas in an effort to build your dog's confidence prior to class.

"Final blindfold testing" is done during Phase 10. This is a gigantic achievement! Your dog works a lengthy, difficult route with the instructor under blindfold. Your dog is expected to demonstrate a clear understanding of all guidework responsibilities, which includes holding a line, consistent lead, curb work, street crossings, and traffic awareness. The class supervisor also evaluates your dog's overall attitude towards his work; is he focused? Is he attentive to the handler? How is his response to the guidework commands? The supervisor also stops the team along the route for an obedience session. This is so your dog's obedience responses can be evaluated with natural distractions present while guiding a blind partner. When natural distractions are present, your dog's response to verbal and leash corrections, if necessary, will be assessed.

Your dog also receives a final physical examination during Phase 10. His puppy raising, training and medical histories are reviewed. When all of these elements are checked and approved, your dog is officially "Class Ready"!

By the time the dogs are finishing their final exams in Phase Ten, the students that are scheduled to arrive for the next class have been confirmed and the preliminary and important process of matching dogs with students begins. Once the students have arrived at the campus and class training has begun, the final decision regarding each student and dog match is made. There will be more dogs available than there are students allowing the best match of student and dog. If your dog is not chosen for this class, it only means that the right student was not available for your dog. If your dog was not chosen, he will continue training with the next string and be available for placement with a student in a future class.

There are 3 different class-training programs available. The four-week class is for new students and some students (retrain) with previous experience using a dog guide. We also have two and three-week retrain classes available. The best training option (two, three or four week retrain class) is recommended during the home interview based on the student's previous experience current physical condition and handling abilities. All the students begin class so that their graduation is on the same day.

The home interview may recommend in a few situations a student receive in-home training if they cannot attend a class at one of the campuses. If in-home training is approved, the student and dog may not attend the formal graduation on campus. (See "Graduation" portion of this packet for special arrangements afforded to Raisers whose dogs are trained in-home).

Some of the lectures students receive during their training are:

ORIENTATION

Instructors give an orientation to the dormitory facilities.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE DOG

Instruction on how to meet and properly handle a Guide Dog.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH A GUIDE DOG

Instruction on appropriate commands for a Guide Dog.

HARNESS COMMANDS

Instruction and review of the obedience and guidework commands for a Guide Dog.

DESCRIPTIONS OF GUIDE DOG BREEDS

Description of the characteristic of each Guide Dog breed: Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, German Shepherd Dog, and Labrador/Golden Retriever cross

CONTROL OF A GUIDE DOG

Instruction on effective control of a Guide Dog.

EQUIPMENT FOR A GUIDE DOG

Discussion about the different types and appropriate use of Guide Dog equipment.

GROOMING

Discussion and instruction on grooming, skin care and dental care for maintaining good health of a Guide Dog.

RECEIVING YOUR GUIDE DOG

Hands-on instruction and discussion prior to meeting your Guide Dog.

MAINTAINING A WELL BEHAVED GUIDE DOG

Review of daily schedule and use of obedience commands.

PROCEDURES FOR FEEDING YOUR GUIDE DOG

Instruction on feeding your Guide Dog (when, what, and how much).

STUDENT VISITING HOURS

Review of visiting hours for students during training at Guide Dogs.

FOLLOW YOUR DOG

Instruction of proper following position while walking with a Guide Dog.

STREET CROSSINGS

Discussion of crossing streets with a Guide Dog (listening for traffic, appropriate stops, etc.)--

MAINTAINING A HOUSE CLEAN DOG

Relieving instruction and information on how to maintain consistent house behavior.

FLEA CONTROL

Discussion of available products and instruction in their use.

ORIENTATION & LEARNING ROUTES

Review and discussion of the downtown street system and street names.

DISTRACTIONS

Instruction on control of a Guide Dog when distracted by other animals, people, or environment.

REWORKING ERRORS

Instruction on how to improve Guide Dog work.

WORKING IN BUILDINGS

Instruction on locating and working different types of buildings with your Guide Dog (such as stores, malls, supermarkets, etc.).

TOYS

Instructors discuss and issue recommended toys for Guide Dogs.

WHEN YOUR DOG IS HOME ALONE

Instruction and practice on having a quiet and well-behaved dog when left alone. Discussion on appropriate times, and length of time, for dog to be left alone.

TRAFFIC TRAINING & TOTAL BARRICADES

Instruction on working around obstacles totally blocking the sidewalk.

CARE OF YOUR GUIDE DOG

Instruction and review of water, feeding and relieving schedule for a Guide Dog.

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF YOUR DOG

Discussion of nutritional needs, type of dog foods, and recommended amount for feeding each individual dog.

THE PUBLIC & YOUR GUIDE DOG

Discussion on laws, legislation and the public.

TRAVELING WITH YOUR GUIDE DOG

Discussion about the different methods of travel with a Guide Dog (city bus, light rail, airplane, etc.)

.A GUIDE DOG IS REALLY A "DOG"

Discussion on how Guide Dogs are raised and trained; how to best adapt you're Guide Dog to your home.

WORKING YOUR GUIDE DOG IN YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT

Instruction on how to transition to your home area with your Guide Dog.

GRADUATION

Information about meeting your puppy raiser, the graduation ceremony, and departure for home after graduation.

Students begin training with their dogs in residential areas San Rafael or Gresham and in the last part of training to San Francisco or Portland. There are many different situations presented to the teams including public transportation (cars, city buses, subway systems, and ferries), heavy traffic, construction, escalators, areas with no sidewalks, etc.

Our students come from many different walks of life and areas. Towards the end of class, students are given more exposure to areas similar to where they will be working most of the time at home. Students are given tips on how to keep their dogs comfortable in all types of climate changes.

This is a busy and exciting time for the Training staff. They have spent many months nurturing and preparing the dogs for class. The staff puts it this way:

"When we finally get to class I'm ready. You are so proud of the dogs – it's a process where you really want to see them fly. There is a part of me saying "show those students what you can do!"

"Going into class and making that match (of dog and student) is what it's all about...seeing people become more and more independent...walking with smiles on their faces."

The end of the training string signals the culmination of months of hard work by many people at Guide Dogs, both staff and volunteers. From the volunteers that socialize the young puppies and work in other areas on campus, to the immense efforts of you in the puppy raising community, to the dedicated staff, and to our donors... we couldn't do it without all of you! It is the efforts of all these people that make the ten phases of training possible, and provide us with 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 is the culmination of many years of hard work from many people. Raisers are invited to attend graduation and present the dogs they have raised to their new partners. If you are planning to fly to attend a Guide Dog graduation ceremony, we recommended purchasing refundable airfare in case something happens to cause your dog to be career changed, passed back or taken out of class at the last moment.

On graduation day you will have an opportunity to meet the graduate and have your pictures taken together. The pictures will be sent to you after graduation. The graduates will then be seated on the stage. When your name is called, you will go on stage to present the dog to the graduate at the microphone. You will then be given an opportunity to share a few words about your experiences. After the ceremony you will escort the new team to a reception in the dormitory. You will be sent a video of the graduation as a keepsake.

Your dog could also be selected as a sponsored team. Donors who have contributed a significant amount towards the cost of training a person and their dog are invited to come to graduation and meet the team they have sponsored. Many times donor teams are chosen based on the area in which the graduate lives or their background, such as being a veteran or in a certain career field. When photos are taken, the donor (if present) will also have their photo taken with the graduate and dog. If your dog and his new partner are a sponsored team, and the donor is present you may be asked to meet the donor at a reception. The Puppy Raising Department will notify you a few days in advance if the graduating team has been sponsored.

Those Raisers whose dogs have been matched with students receiving in-home training are welcome to attend graduation, and their name, their dog's name and the student's name will be mentioned during the program even though their dogs will not be presented in person.

Individuals who receive their guide dogs through in-home training are often not able to attend the formal graduation with their new guides. The whole purpose of this type of special training is to help a person with a visual impairment who cannot, for health or other personal reasons, attend one of the campus-based training classes. Because of this, Guide Dogs can sometimes arrange for the Raiser to visit their dog on campus before it leaves for training. The Instructor will take photos of the working team for the Raiser's keepsake. You may attend graduation and can make a statement at the microphone when introduced. With the graduate's consent, a statement composed by the graduate may be read by Guide Dogs' staff. Also with the graduate's consent, a phone call can be arranged between the Raiser and the graduate.

If your dog is chosen for breeding stock, it will also be involved in a graduation at one of our San Rafael graduation ceremonies. Just like presenting a guide, you will have the opportunity to present the breeder and make a statement at the microphone when introduced.

Tips to help make graduation more relaxed and enjoyable to all:

- Realize that the student is probably nervous and wants to make a good impression on you.
- It's natural for some Raisers to be nervous too; we want you to relax and enjoy yourself.
- Please let your first words be a greeting to the student (not the dog). Initiating a handshake is great! (Gently touch the back of the student's right hand as a greeting if they do not have their arm extended.)
- The student may offer you the leash so that you can visit with their dog for a few minutes. Keep in mind that this is a courtesy to you. Please be respectful of the student's important relationship with their dog and hand the leash back to them in a few minutes.

- Take a few minutes to greet the dog you've raised; it's best to stay gentle and calm. Despite your own excitement, try to not increase the dog's excitement.
- Please remember that the dog is working on this day. Expect and encourage him to behave as he would in a working situation involving a crowd.
- Indicate an open seat to the student. Ask the student about their class experience.
- Feel free to share positive and/or humorous stories about the dog's puppyhood. Keep in mind that the student has only begun to develop their trust and confidence in their new guide. While sharing normal puppy "challenges" with the student is fine, try not to focus on any negative subjects about raising their dog.
- Inquire about the student's lifestyle, plans or hobbies/career. Keep in mind, the student may or may not want to share this.
- Please do not offer the student any training advice even if asked.
- The student will put the harness on the dog when it is time to take photos. The student may also attach alternative control equipment onto their dog, such as a specialized collar or headcollar.
- The students' complete address is sent to you in the letter informing you of the graduation. Many times phone numbers are exchanged but remember that the graduate and you are under no obligation to give each other personal information or communicate in the future. Please respect any privacy wishes that the other may express.

This is truly a day to celebrate. All of the hard work that you have put into your dog has paid off. This new team still has a lot of work to do. When they return home, they will truly begin developing a working relationship based on trust and love. The graduate will receive a yearly veterinary reimbursement and follow-up visits by licensed instructors to ensure that the transition goes smoothly. The graduate will look back on this day as the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in their life. And you are a very large part of what has made Guide Dogs' mission a reality for another visually impaired person.