

# Scent training could make pet dogs better behaved, shows study

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Scent training could make pet dogs better behaved, suggests a [study](#) by

Aberystwyth University academics published in *Animals*.

The research suggests that [pet dogs](#) trained to detect smells have improved [mental ability](#) and capacity to carry out certain tasks.

Training is known to improve dogs' ability to solve cognitive tasks, but previous research has focused on comparing highly trained working dogs, like those trained in search and rescue or assistance dogs, with untrained pets.

The study by researchers from Aberystwyth University, in collaboration with Emma Stoker, owner of Puppy Plus in Newtown, suggests that even pet dog [training](#) can alter how our dogs cope with cognitive tasks.

The team tested the animals, who had been trained to varying degrees, with two tasks both requiring impulse control.

One was a test to navigate a transparent barrier to get food, known as the "detour [task](#)." The other "A not B task" involved the dogs being able to switch their choice from one pot to another, depending on where food was placed.

The study found that dogs trained in scent work performed better in these tasks than those who were not. The new research demonstrates that scent training can improve dogs' ability to avoid acting impulsively to complete a specific task.

This ability, known as inhibitory control, has been shown to improve canines' problem-solving skills.

Importantly for [pet owners](#), poor [impulse control](#) is thought to be the

cause of a lot of unwanted behaviors in dogs, such as destructive behavior and inappropriate toileting. So, the new findings suggests that scent training could be a way for owners to improve their dogs' behavior.

Dr. Sarah Dalesman, who co-supervised the project, said, "We are a nation of dog and animal lovers, and for good reason. They are very important for our lives and play a variety of roles—from offering vital companionship to working in the emergency services. For those and many other reasons, understanding their behavior and what influences it is important.

"This research shows that dogs that train primarily in [scent](#) work have stronger inhibitory control, suggesting that this training can have a positive effect on their behavior.

"Scent training is offered by a lot of dog trainers, and easy to practice at home. It might offer a great way for owners to improve their pet's behavior, and we're aiming to test this theory in future studies."

Dr. Sebastian McBride from Aberystwyth University added, "This research is important in helping us understand how dogs' behavior is influenced by the extent that they have been trained. Based on our findings, future studies should not simply separate dogs into highly trained versus untrained, but rather take account of this relationship between specific training and behavior.

"This exciting research would not be possible without all the volunteer dogs, their owners and local training clubs who participate, so we would like to thank them all for their support."

**More information:** Nerys Mellor et al, Impact of Training Discipline and Experience on Inhibitory Control and Cognitive Performance in Pet Dogs, *Animals* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/ani14030428](https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14030428)

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