Atlas Assistance Dogs®
Atlas Trainer Academy Course Syllabi
Service Dog Selection

Last updated May 24, 2022

S1 – Selecting an Appropriate Dog for Service Work

Course Description

This course is text and video based. It covers the physical, psychological, and emotional requirements of service dogs. It evaluates various sources for finding a suitable service dog. It discusses temperament, health, and red flags to look for during an evaluation. It explains breeds and sizes and how they impact the dog's ability to perform specific tasks. It offers example assessment tests and videos.

This course is primarily targeted toward trainers who are helping their client select a dog. It is equally applicable for an owner-trainer to use in choosing a dog for themselves as well as an individual looking for a family pet.

In all cases, the individual assessing a dog should put their safety and the dog's comfort and safety first. If in doubt STOP the assessment. This course gives you tools to use to assess a dog's potential suitability for service work but does not cover everything you need to know to understand the many nuances of dog behavior. All who take this course and use the assessments within it assume all liability and responsibility for themselves and other dogs and humans involved.

Course Objectives

This course will:

- Teach participants guidelines to evaluate a dog's health, age, confidence, trainability, temperament, sociability, motivation, capability, and willingness to comply

- Identify places to obtain a prospective service dog candidate

- Teach participants about different dog breeds and what they were bred to do

- Teach participants how to evaluate a dog with a specific task in mind

- Teach participants how to evaluate a puppy

- Teach participants how to identify quality shelter and rescue facilities

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Select an appropriate dog for their needs

- Evaluate an adult dog

- Evaluate a puppy

- Evaluate a rescue

- Describe which breeds are more suited to perform specifics tasks

Outline

- Service dog selection & evaluation guidelines
- Task evaluation
- Assessment tests
- Dog breeds and where to find dog candidates
- References
- Test your knowledge

Course Expectations

Please allow multiple sessions of at least one to two hours to go through the course and review the references that will be provided. If the topic is less familiar to you, you may need more time to view references or research the area in further depth.

You will be asked to complete a very brief survey after you complete the course to give us your feedback.

This course includes a video assignment. It requires you to do a video and write up of you doing an assessment on a puppy or dog to determine its suitability as a future service dog. You will need to work with a dog who is not familiar with you. Videos will typically be about 15-30 minutes long. More detailed guidelines for the assignment can be found at the end of this course.

You will also be asked to complete a short quiz. A grade of 80% or above is required to pass the quiz. Students have the opportunity to discuss their answers with Atlas faculty as well as retake the quiz if necessary.

D4 – Dog Body Language and Communication

Course Description

This course is text and video based. It covers important information about reading and interpreting dog body language. This is an important skill for any dog trainer but even more important for those training service dogs. These dogs are exposed to many different potentially stressful environments, and it is our job as trainers and handlers to advocate for them and make sure they are well-suited for service work. Service dog trainers also need to know how to relay this information to their clients so that they can ensure their dog remains comfortable and happy in the job they are doing.

*Note, we also offer this course to our clients to best educate them on how to read and communicate with their dog.

Course Objectives

This course will:

- Enhance the student's knowledge of how dogs communicate through their body language and vocal communication
- Describe and demonstrate the different levels of stress signals observed in dogs
- Go over what are appropriate levels of stress for a service dog

Learning Outcomes

- Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:
- Observe and interpret dog body language
- Identify what a dog is communicating
- Describe what type of stress signs a dog is displaying
- Identify whether or not a dog may be suitable as a service dog based on their stress levels

Outline

- Body language observations
  - Face
  - Tail
  - Posture
- Interpreting body language
- Vocal communication

- Building confidence and trust

- Progressive stress signs

- Stress behaviors

- Observations while training

Course Expectations

Please allow at least one hour to go through the course and review the references that will be provided. If the topic is less familiar to you, you may need more time to view references or research the area in further depth.

You will be asked to complete a very brief survey and quiz after you complete the course to give us your feedback.

A grade of 80% or above is required to pass the quiz. Students have the opportunity to discuss their answers with Atlas faculty as well as retake tests as needed.