

Certification and Assessment Preparation

Introduction to Certification

Graduates of Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training & Behavior earn certification and become part of a community of trainers who have achieved and demonstrated a consistent level of excellence and can represent themselves and the Karen Pryor Academy name proudly. (Please refer to the Student Handbook for specifics about graduation requirements.)

The purpose of this document is to give you more details about, and initial instructions for, preparing for the “certification exams.” These exams are very important. If you have passed the Workshop and Lesson assessments but not the certification assessments, you will not earn certification without a retest. A score of Excellent, or 90%, is required to pass each part of the certification assessments. It’s our expectation that everyone has the capacity to make the grade, and we will do everything we can to help you.

The certification assessment has three parts: an online written exam and two practical exams.

- The written exam may cover material from any and all lessons. It is taken online after completion of the Unit 4 lessons. You must pass this exam before attending Workshop 4 (for Regional students) or the final Workshop (for National and World students).
- Both practical exams take place at Workshop 4 (for Regional students) and the final Workshop (for National and World students):
 - One component (the Teaching Assessment) is focused on your people-teaching proficiency. The details needed to prepare for this will be provided in Unit 4.
 - A second component (the Training Assessment) is focused on your dog-training skills. Your preparation for planning and training behaviors that might be used in your final behavior chain can begin now. Details are provided below.

Training assessment preparation: behavior chain

The training skill assessment will consist of a 10-part behavior chain, to be demonstrated at Workshop 4 (for Regional students) and the final Workshop (for National and World

Training Assessment Preparation

students). We are giving you the instructions for this exercise now, so that you will have as much time as possible to plan out and train your chain.

From the earliest lessons in the course, the training exercises you've completed have prepared you for this assessment. You have probably already trained many strong and resilient behaviors with clear and consistent cues. Think of behaviors your dog enjoys doing, the ones with a deep history of reinforcement. These fluent behaviors will be ideal for your chain.

Take heart! Ten steps is not really that long; freestyle routines, an agility course, search and rescue, and any obedience trial may consist of chains 20 to 80 or more steps long.

Requirements for the chain

- **The chain must include at least three types of behavior:** one stationary, one involving a target, and one involving an obstacle. (An obstacle is something the dog goes on, off, over, under, around, or through. Generally, an obstacle is not a student's body part, although exceptions can be made for leg weaves or going around the student's entire body.)
- **The chain must include at least four different types of cues:** verbal cues, visual cues from the trainer such as hand or body gestures, physical objects such as targets or props, tactile cues (touching a part of the dog's body), scent, or non-verbal auditory cues (sounds such as a whistle, a chime, music, etc.). If an object (target, prop) is being presented but the actual cue is verbal, the verbal cue must be given *after* the object is presented; students are being assessed on their ability to give clean cues and distinguish between different types of cues, and will need to demonstrate what the cue actually is. Sound cues must be consistent in their tone and length, whether made by a device or the student; they cannot become louder, more insistent or repeated. Also note that compound cues may be used, but will count as the actual type of cue used (e.g., verbal) and not as a different cue type.
- **Cues should be minimized where possible,** that is, for verbal and body cues, the less obvious the better. Because cues in a chain function as clicks, a cue should not be given more than once and behaviors should take place without pauses between them.

Training Assessment Preparation

- **All behaviors must be on cue and under stimulus control.**
- **Only one cue should be given for each behavior (e.g., visual cue or verbal cue, not both simultaneously).**
- **Students are encouraged to use a variety of distinct behaviors.** A general rule of thumb to determine whether behaviors should be counted as different or the same is that distinct behaviors involve different muscles; for example, Spin Right and Spin Left are considered different behaviors. On the other hand, in most cases, presenting different targets to be touched with the same body part are considered the same behavior.
- **One behavior may be repeated twice as long as it is separated by another on-cue behavior. Repeated behaviors (e.g., going through three weave poles) count as a single behavior.**
- **In addition to the 10-part chain, the instructor will ask students to demonstrate two additional segments: one segment consisting of a four-part sequence (in order) from the chain, and one segment consisting of four behaviors from the chain that have been reordered.**
- **Prepare a detailed description of the behaviors and cues in your chain, listed in the order in which you will demonstrate them, for your instructor's feedback.** The final version should be distributed to the instructor and the rest of the class before your assessment.
- **You must keep a training journal or log** (written and/or video) that documents your objectives, your training processes, and records of your progress. You must submit this to your instructor at the final workshop.

Additional guidelines to keep in mind

- The fluency of the performance is more important than the “wow” factor of individual behaviors. It will be far better to have fluent simple behaviors than non-fluent dramatic behaviors.
- That said, imagination, fun, and the “wow” factor will certainly be appreciated by your fellow students and your instructor; so if your training is going smoothly, definitely stretch yourself.
- It may be useful to develop some segments of the chain by back-chaining.

Training Assessment Preparation

- Remember that good training does not stop at the limit required to qualify. Accustom your learner to the occasional performance of both shorter and longer chains so that the target number of 10 is not a stretch.
- We strongly recommend that you videotape your chain from the beginning.
- Your instructor is here to help you. Your fellow students are also a source of ideas and advice. Our aim is to enable you to succeed. Feel free to seek guidance or ask for suggestions as you train behaviors and work on your final chain.