

UNDERSTANDING TREAT VALUE

Choosing rewards your dog actually wants can make training clearer, faster, and more enjoyable.



The most important rule: Your dog decides what is valuable.
“High value” and “low value” describe how motivating a reward is to your dog in that moment – not a fixed ranking of foods.

THE TREAT VALUE LADDER

HIGH VALUE

Extra-special favorites



-  Chicken
-  Cheese
-  Hot dog
-  Freeze-dried meat
-  Another favorite food

Often useful for:

Harder skills, challenging environments, bigger distractions.

MEDIUM VALUE

More exciting than everyday food



-  Soft training treats
-  Novel treats
-  Favorite biscuits

Often useful for:

New skills or moderate distractions.

LOW VALUE

Everyday rewards



-  Kibble
-  Dry treats
-  Favorite snacks

Often useful for:

Easy, familiar skills in quiet environments.



These are examples – not rules.

A dog who loves kibble may consider it high value. Another dog may ignore chicken outdoors even though it is exciting at home. Preference, hunger, stress, distractions, novelty, and the environment can all change how valuable a reward is.

VALUE CHANGES WITH DIFFICULTY



EASY

Quiet + familiar



HARDER

More distractions



MORE VALUE

May be needed

Example: Kibble may work beautifully for practicing “sit” in the kitchen. At the park, your dog may need something more exciting – or the exercise may need to be made easier.

USING TREATS EFFECTIVELY

Match the reward and the training setup to what your dog is telling you.

IS THE REWARD VALUABLE ENOUGH?



YOUR DOG...	WHAT IT MAY MEAN	TRY...
 Eats readily and re-engages	The reward and difficulty may be a good match.	Keep training and reinforce successful choices.
 Takes food but is very distracted	The environment may be getting difficult.	Try more value, more distance, or an easier task.
 Refuses a normally loved treat	Stress, fear, excitement, or distraction may be too high.	Reduce difficulty rather than simply upgrading food.
 Grabs food frantically and cannot settle	Your dog may be too aroused to learn comfortably.	Pause, add distance, and create a calmer setup.

FIND YOUR DOG'S FAVORITES



Try a simple preference test. Choose 3-5 safe foods your dog already tolerates. Offer small samples individually and notice which ones create the most interest. You can also offer two options and see which your dog chooses first. Repeat on another day – preferences can change.



LOWER VALUE

MEDIUM VALUE

HIGHEST VALUE

A FEW PRACTICAL TIPS



KEEP IT TINY

Pea-sized or smaller pieces are often enough for training.



ROTATE REWARDS

Variety can help keep rewards interesting.



COUNT THE CALORIES

Training food still contributes to daily intake.



REWARD OFTEN

When learning, frequent success helps build the behavior.



WATCH YOUR DOG

Their behavior tells you whether the reward is working.



USE MORE THAN FOOD

Play, sniffing, attention, toys, and access can reinforce behavior too.



REMEMBER: Difficulty ↑ → reward value may need to ↑. But if your dog is overwhelmed, make the situation easier. A tastier treat cannot always make a difficult situation feel safe.