

# What are the C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation Rules?



See the complete Evaluation Rules in the Overview Handbook available at [www.mydoghasclass.com](http://www.mydoghasclass.com).

We want C.L.A.S.S. to be an enjoyable experience for everyone—including the dogs, students, and Evaluators. For consistency, safety, and a positive environment, the following guidelines are in place for use during a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation.

## *What is Acceptable*

<b>C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation Rules</b>		
<b>What is Acceptable</b>		
	<b>What is Acceptable</b>	<b>What is Acceptable at Specific Times</b>
<b>Rewards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Verbal Praise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Food Treats</li> <li>✓ Petting</li> <li>✓ Toys/Games</li> </ul>
<b>Equipment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 6' Leash</li> <li>✓ Flat Buckle or Snap Collar</li> <li>✓ Martingale/Limited Slip Collar</li> <li>✓ Body Harness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No-Pull Harness (B.A. Level only)</li> </ul>

## **Rewards**

By definition, rewards are essential to positive reinforcement training! The C.L.A.S.S. program encourages the use of rewards, within guidelines, during the C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation.

## *Rewards Usage Rules*

Here is a table summarizing how rewards may be used during an Evaluation:

<b>Rewards Usage in a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation</b>		
<b>B.A. Level</b>	<b>M.A. Level</b>	<b>Ph.D. Level</b>
<b>Praise may be used freely during any part of an evaluation.</b>		
<p><b>Food treats, petting, and toys/games are allowed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the completion of each test item</li> <li>• After the completion of each part of a two-part test item</li> <li>• During pauses between test items</li> <li>• During Warm-Up Time</li> </ul>	<p><b>Food treats, petting, and toys/games are allowed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the completion of all parts within each test item</li> <li>• During pauses between test items</li> <li>• During Warm-Up Time</li> </ul>	<p><b>Food treats are allowed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the evaluation begins</li> <li>• After the completion of the final test item in the evaluation</li> <li>• During Warm-Up Time</li> </ul> <p><b>Petting and toy/games are allowed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the completion of all parts within each test item</li> <li>• During pauses between test items</li> <li>• During Warm-Up Time</li> </ul>

For all C.L.A.S.S. Levels, food treats and toys must be concealed in the student's pocket. Food treats may not be carried by hand, in a treat pouch, or in the student's mouth.

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## ***Food Rewards***

Food rewards, with correct usage, are a powerful tool in positive, reward-based training and relationship building. Dogs naturally love food, so food rewards can reinforce a behavior, making it more likely to occur again! Food rewards in positive training are given when the dog does a desired behavior, so that the dog will want to repeat the behavior in hopes of getting more food rewards. The dog does not have to see the treat first before doing the behavior; the dog gets the treat after doing the behavior.

## ***Life Rewards***

Life rewards can be anything other than food treats that a particular dog finds pleasant and enjoyable, and therefore reinforcing. The list of life rewards depends on the dog's individual personality, the relationship of the dog and student, as well as the context in which the reward is given. Praise, petting, toys, and games are examples of life rewards allowed during a C.L.A.S.S. evaluation, in accordance with the Rewards Usage rules.

## **Praise**

Praise is encouraged throughout the test. Praise is verbal approval or other indication of approval (e.g. gestures, facial expressions) given to the dog, and students are encouraged to generously connect verbally and relate in a positive manner with their dogs throughout the evaluation just as in real-life. A cheerful or soothing tone of voice, a smile, or an enthusiastic "yay!" or "yes!" to communicate to the dog the student is pleased with the performance and as a reward to the dog for performing the cued behavior, is allowed throughout the evaluation.

## ***Difference Between Praise and Cues***

While praise is an indication of approval given as a reward for performing a cued behavior, cues are words or gestures that prompt a dog to perform a behavior. To assess whether the student is cueing or praising the dog, an Evaluator may ask himself, "Is the student's intent to communicate to the dog to perform the behavior? Does it seem the student is reminding the dog of what she'd like the dog to do?" If yes, that will be scored as a cue.

Students are encouraged to effectively train so their dogs respond to cues reliably, and receive clear praise for doing so. This is very different than trying to figure out how many cues can a student give and still pass. Students are urged to aim for the kind of dog training that is clear, clean, effective and pleasant for the dog, without a lot of extras to complicate the training process.

## **Petting**

We love our dogs and want to physically touch them. In a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, students may pet their dogs during the Warm-Up Time and between test items, that is, after completing one test item and before starting another test item. However, since petting can possibly interrupt a dog's performance or be construed as physical prompting, students may not pet their dog during other test items, except during items that require handling.

## **Toys/Games**

There can be varying types of toys and games that are rewarding to dogs, such as tug, fetch, tennis balls, and flying discs, just to name a few. In an evaluation, students may use toys and games during the Warm-Up Time and between test items, that is, after completing one test item and before starting another test item. Toys and games may *not* be used during other test items, as they could possibly be used to entice a dog to do a behavior or be distracting to the dog.

## Equipment Allowed

For safety, compliance with leash laws, and expediency during a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, a student must have their dog on a 6-foot, non-retractable leash. The leash must be held in the student's hand, except when held by the Evaluator; the student should not drop the leash during stationary test items.

The leash should be attached to a properly-fitted flat buckle or snap collar, standard body harness, or Martingale/limited slip collar. (Note: A Martingale/limited slip collar is a type of collar with two loops. The larger loop fits around the dog's neck, and the leash is attached to the smaller loop. When pressure is applied on the leash, the smaller loop pulls the larger loop taut around the neck. For the evaluation, the Martingale collar should be fitted so as not to restrict the dog's airway if the larger loop is taut. A Martingale collar is acceptable equipment, while a Martingale lead is not acceptable during a C.L.A.S.S. evaluation. A Martingale lead is a one-piece Martingale collar and leash device, such that the leash cannot be detached.)

In the B.A. Level only, additional equipment allowed includes no-pull harnesses such as front clip harnesses, Easy Walk™ harnesses, and Sporn harnesses; these harnesses may only be used in the B.A. Level if the leash remains loose and if the handler can manage the dog in the same fashion as if using a buckle collar or harness. (No-pull harnesses are not acceptable for use in the M.A. and Ph.D. Levels.) All equipment should be in good repair.

The student has the option to remove the leash for the following test items, ONLY if the test is performed in a secured area:

<b>Optional Off-Leash Test Items If In Secured Area</b>		
<b>B.A.</b>	<b>M.A.</b>	<b>Ph.D.</b>
All B.A. Test items must be performed on-leash, with the exception of B.A. 2. Come and Leashing Up Manners (part A) and the B.A. bonuses, which may be performed off-leash at the Evaluator's discretion.	M.A. 4. Come and Leashing Up Manners (part A) M.A. 5. Sit, Down, Stand M.A. 6. Handling M.A. 8. Stay M.A. Bonus 1 and 2	Ph.D. 4. Come and Leashing Up Manners (part A) Ph.D. 5. Meet and Greet Ph.D. 6. Attention Ph.D. 7. Table Manners Ph.D. 8. Do You Really Know Sit? Ph.D. Bonus 1 and 2

## ***What is Not Acceptable***

To foster a positive focus, effective training, and pleasant atmosphere, certain activities and equipment are not allowed in a C.L.A.S.S. testing environment.

<b>C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation Rules</b> <b>What is NOT Acceptable / Automatic Incompletes</b>	
<b>Student Activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Luring</li><li>✗ Using Rewards at the Incorrect Time</li><li>✗ Physical Prompting</li><li>✗ Physical Force</li><li>✗ Harsh Corrections</li><li>✗ Aggression Toward Dogs or People</li><li>✗ Unpreparedness</li></ul>
<b>Student/Dog Activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Unmanageable Behavior</li></ul>
<b>Dog Behavior and Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Inappropriate Elimination</li><li>✗ Excessive Stress</li><li>✗ Illness</li><li>✗ Physical Pain or Injury</li><li>✗ Aggression Toward Dogs or People</li></ul>
<b>Equipment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Slip Lead / Martingale Lead (one-piece collar/leash devices)</li><li>✗ Retractable/Extendable Leash</li><li>✗ Anxiety-reducing Wear</li><li>✗ Head Halters</li><li>✗ No-Pull Harness (M.A. and Ph.D. only)</li><li>✗ Muzzle</li><li>✗ Choke Chain</li><li>✗ Prong Collar</li><li>✗ Shock/Electronic Collar</li></ul>

The occurrence of any of the following during a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation will mandate an Automatic Incomplete test score for the overall evaluation, with the exception of excessive stress, during which instance the C.L.A.S.S. Evaluator may allow the dog extra time and patience to see if the dog will relax in a reasonable amount of time.

### **Luring**

Luring is using food or other desirable object to entice a dog to do a particular behavior, and is not allowed during an evaluation. Luring can be: pretending to use food, tricking a dog into thinking you have food in your hand, pretending to pull a treat out of your pocket, and showing food to the dog.

When a dog is lured into a position, the dog may have learned to follow a treat but not necessarily how to perform the behavior on cue. So luring may be a sign that the dog has not yet learned the desired behavior. A

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C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation is intended to assess the skills a dog/student team has already acquired. Therefore, luring a dog is not allowed during a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation at any level. Essentially, in a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, if the dog sees the treat (real or pretend) first before doing the behavior, that would be considered luring or bribing.

The C.L.A.S.S. luring rule applies to bonuses within an evaluation as well. Even though bonuses are not scored as Excellent, Needs Work, or Incomplete, the C.L.A.S.S. Rules of “What is Not Acceptable – Automatic Incompletes” still apply during bonuses as in any test item.

Though hand signals can be derived from the action of a lure, hand signals are not considered lures, and therefore are acceptable. The Evaluator will use discretion when assessing if a hand signal is intended to try to lure the dog.

### **Using Rewards at the Incorrect Time**

There are specific times in a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation during which rewards (food treats, petting, toys, games) are allowed. If those rewards are given at the incorrect time during an evaluation, the team will receive an Automatic Incomplete for the evaluation. See the “Rewards Usage Rules” in “What Is Acceptable” for a description of when rewards (food treats, petting, and toys/games) are allowed during an evaluation. As stated in “What Is Acceptable,” praise as a reward is encouraged and may be used at any time during an evaluation.

### **Physical Prompting**

Physical prompting is touching a dog or using leash pressure as a cue to perform a behavior. Some examples include touching a dog’s rear as a cue to sit, or touching a dog to get his attention. A leash pull to get the dog’s attention, even a gentle pull, is not allowed as a cue. (See “Cues” for information on cues that are allowed.)

Body blocking with physical contact is also considered physical prompting. Body blocking in general is using your body to take up space, and can be used (and is used) by humans and dogs as a way to control the movement of others. In a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, body blocking without physical contact is allowed (see “Cues” for more information), while body blocking with physical contact is not allowed. Examples of body blocking with physical contact, which is considered physical prompting, include: physically pushing against the dog with any part of the student’s body to block the dog from going through an open doorway, and shuffling into the dog with physical contact so that the dog moves away.

Physical prompting can create pressure or anxiety for dogs, even if no physical pressure is used. C.L.A.S.S. tests are for assessing responses to verbal and visual cues, so physical prompting is not allowed. An exception to this rule will be made for students with deaf dogs, where touch can be used for attention.

### **Physical Force**

Students may not use physical force or a taut leash to control a dog’s movements. For example, pushing a dog into a sit or down and pulling a dog’s body with the leash is not allowed. This signifies more training is needed for the dog to choose to do the behavior voluntarily.

### **Harsh Corrections**

The following corrections are not allowed in or around the evaluation site.

#### ***Harsh Tones***

Yelling at or intimidating a dog with voice tone is not allowed.

### ***Harsh Startle Corrections***

Students may not use startle or fear-based corrections such as squirt bottles or shake cans during a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation.

### ***Physical Corrections***

Students may not use physical corrections, including, but not limited to, rolling a dog on his back, grabbing, hitting, kicking, slapping, shaking, pinching, muzzle popping, or finger jabs.

### ***Leash Corrections***

Students may not use leash corrections (also known as leash jerks, leash checks, or leash pops).

### **Students Who Exhibit Aggression Toward Other People**

A student should not be allowed to test, or be given an Incomplete if testing has already begun, if the Evaluator observes the student exhibiting aggressive or threatening behavior toward other people or dogs in and around the C.L.A.S.S. test area, including before and after the evaluation. Threatening or aggressive behavior may include, but is not limited to, shoving, yelling, using foul language, and being argumentative.

### **Unpreparedness**

If the student does not have the required equipment for the evaluation, the student is not allowed to take the evaluation at that time.

The required equipment is:

- Permissible collar or harness
- 6-foot non-retractable leash
- Doggy clean-up supplies (waste bags, poop scooper, etc.)

While it is preferable that students have their C.L.A.S.S. Student ID and Dog ID Numbers on or before the day of the evaluation, and that the dog has been registered for each level of evaluation that will be taken that day, students may also register their dogs for any level of C.L.A.S.S. after an Evaluation. However, the online score reporting system (used by Evaluators to upload scores) will not recognize that evaluation score until the student registers his dog for that level at [www.mydoghasclass.com](http://www.mydoghasclass.com).

For the B.A. Level Evaluation, it is also preferable that students get their signed Veterinarian Certificates to their Evaluator at some point prior to the evaluation, since this certificate is part of the requirements for each team to complete the B.A. Level. If the student has not yet completed the Veterinarian Certificate requirement before the Evaluation, the student may still take the evaluation. However, when the Evaluator reports the team's score, it will be noted that the Veterinarian Certificate requirement, and therefore the B.A. Level, is not yet complete. The student will then need to send the Veterinarian Certificate to the Evaluator and C.L.A.S.S. Office in order to fulfill that requirement.

### **Unmanageable Behavior**

In Canine Life And Social Skills, an overall goal is to teach and encourage students to properly manage so-called "unruly" dog behaviors so that dogs are welcome in more social situations. Jumping up, barking, chewing, mouthing, peeing, pooping, digging, chasing, tugging—these are all normal dog behaviors. Although there could be different reasons why these behaviors may occur, dogs basically engage in these activities because it is what they naturally know and it works for them. While dogs should be allowed to be dogs, we also need to teach our dogs the rules of living in a human world.

Therefore, if during a dog's C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, the dog engages in unruly activity that cannot be managed by the student, such as excessively and repeatedly jumping up on a person, barking, or mouthing, the team shall receive an Automatic Incomplete score for the overall evaluation.

### **Inappropriate Elimination**

Appropriate times and places for eliminating are important in Canine Life And Social Skills. Urinating, including urine marking, or defecating during any part of a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, except during the Warm-Up time, will result in an Automatic Incomplete for the overall evaluation. Students are encouraged to potty their dogs before the C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation begins, in addition to learning to read their dogs' physical signs of needing to go potty. An exception to the elimination rule will be made during the Warm-Up Time in each level, during which time dogs are allowed to eliminate in the designated potty area only. In the interest of fairness to all dogs, a designated potty area will be set up for all C.L.A.S.S. Evaluations whether held indoors or out.

For the indoors, the potty area is available just in case stress or nervousness create the need to eliminate. Moreover, the indoor potty area provides for dogs who are not yet housetrained or who are trained to potty indoors, as long as the student recognizes the signs and directs the dog to the designated potty area. For indoor testing locations, depending on the location, there may be both an indoor and outdoor potty area option, so that owners may choose to take their dogs outside to eliminate if necessary.

For the outdoors, the designated potty area again is available in case of stress or nervousness, or if the dog did not potty before the evaluation. Also, by designating a specific potty area outdoors, the outdoors area allocated for the test does not become a potty area which would serve to stimulate more dogs to potty as well as distract dogs with enticing smells. This is realistic as even if dogs are trained not to potty in the house, they also need to be taught appropriate times and places to potty outside, and the student should know how to observe and redirect their dog to an acceptable place to potty if necessary.

### **Excessive Stress**

Testing a dog who is experiencing extreme stress may not reveal information about how the dog will behave when he is relaxed. Responsible students will seek to protect their dog from extremely distressing situations. The C.L.A.S.S. Evaluator may allow the dog extra time and patience to see if the dog will relax in a reasonable amount of time.

The C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation will not begin if a dog is exhibiting signs of excessive stress. If a dog becomes excessively stressed during an evaluation, the Evaluator should end the testing at that time. This dog may need more socialization and/or training before retaking the C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation.

Some signs of excessive stress include: shutting down, tail tucked between legs, trembling, whining, excessive barking, cowering, excessive chewing of the leash, pacing, excessive drooling, excessive panting, and trying to escape or hide. There are different intensities of these stress signs, and the Evaluator shall use their best judgment in deciding whether to begin, pause, or continue an evaluation or not if the dog is displaying these signs due to stress.

### **Illness**

A team will not be allowed to go through a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation, or be given an Automatic Incomplete if the evaluation has already begun, if the dog demonstrates illness, such as vomiting, severe diarrhea, or fatigue.

## **Physical Pain or Injury**

A team will not be allowed to test, or be given an Automatic Incomplete if the evaluation has already begun, if the dog appears to be in pain or discomfort, or has stitches or bandages from a recent wound.

## **Dogs Who Exhibit Aggressive Behavior Toward Others**

A dog will not be allowed to test, or be given an Automatic Incomplete if the evaluation has already begun, if the Evaluator observes the dog exhibiting aggressive or threatening behavior inappropriately toward people or dogs in and around the C.L.A.S.S. test area, including before and after the evaluation. Threatening or aggressive behavior may include, but is not limited to, snarling, growling, lunging, snapping, or biting toward a person or dog. (Also refer to “Eligibility for C.L.A.S.S. Certificates as Related to Aggressive Behavior.”)

Not all aggressive/threatening behavior is inappropriate. For example, some dogs growl during play; at other times, a dog may appropriately growl as a warning toward another dog who is disrespecting his space. A growl and other aggressive-looking behavior is part of canine communication, not to be suppressed by punishment. So applying this rule will require Evaluator discretion based on observation and understanding of canine behavior. If, in the Evaluator’s opinion, the dog threatens the safety of any people or dogs in the vicinity of the testing area, the Evaluator shall ask the student to remove the dog from the evaluation site.

## **Equipment Not Allowed**

Equipment not allowed includes slip leads, Martingale leads (which is a Martingale collar/leash combination in one piece, such that the leash cannot be detached.) retractable or extendable leashes, anxiety-reducing clothing (i.e. any type of clothing that covers the dog’s body such as Thundershirts™ or Anxiety Wraps), and muzzles. This equipment may be helpful and practical for use in some settings; however, a C.L.A.S.S. Evaluation should be performed without the use of these training aids.

No-pull harnesses, such as front clip harnesses, Easy Walk™ harnesses, and Sporn harnesses, are not acceptable in the M.A. and Ph.D. Levels; a dog may wear a no-pull harness in these levels, but ONLY if the leash is attached to the collar or in such a way so that the no-pull functionality is not activated. (No-pull harnesses are acceptable in the B.A. Level only if the leash remains loose and if the handler can manage the dog in the same fashion as if using a buckle collar or harness.) Head halters, such as the Halti and the Gentle Leader, are not allowed at any C.L.A.S.S. Level.

Equipment and techniques that try to modify behavior through fear, pain, or threats are not allowed in a C.L.A.S.S. setting nor are they generally recommended to prepare a dog for C.L.A.S.S., as fear and anxiety are not the basis for building a mutually rewarding relationship. The equipment not allowed includes choke chains, prong collars, and shock/electronic collars. (Vibration-only collars, however, are allowed for use with deaf dogs.)