

Teaching Your Dog to Dock Dive: Part 1 (That First Jump)

So, you've decided you want to try dock diving. Now what do you do? Just how do you teach your dog to dock dive? Can your dog dock dive like Sally and Spud? This article contains some tips and ideas to help you get your dog off the dock that first time.

Before we begin, let's clarify one thing. For some reason, some people think they can take their dog up on the dock for their first time ever, and, and because their dog enjoys water and loves retrieving, the dog is going to jump like the seasoned dogs like Sally and Spud. Their thinking goes something like this: "My dog loves water, swims all the time and loves to retrieve. He's can easily do this." And the truth is, the dog probably will make a good dock diver.

But first, the dog has to *learn that skill*. Many folk, unfortunately, do not see dock diving as a *learning experience*.

You wouldn't take your dog to try agility and just put them out with the hurdles and ramps and say "Jump over the hurdle," or "Go up the ramp." The dog would just stand there, of course.

Well, that's exactly what happens on the dock. Someone who is certain their dog will be a great dock diver takes their dog up on the dock, throws the toy out there, and says, "Get it, boy." The dog runs to the end of the dock and stops with no earthly idea what he's supposed to do. The toy is left floating untouched out in the pool or lake and the handler is left frustrated.

Let me add here that yes, occasionally, a dog readily jumps the very first time like he's done it all his life. Sally was like that. The first time she tried dock diving, she flew off the dock like she had been doing it all her life. But those scenarios are rare.

Just as you have to *teach* a dog other sports such as agility, you need to *teach* your dog to dock dive. For some dogs, the learning curve is small, so the teaching process only takes one day. For other dogs, the learning curve is a little greater, so the teaching process might take days or even weeks, maybe months.

One more word of advice before the "How To" steps. It is very important that your dog have a good recall before you go to practices with other people and dogs. Most of the practices are at a pond or lake or river, so when your dog exits, he need to know to come immediately to you. If your dog runs off with the toy expecting you to play a game of chase, that could be not only an inconvenience for those waiting for their turn on the dock, but also dangerous for your dog and others. At an event, a good recall is not as important because there is only one exit ramp, and you will be waiting for him at the top of that ramp. But most practices are more wide open spaces, making recall most important.

The First Jump

Step #1

Get your dog used to going in the water to retrieve objects, not from the dock, but just from the edge of the pool or lake. In other words, get your dog comfortable and enjoying retrieving in water.

Step #2

After your dog is comfortable retrieving objects in water, take your dog up to the very edge of the dock. *Do NOT put your dog at the far end of the dock and throw an object like you see the seasoned teams doing.* Start up at the edge of the dock. Drop the toy right under your dog's nose. Do not throw the toy out into the water; just drop it right under the dog's nose and encourage him to retrieve/get it/fetch, whatever term you use. If your dog balks, get down with him. Point out the toy; splash water on it; act as crazy and excited as you can to get

him revved up and wanting that toy. Here are some photos of some people doing just that as they try to get their dogs off the dock.





And of course, here's me with Hoppy!



This part of the process might take just a few minutes, a day, weeks, or occasionally, months. It all depends on the dog. But eventually, your dog will go off that dock!

Even if your dog has jumped off a dock at the lake, jumping into a pool (like a competition pool) is a totally different experience. The water is clear, and often the dog cannot see the water. For all they know, they are jumping onto a big blue thing.

Here are a few photos of dogs and their first jumps (if you want to call them jumps). Often, it's more like sliding off into the water!



Maybe not the best form in the world, but when your dog makes that first splash, it will seem like an Olympic moment to you!

Here's a link to a video of a dog from the Buckeye DockDog club going in for his very first time. This is quite typical...and really cute!

[Riley Jumps In](#)

Step #3

After your dog does make that first jump, it's up to you to praise, praise, praise your dog! Act like he's just won some Grand Championship! Then get him right back up on the dock and *do the exact same thing*. At this point, your dog might only be jumping 1-2 feet, if that far. That's fine! Your goal at this stage should be to generate success for your dog...let your dog become familiar with just going from the dock into the water. Distance is not a factor...yet.

Step #4

Once your dog is comfortable going from the dock into the water, start throwing the toy a little farther out there...not 20 feet yet, but maybe 7-8 feet. The dog should still be jumping from the end of the dock, but now the dog should be getting a little distance.

Step #5

As your dog becomes more comfortable jumping from the end of the dock, begin moving your dog farther back on the dock to start the jump. Maybe start the dog 6 feet back, then 10 feet back, etc. Make sure the dog is successful before moving him back any farther. Soon, you will be starting your dog all the way back on the dock!

If your dog runs down the dock, but hesitates at the end before jumping, that's okay. It might take a while for him to gain the confidence to jump without hesitating and thinking about it first. Once that confidence factor is okay, the hesitation at the end of the dock will disappear.

Now, your dog is a dock diving dog for sure. How long will it take for your dog to reach this stage? Who knows? Some dogs become a dock diver in just one day, while other might take weeks or months. *But it will happen!*

Your next step is to improve on your dog's distance and form. ([Teaching Your Dog to Dock Dive: Part 2](#))

*****NOTE***** *Steps 3-5 are for the newbies whose dog jumps for the first time like the dogs in the photos...the ones who very hesitantly make that first plunge. If, the first time on the dock, your dog readily jumps out into the water, you can skip steps 3-5. Your dog is ready for [Teaching Your Dog to Dock Dive: Part 2](#).*

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For more specific training techniques, we suggest you contact [SportMutt](#).

Thanks to the following people for contributing photos or video for this article: Whitney (Chicagoland DockDogs Club), April (Rocky Mountain DockDogs Club), Cindy (Mokan DockDogs Club), Ron (Puget Sound DockDogs Club), Christy (Puget Sound DockDogs Club), Sue (Club 3D), Kris (Club 3D), Randi (Buckeye DockDogs Club)