



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department Ruff Notes – August 2019

Training Reports – Explanation of Why Dogs May Stay in a Phase or Jump Several Phases

We are occasionally asked why some dogs remain in a training phase for a long time and why some dogs jump several phases of training (for example going from Phase 2 to Phase 5). Here are some answers from the Training Supervisors:

- A dog in training may need some basic skill development or extra polishing. This can be common at the end of Phase 3 and Phase 7, right before preliminary and final testing.
- A medical issue (like pano or Kennel Cough) may keep a dog from progressing if the veterinary staff recommends a break in training for a dog with a health issue.
- Some dogs take longer to learn and benefit from extra practice. Dogs with sensitive temperaments may progress more slowly. The instructor will introduce skills and tailor training sessions to the needs of the individual dog.
- All areas of a specific phase must be completed and a dog must pass testing before they can advance to the next phase. This can lead to stalling in a phase followed by a seemingly big 'jump.' For example, a dog in Phase 3 may struggle on the preliminary blindfold test, but do well in everything else (obedience, distraction, body handling, guide work training, curbs, etc.). The instructor may then start work on teaching the dog the next set of skills in Phase 4, while also continuing to work on finishing up Phase 3. The dog won't be able to officially move up phases on the report until it has passed the preliminary blindfold test, but once that is accomplished the dog can speed through the next phase or two and catch up.
- A behavioral concern (such as inappropriate relieving or discomfort riding in a vehicle etc.) may need further evaluation.
- An instructor may be sick, on vacation, or not get the phase updated in time. While human error may occur on a rare occasion, most likely if the dog is lingering for a few weeks in a phase, it is for a different reason. Reports are updated weekly.
- Phase 8 'class ready' dogs: A dog may be in Phase 8 for a while waiting for a perfect match, or, perhaps the dog has been matched to a client but in-home training or class is subject to scheduling and coordinating with the client.

If a dog is stuck in a phase for more than 4 weeks (5th week in a phase) the leader may check with the CFR who will consult with the Training Department for any insight. Sometimes information can be shared with volunteers, sometimes not. It is not unusual for a dog to remain in a phase for up to four weeks; if raisers have concerns about a dog being in a phase for less than four weeks they can be reminded of the reasons above.

The phase report guidelines also sums it up nicely: "Phases generally last a week or so, depending on the individual dog. At times, it may seem like some dogs advance quickly through phases and others linger.

Neither situation necessarily indicates success or failure in the program. If a dog remains in a certain phase longer than average, it may mean that the dog is working on proficiency in one area, or training or veterinary staff are investigating a potential behavioral or health issue that needs extra time. Puppy raisers are encouraged to be flexible and refrain from either being discouraged if progress seems slow or overly eager if progress seems quick.”

<https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Training-Phase-Descriptions.pdf>