



Emily Pyle
emilypyle@sbcglobal.net
www.headovertailstraining.com
281-772-2653

Everybody Dance Now!

Welcome to Beginner Canine Musical Freestyle

Canine musical freestyle is a sport that combines basic obedience skills your dog might already know – such as heel, sit or down – with tricks into a creative, choreographed routine to music. Most people have heard the sport referred to as “dog dancing.” In fact the best freestyle routines should give the illusion that dog and handler are reading each other’s minds; they are a single, intangible unit. They use the *entire* floor, just like human dancers would. They are focused on each other. They both have personality and attitude and look like they *want* to be there doing that dance.

The choice of music is an essential first step to a great routine. We don’t simply pick music we like. We pick music that matches the natural gait of our dog and his personality. My favorite music might be the heavy beat of classic rock, but if I have a dog that glides with soft elegance when he trots, heavy rock won’t match my dog. Why is it important that the music matches your dog? Well when the music matches and amplifies the natural gait of your dog, it immediately looks like the music was made for *that* dog. In short he looks like he’s dancing just heeling across the floor, before any of the fancy tricks begin. We will not be picking music in your first few sets of classes, there’s a whole other workshop for that! But you will get to work to music and begin to feel how it can amp up your attitude and just how hard it is to follow the music with timed moves.

The next important step is to use the right moves and tricks. People often think that freestyle is trick after trick with music playing. In fact our routines are carefully choreographed to fit that *exact* music and that *exact* dog. Human dance styles have different steps that are unique to that music style. In freestyle, we take some of those unique dance styles and modify them for our dog. This is where innovation, creativity and lots of training come into play. Unlike other dog sports, there are no right answers and you aren’t told what to do. You are limited only by your imagination. One of our dance teams developed a cha-cha with timed spins, and another a leg weave based on Charleston footwork. For an elegant instrumental we might use round heeling patterns and circular tricks. A young, athletic dog might include jumps, while an older dog might add sweet paw shakes. Every move, sequence, or trick we add matches the personality of the music and the unique qualities of our dog.

Anyone can stand in one place and do trick after trick after trick. It is infinitely harder to craft a true, creative *dance* routine. It’s my goal to teach you how to make and perform quality freestyle routines that make people smile in admiration. It won’t happen overnight, and sometimes it will be hard. But stick to your foundations and open your mind and one day you both will *click* to it!

Lastly, the most important part about freestyle is to simply have fun. This isn’t hard to do when you put on some good music and see the light in the eyes of a dog that’s having the time of his life. The more fun you have, the more fun your dog has. You get out what you put in. And really isn’t that kind of joy the real reason we love to do sports with our dog?

Freestyle Organizations

There are three major freestyle organizations with their own philosophy, style and competition standards. Personally, I prefer the Musical Dog Sport Association www.musicaldogsport.org. I have been a long time member, executive board member, president and judge for MDSA and many on our freestyle team are active members and competitors, too. I prefer MDSA because their values and style fit my own attitudes about freestyle. In its definition the Musical Dog Sport Association states that the **dog will be the focus** freestyle performances. This is portrayed in a choreographed routine through the creative use of movement, music, and training in a way that is **respectful** to the dog, the audience and to the sport itself. MDSA also puts emphasis on training as being the foundation of a freestyle performance. The *positive working relationship* should be visible in the teamwork, the interactive attention and obvious joy the dog and handler share with each other. **As a freestyle team neither the dog nor handler can stand alone.** As a team member, the handler should allow the dog to shine. The dog should never be relegated to the position of being a prop or being secondary to the music or handler. MDSA also speaks of celebrating the unique qualities of each individual dog. The trust and unconditional love dogs give to us is something to be cherished and freestyle, when done at its best provides us the opportunity to share our special dogs with others.

What freestyle is ... and isn't ...

- **About the dog**, not you and your dance abilities (or lack thereof!).
- **About teamwork**, not master and commander, do it or else.
- **Artistic at it's best**, not mechanical, stiff and unimaginative.
- **About tasteful pairing of outfit and music that complements the dog**, not an over-the-top costume and arbitrary music that overshadows the dog.
- **About moving**, not standing still on the floor doing every trick you know.
- **Respectful to the dog**, does not overface the dog's abilities and considers the safety and well being of the dog *first*. I will always put your dog first, even if you forget sometimes in the moment of enthusiasm or stress. I'm not trying to be a wet blanket, I just care almost as much about your dog as you do!
- **Beautiful, elegant, athletic, humorous or whatever natural qualities your dog "oozes"**, not striving to copy another dog or make your dog into what you think he should be (or be like).
- **FUN for you AND your dog.** If it's not, STOP!

In my opinion, the most important qualities of an impressive freestyle dog are simple:

- "Laser" focus and attention.
- Enthusiasm (dog *and* handler).
- The ability to move across the floor (with laser focus and enthusiasm).
- Solid proficiency in foundation positions and certain skills.

If you have (or train up) these qualities, add in a dog that knows how to think and learn, and you can do most anything! For this reason, we'll spend a lot of time building these skills because they are just that important!

Smart Dog Training Center

Facility Instructions

Smart Dog Training Center

910 Curtin St, Houston, TX 77018

[Google Map](#) | See next page for map and more detailed written directions

Please help me keep things clean and orderly so we continue to be welcome to train at Smart Dog.

- I have back-to-back classes all day at the building, so for your first time to Smart Dog, leave your dog in the car and come in the building for initial crating instructions.
- I strongly suggest you have a crate in the car that you can bring into the building with you every week, if needed. There are crates in the building, but they belong to others and not always available, so it's best to be prepared with your own. If you use an existing crate in the building, take out the bedding and use your own! I also suggest a crate cover if this helps your dog relax.

The crates that are in the building belong to individuals who train and don't want to have to bring a crate every time they train at the building or attend an event. Because we only have room for so many crates (and are at capacity now) everyone who has a crate there has agreed to share with people who come in and don't have a crate. So, if you use one of the crates and your dog tears up the matting or any other items surrounding the crate, common courtesy would be to let the owner know. Either contact them directly or leave a message on the crate that you will replace the damaged item.

- Parking is self explanatory, just please conserve space as we have a lot of people coming and going at the center.
- The entrance door is in the big garage bay.
- Potty area is also obvious. The usual leash and pick up after your dog rules apply, so please, please PICK UP AFTER YOUR DOG.
- Please stay off the agility equipment as I have rented the building only and don't have permission for that.
- There is a kitchen and a fridge so you can heat up food or beverages or keep them cool if you'll be there for several classes. There are snacks and drinks we are welcome to use, but if we are being pigs and using all the resources, let me know so we can help replenish.
- There's also a nice quiet living room with TV, game console and DVD player. The building also has free wi-fi. So if you have to wait between classes you can be comfortable and get useful things done, like bills or emails!

Smart Dog is near the center of Houston, off Loop 610 which will connect you to the main freeways to go north, south, east and west. Curtin Street can be hard to see from Shepherd Drive. A major stop-lighted intersection is W 43rd St / W Crosstimbers and there is a large Sears nearby that intersection. Curtin Street and Thornton Road is by the Gulf gas station, which is the easiest business to spot clearly. Here is a bird's eye view of the landmarks and side roads. The building is a large tan metal building that is gated along the front. The training center does not have a sign out front, so don't bother looking!

