

**Pamela Dennison (c) 2016**  
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“Pushing the session.” “Testing.” If you push the dog or test him, you *will* be sorry.

Really. *Never* test a dog. Been there, done that (once), it was really stupid on my part. Trust me, I know first hand. After Shadow (my recovering human aggressive dog) earned his Canine Good Citizen certificate, I apparently lost my mind. I knew he wasn't “cured,” but I screwed up royally and tested him. I failed. It wasn't a major setback thank goodness, but it did cure me of being stupid.

At the time, I was still working with Ted Turner (long distance) and I emailed him the gory details. He reamed me up and down, no holds barred, no soft words and he was right. I would willingly share what he sent me, but I lost that email a few computer crashes ago. The gist of it was, **“Never test your animal.”**

So how do you get your dog to the next level? By guessing? By crossing your fingers while you put him into a situation you have no clue if he will be successful? By pushing him, without having some solid foundation work under your belt, and without *really* knowing if he is ready?

Nope, by gradually, systematically, and carefully “raising criteria.” It's kind of like shaping a behavior - any behavior. You don't move on until your dog has mastered the previous skill, right? Let's say you want to train “ride a skateboard.” You wouldn't expect your dog to do it from the get-go; you'd shape any kind of interaction with it - looking at the board, sniffing it, one foot, two feet, pushing it, etc.

So when you raise criteria when working with an aggressive/reactive dog, you'd do the same thing. Look at what you want your dogs final behavior to be and break it down into the smallest of approximations. Would you go from let's say 100 feet away to 10 feet away in one step? I certainly hope not! Great way to set your dog up to fail.

You may however, raise your criteria, based on many factors; knowledge of your dog's body language, skill set in place at any given moment, length of session, target goal for that particular session, and success in the previous session.