

Think your dog knows _____?

Fluency check

You can do this check any time you think the dog knows a behavior, especially if you are in a new environment or around new distractions.

Speed: How quickly does the dog respond to the cue?
Sloth: You need to add motivation/fun/rewards, reduce confusion, reduce the dog's stress, and/or increase the dog's ability to ignore the environment or distraction.
It's okay/moderate: Are you okay with that? If not, see Sloth suggestions above
Speedy!: Excellent! Your dog has a solid understanding of the cue, is motivated to do the behavior, and is not stressed about the cue/behavior/environment/distraction.
Clarity: How often does the dog do something other than what you cued?
Frequently: This behavior needs more practice and you might need to go back a few steps and build a more solid foundation
Sometimes: This behavior needs more practice
Rarely: Excellent! The dog is not confused about what this cue means
Precision: How consistent/precise is the dog's behavior?
Sloppy/not consistent: You'll need to go back to basics and work through the training steps again making sure you only give a motivator when the behavior is as precise as you desire.
Sometimes good, sometimes not: Go back to some easier training steps and only give a motivator for the repetitions that are as precise as you desire.
Very consistent! Excellent! The dog is clear on the criteria for the behavior.
Generalization: Would you be willing to bet \$100 that the dog will confidently, correctly and immediately respond to the cue in the environment you are currently testing?
Maybe 50 cents: Add distance from the environment if possible. This environment needs more practice, go back to basics and work through the training steps in this environment to help the dog. If stress is the issue, work on helping the dog feel more comfortable in the environment first.
\$50: You're on the right track. Just needs more repetition to build the dog's understanding and confidence, or perhaps more motivation and/or less stress.
\$100, no problem. Excellent! The dog is confident about working in the environment and well-motivated.
Distractions: How likely is the dog to be distracted?
No way he can focus on the task: Add distance from the distraction. This distraction needs more practice, go back to basics and work through the training steps in this environment to help the dog. If stress is the issue, work on helping the dog feel more comfortable in the environment first.
He's working, but often loses focus: You're on the right track, but too close to the distraction. Add distance and work your way closer using more incremental steps with easier distances often sprinkled in.
Distraction? What distraction? That is fluency with that distraction! The dog knows the distraction is there, but can still maintain focus on the task. The more distractions he works near, the more focused he will get.
Distance: How far can the dog be from you and still respond correctly to the cue?
Want to go farther? Don't rush distance! Add distance slowly to keep the dog stress free, confident and motivated. When you add a new challenge like a new place or new distraction, shorten the distance and incrementally build back up to keep the dog successful.
Duration: For stationary behaviors, how long can the dog hold the position without stress?
Build duration incrementally and watch for any signs of stress (yawning, lip licking, body tension, whining, etc.) Only add the distance the dog can handle while remaining stress free.
Positions: Can the dog correctly respond to the cue regardless of what the human is doing?
Handler sitting in a chair, sitting/laying on the floor, not looking at the dog when the cue is given, handler's back turned to the dog (dog behind a barrier or tethered if needed), Handler dancing, skipping, high stepping, waving arms oddly, or doing jumping jacks Handler not visible to the dog, at a distance from the dog, while handler remains in motion, etc.
Dog positions: On a raised surface, under the handler that is on a raised surface, on an unstable surface, in water or in rain/sprinkler, in tall grass, on rocks/boulders, etc.
Speed: For moving behaviors- Is the dog performing the behavior at the speed you desire?
No?: Build motivation, confidence, muscles and an understanding of the criteria (reward the faster reps)

