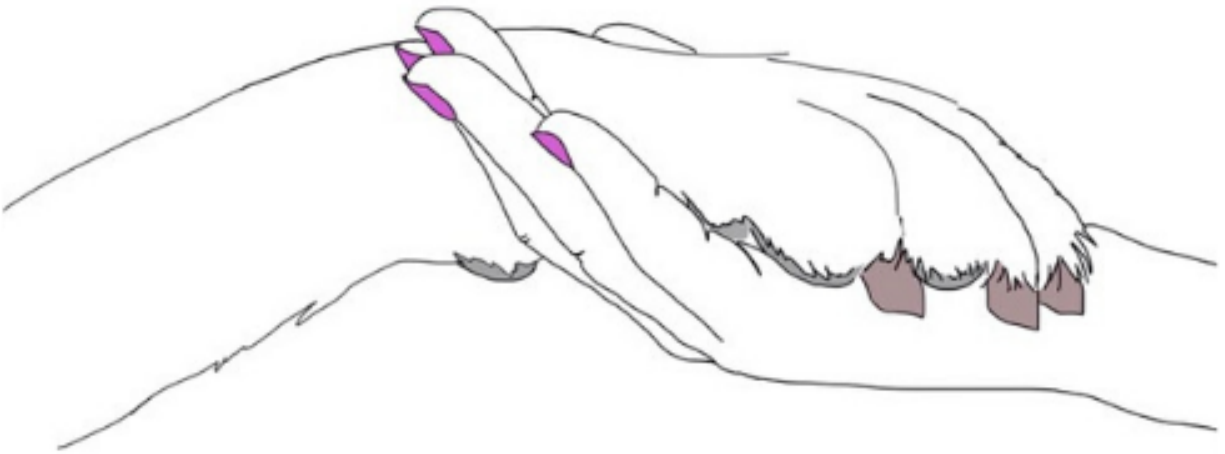


Nailed It:  
A Course in  
Canine Nail Care



Created by Lori Nanan  
Copyright, 2020

Instructional eBook

# Welcome!

## Hello and welcome to Nailed It: A Course in Canine Nail Care!

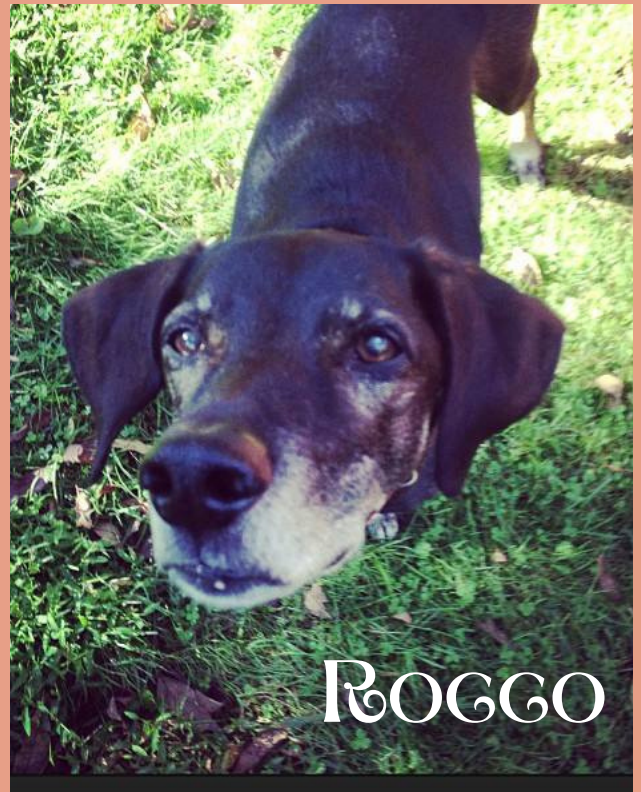
This EBook is designed to help you and your dog be more comfortable with routine nail maintenance. Before we get started, let me tell you a little bit about myself and why I created this EBook, and before I even get into the professional part, I want to fill you in on my personal reasons for caring so much about canine nail care.

### My Heart Dog & Inspiration: Rocco

For 13.5 years, I shared my life with a wonderful dog named Rocco. He was my "heart dog", as I had brought him home from Greece when he was only four weeks old. He was a street dog, fending for himself at the Santorini airport, and likely wouldn't have made it if someone hadn't scooped him up and brought him to safety. When Rocco was still a young puppy, I quicked him while clipping his nails and it was very painful for him and traumatic for both of us. He never quite recovered emotionally and would never let me near his paws again, therefore suffering with overgrown nails for his entire life. I subjected him to nail trims done during already scary vet visits and his discomfort was so great that he screamed. I could not be in the room and left my husband to handle him during the procedure, and the aftermath of "get me the heck out of here". I did that for years and it's always haunted me. I vowed that after Rocco, no other dog I loved would be subjected to the same terror around what many of us consider to be a routine procedure. One day, I opened my bathroom drawer, saw a nail file, and it was as if the heavens parted and the angels sang! I wondered if I could file my current dog Hazel's nails instead of clipping them. I wrote up a plan and set off to give us both a completely different experience. We've never looked back! I maintain Hazel's nails in Rocco's honor (and for her health!) and think of him whenever I see dogs in need of some nail TLC.

### My Professional Background

Professionally, I worked as a dog trainer for about 13 years in total. I am a CPDT-KA (Certified Professional Dog Trainer- Knowledge Assessed), a graduate of the Academy for Dog Trainers (2013) and Animal Behavior College (2001). I worked for the Academy, owned my own business and worked as the Canine Behavior Education Coordinator at an animal shelter. I also founded a non-profit, Your Pit Bull and You. I wrote a blog on nail care years ago, and it seemed to resonate with many people and is what led to what you see here today!



*-Lori*

# How to use this eBook

This eBook lays out all of the information and steps needed for you to be able to maintain your dog's nails at home. Please be sure to read each chapter and be sure you understand

the why and how before you actually move on and begin to work with your dog. This eBook lays out a DIY protocol that many people and dogs will be able to execute, but I cannot make any guarantees. Please see the Disclaimer section for more information.

**NOTE:** All links, including the training video are in **bold red** and underlined. (Right click on links to keep eBook open.) You do not need to print this manual, but printing the training plan pages may be helpful (pgs. 34-36).

## Table of Contents

<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>EBook Layout</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Disclaimer</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Let's Get Started</b>	<b>8</b>
Overcoming the Fear	<b>9</b>
Deciding on the right tool	<b>10-12</b>
<b>Pavlov on your Shoulder</b>	<b>13</b>
How classical conditioning works	<b>14</b>
The Almighty +CER	<b>15</b>
About Counterconditioning & Desensitization	<b>16</b>
The Importance of a 1:1 Ratio	<b>17</b>
Food, Delicious Food	<b>18-19</b>
A Bit About Fear	<b>20</b>
Tuna Fudge Recipe	<b>21</b>
Treat Prep & +CER Building	<b>22</b>
<b>Nail Tips</b>	<b>23</b>
Expert Interview	<b>24</b>
Paw & Nail Anatomy	<b>25-26</b>
Useful Information	<b>27</b>
Checklist of Needs	<b>28-30</b>
Go Slow, Be Generous	<b>31</b>
<b>Time to Get to Work</b>	
About the Training Plan	<b>33</b>
The Training Plan	<b>34-36</b>

# FAQs (1)

## **How long will it take for my dog to be comfortable with me touching their nails?**

**This process is very much about the individual dog - and human! Some dogs may breeze through the early steps, but need a bit more time getting comfortable with the actual procedure, and the same may be true of you. If this is something that causes you some stress, take your time and get comfortable with each step. Later in the EBook, we will speak with a veterinarian about how to manage your dog's nails in the meantime, if you are feeling pressured to get them maintained before you have finished the process of doing so yourself.**

## **Why is this more effective than just taking my dog to the vet or to a groomer to be clipped?**

**Nail maintenance is one of those things many people feel like they "should" be able to handle on their own. Due to this, many people struggle through it, stress about it, and maybe, just avoid doing it. As dog owners, we're likely the only ones who will be willing and able to make the experience as comfortable as possible for our dogs. Veterinarians and groomers book appointments and are often facing a time crunch. We can set aside some time for this. The great news is that it doesn't all need to be (and should not be if you are following the plan!) done in one session. Once you have worked your way through the "preparation" steps, you should be able to do all (or most) of your dog's nails in one session. Putting in some extra time to help your dog be more comfortable with the process will allow you both to enjoy a lifetime of stress-free nail maintenance. Since nail maintenance needs to be done often - as nails grow fast - doing it on your own is more cost and time efficient.**

# FAQs (2)

## **How do I know which tool will work best for my dog? Will I be able to get one-on-one feedback from the instructor?**

Be sure to check out the "Let's Get Started" section of the course. Here you will learn how to choose the best tool for you and your dog. In my experience, a nail file is a great "intro" tool, as the margin of error is much smaller and you *\*may\** need to do less conditioning to it. Please note that I am not able to provide feedback, but that you may go back through each lesson in the EBook as many times as needed. Take your time with the information and preparing to get to work!

## **What if my dog doesn't like being touched in general on his feet? Where do I start?**

Many dogs do not like having their feet touched, but we can often get them more comfortable with it by working slowly and systematically. In order to help your dog feel more comfortable with this, you should start higher on the leg and move your way down, closer to your dog's toes with time, patience and repetition. You'll learn more about this in the training video, and I will show you exactly what the process looks like. There may be some cases in which you simply are not able to help your dog feel more comfortable with this. Dogs who have had traumatic experiences with nail maintenance, or are fearful in general, may need more help than you are able to provide on your own. Please speak to your veterinarian about options if you feel your dog falls into this category. You may be able to get help from a qualified trainer, who can work through the steps with you.

# EBook Layout

**This EBook is divided into sections designed to help you work through the canine nail care process effectively.**

**Building of positive Conditioned Emotional Responses (+CERs) & Animal Learning:**

Here you'll learn how we get the dog to the point where she loves that file, the Dremel or those clippers! You'll watch an expert interview and read a few articles on the topic as well. This is an important component of the overall plan and will be crucial to your progress.

**Understand the Importance of Nail Care:**

Here you'll gain an understanding of why nail care is so important for your dog. We'll talk to a veterinarian to get her take - from the physiological reasons, to the wear and tear emotionally on your dog if he or she is not comfortable with the process, to a veterinarian's experiences as professionals with dogs who struggle with the procedure.

**Determine the Best Tool:**

You'll be able to determine which tool is most comfortable for you and your dog. There's important things to consider when making your decision. For instance, using a Dremel might not be the best choice for long-haired dogs (and you'll understand more about that as we go) or you may never quite feel comfortable with clippers in your hand.

**Understand and Implement:**

Then, you'll understand the basic plan and be prepared to implement it. You'll also be able to print out the training plan so that you don't need to log onto your computer every time you want to do some work with your dog. This EBook is designed so that you can go at your own pace. There's no need to be in a hurry and you'll be able to pop back in as you'd like.

# Disclaimer

The material within this manual is not meant to be a replacement for veterinary care or the services of a qualified trainer. While many people will be able to complete the training and maintain their dog's nails, some may need more help. If your dog has a history of generalized fear or neophobia (fear of novel items), consider using the services of a force-free trainer to help your dog become more comfortable. Often, dog owners miss subtle signs of discomfort and can unintentionally make matters worse (as I believe I did with Rocco). If your dog has medical issues which may make nail maintenance uncomfortable, speak to your veterinarian about options. For instance, dogs with skin issues, soft nails, brittle nails or who are in pain may need more assistance. I cannot provide guarantees, as when we are working with animals, it is not ethical, nor possible, to guarantee behavior change or results.

Qualified Trainers can be found through the following organizations:

[Academy for Dog Trainers](#)

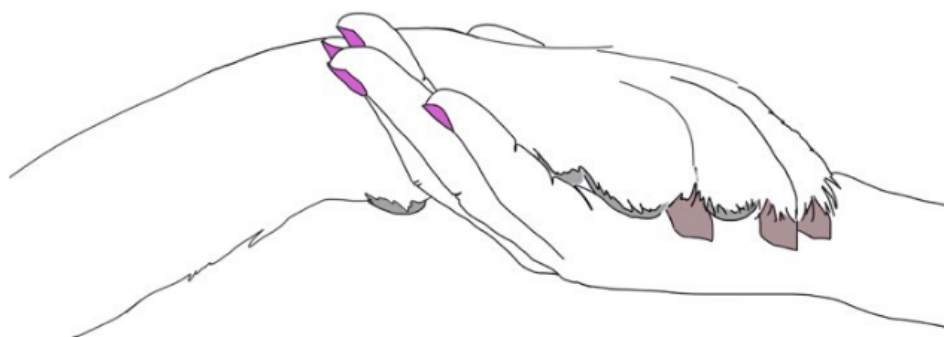
[Karen Pryor Academy](#)

[Pet Professional Guild](#)

Here's a helpful blog on what to look for in a trainer:

[Companion Animal Psychology- How to Choose a Dog Trainer](#)

Let's Get Started





# Overcoming the Fear

I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger....Life is sorta like that, right? They might not all fall into the category of regret, but I'm sure many of us can come up with things we wish we had done differently. When I look back at Rocco, and my failure to maintain his nails, I actually do feel regret. The other side of my brain tells me that I did the best I could with the knowledge I had at the time. In addition to not knowing any better, I was also so afraid of anything to do with his nails that I just didn't do anything at all. That fear was as real as his fear that I would hurt him again. To ensure that this didn't happen with Hazel (the fear part), I devised a plan - an actual training plan - that we would walk through together. This was not about force or skill, it was about practice and repetition. It's those very things that allowed me to build my skills and confidence along with her trust.

I love this [YouTube video](#), in part because it's short, but mostly because it lays out some very important questions to ask yourself about something you fear.

When I think about Rocco's nails, I was afraid of hurting him again. The worst that could happen is that I would hurt him and potentially make things much worse than they already were. I was never able to rationalize my fears, therefore, I could not relax around them so I could never make any progress. Again, I also didn't know the things I know now, and hopefully this EBook will help you overcome any fears you might have so you're able to make progress.

As the video mentions, repetition makes it easier! You may have to go through the beginning steps of the plan a few times before you feel ready to progress. This is fine, and I am sure your dog won't complain about having his foot touched for a few seconds and being given some delicious food a bit longer. The more we practice something, the better we get at it. Fear is a tough one - it's easy to put in and hard to get out! If the only fear involved in this process is yours, embrace it and start to face it. If your dog is the one who is afraid, following an incremental plan that goes at your dog's pace is the way to go. The training plan, if followed correctly, can help you avoid any accidents - just like training wheels make learning to ride a bike easier and not quite so scary for kids!

# Deciding on the most comfortable tool

This decision will become more clear to you as you go through the manual, so if you're unsure, grab a nail file and start with that. You can always switch up later, but no matter what you do, make sure you stick to training with the plan!

## Canine Nail Care Tools of the Trade



### **Dremel or rotary-type tool**

These tools work at high speed and do much of the work for you. Dogs may need to be conditioned to them in order to be comfortable.

My go-to tool!



### **Salon-type nail file**

Salon-type nail files are a nice option for getting started. Nail files typically need less conditioning than other tools. A great option for newbies to in-home nail care.



### **Traditional clippers**

Clippers can help the process go fast for those who are comfortable with them - both dog & human! Some dogs may have negative associations with them, so proceed with care!



### **Patience**

When working to help your dog feel comfortable with nail care, patience is the most important tool.

**Canine nail care is a marathon, not a sprint!**

# Deciding on the right tool for you and your dog is a big decision.

There's a few things to consider - from comfort level for you, to comfort level for your dog. You might not have an issue with using with the clippers, but if your dog already has a negative association with them, why not consider switching? That way, you won't have to undo any existing fear of an implement. You'll just be able to start building fantastic +CERs to a new one (we'll talk more about +CERs in a coming section). The associations your dog makes are powerful, and if you can build a great association to a new implement, that's where I cast my vote.



Some of your decision-making may also be guided by a few things:

**Color of nails:** Black nails can be easier to quick because you can't see the quick the way you can with clear or light colored nails. If that's a concern, a file or Dremel might be the better choice.



**Long haired dogs:** When working with long haired dogs, Dremeling can be a disaster waiting to happen. A friend experienced that disaster when the tool went spiraling out of her hand and got tangled in her dog's fur! Thankfully, he didn't develop any fear of the Dremel, and tips from this [article](#) solved the problem!

# Deciding on the right tool for you and your dog is a big decision. (2)

## Salon Nail Files:

These are emery boards that are thicker and sturdier than more basic files. They are also available in different "grits" - I always choose 60 grit. As for your comfort, you may want to play around a bit. I love salon nail files and bought 10 at a time when I was working on Hazel's nails. I know some people who prefer the block foam files. I personally never became fully comfortable with that type, as it felt too bulky in my hand.



## Dremel:

Dremel is the brand name for a type of grinder - a tool not intended for use on dog nails, but mighty effective at it. These are hand-held tools that have a band of sandpaper attached, which moves at high speed. It can take some getting used to for dogs because of the noise and sensation, which is why I recommend starting off slow. The thought of using this tool scared me at first. For a long time, I couldn't even think of using one. But, I loved it once I started. It's probably also easier to avoid accidental quicking on slow speed, so making sure we feel comfortable with it is important for this reason, as well. It's become very clear to me that Hazel is more comfortable with the Dremel on slow speed. It may be the sound (it's more high-pitched when on high) or it may be the feeling on her nails. I'm not sure, and I've decided it doesn't matter. We will stick with the low speed to get the job done!

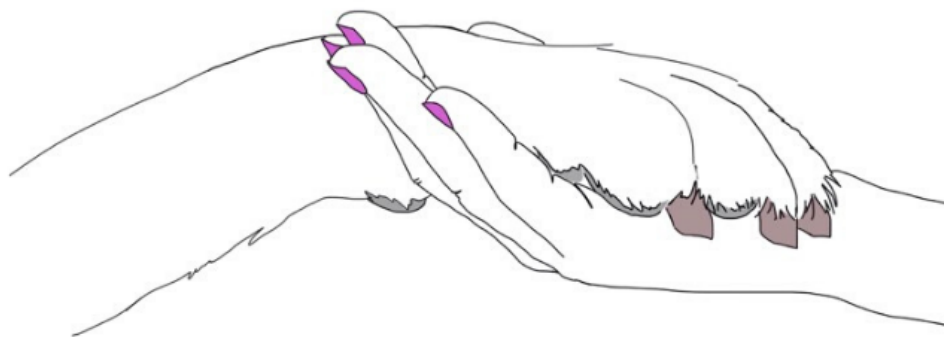


## Clippers:

Here I mean the traditional nail clipper. Due to my personal experience with them, I worry about them not being sharp enough and causing some un-bargained discomfort and pain since you might need to use extra pressure needed to get through the nail. There's a few types of these - the guillotine and scissor types.



# Pavlov on your Shoulder



# How Classical Conditioning Works

**This video** is a nice, simple breakdown of Classical Conditioning (what I will call CC), or what some people call Pavlovian Conditioning. We'll be using Classical Conditioning for this course, for reasons that are both practical and very personal to me. Based on my past experiences with Rocco, I was not comfortable with the process of nail maintenance using Operant Conditioning (what I will call OC) with Hazel. When I thought about the two methods, I realized that through CC, I could help us both!

Let me explain why:

**Classical Conditioning (CC) works through associations.** Just like us, dogs are constantly making associations with things in the environment. The food bowl hitting the ground means dinner time, grabbing the leash predicts walks, and so on. We can use this process to our advantage any time, but it can become very handy for procedures like nail maintenance, and we can do it deliberately, rather than something that just sort of happens as the dog puts things together in her mind. So just like our ability to get a dog excited when she sees us grab for her leash, we can also get a dog excited about seeing the Dremel! By pairing delicious food with the sight of the Dremel, we can build a POSITIVE CONDITIONED EMOTIONAL RESPONSE (+CER, which we will talk about next, I promise). We can do the very same thing with touching our dog's feet, touching the nail with the implement and all the way to actually working on the nails. You'll learn more about exactly what this looks like as we go.

**Operant Conditioning (OC) works through consequences.** While we will not be covering OC methods in this manual, I still wanted you to have an idea of what it means:

You ask your dog to sit, she sits, you pop her a treat. The treat is the reward, or consequence, of sitting. Many people are able to use OC for things like nail maintenance successfully. Dog hands you her paw, you do a few swipes with the file, and pop her a treat. Again, I chose not to use this method for personal reasons, and as a trainer, I felt the margin of error was too big. If Hazel was not truly comfortable and I tried to keep going, I could actually have a consequence that was the exact opposite of what I wanted - a dog who ran from me when she saw the tool. Some people use a combination of the two by building a +CER to the tool, and the touch, and then use OC consequences (hand me your paw, I file, you get a treat). It can be tricky to hold a paw in one hand and deliver food at the same time when you are also holding an implement! The key is being able to continue delivering food quickly and using "happy talk" to help bridge the time between touch and food delivery.

# The Almighty + G&R

The video below of my dog Hazel is a good example of a POSITIVE CONDITIONED EMOTIONAL RESPONSE (+CER). CERs are an important component of dog training, and obviously, a positive one will get you much further than a negative one. It will also help your dog have a great experience, which is what we are aiming for here (and hopefully, always).


## POSITIVE CONDITIONED EMOTIONAL RESPONSE (+CER)

In the video, Hazel wags her tail and licks her lips when I bring out the nail file (my happy talking voice probably didn't hurt, either). To build the +CER, I brought the nail file out at random times throughout the day, presented it to her and then popped her some delicious food as soon as she saw it (I am using tuna fudge here). I stopped the flow of food when I put the file back into hiding.

Let's talk a little bit about "happy talk", as it's a really helpful component of this process. By keeping ourselves and our voice relaxed, we can actually help dogs become believers. Think about it - if you're happy and upbeat, your dog is more likely to be happy to get with the program!

There are a couple of very important concepts to keep in mind here:

 The file predicts the food, never the other way around.

 You must maintain a 1:1 ratio. This means that you never present the file without backing it up with food. Right away. Not in 30 seconds and certainly not in 5 minutes. The association needs to always be protected and kept strong. We'll talk about this more soon.

I also did this with touching her feet, and we'll talk more about why having their feet touched or held can be so difficult for so many dogs in a later section - always being mindful to touch, and overlapping the touch with popping her some food. You don't want to feed the dog first and then start the touch, because we end up with what is known as "backwards conditioning" (search this term in Google to learn more about it). The training plan that you'll follow for this course lays out how to do this in more detail, but I wanted to get you started on thinking about and understanding the importance of the +CER.

# About Counterconditioning and Desensitization

My hope is that you will choose a new implement if your dog has a negative conditioned emotional response (-CER) to one of the others. As I mentioned earlier, fear is easy to put in, hard to get out. This process is one in which novelty\* can really help us out. Rather than trying to undo a fear of the clippers, why not just build a new positive association to a nail file?

There are 3 concepts I'd like you to understand here. If we understand that our dogs are not doing things to be stubborn, willful, dominant or difficult, we can start to make headway and actually help them.

**Counterconditioning** is a form of classical conditioning in which we work to change a pre-existing association. Take my Rocco as an example. He had a pre-existing fear of the nail clippers because they had caused him pain. Prior to that initial painful clipping, they had been neutral- there was no association to undo, but once the damage was done, things got messy. He learned that the clippers caused him pain and there is also often an intrinsic sense of "I don't like having my foot held because it's just naturally scary". Since I didn't know then what I know now, I actually (unknowingly) made things worse.

**Desensitization** is the process through which we slowly and gradually work with a dog to help them feel more comfortable with something (nail maintenance, alone time, loud noises, etc). We expose the dog to low levels of the tool, while being extremely careful not to raise the intensity too quickly. If we go too fast, we run the risk of causing an unwanted reaction, meaning we won't be able to build the +CER and may create a negative conditioned emotional response (-CER).

Depending on the issue or need, these are processes that are often best handled with the help of a skilled dog trainer. As you can probably imagine, the margin for error can be big, and sometimes, there's a lot at stake. This is why my bias is so strong regarding simply creating a new +CER to a novel implement. This process is one where "novelty" can really, really help.

\***Novelty** means something new. It's something the dog hasn't been exposed to yet. We can use this to our advantage by making positive associations from the very first exposure. In this case, to the tool and the handling.

Click here to read a really great [article](#) on Desensitization and Counterconditioning by Eileen Anderson.



# The importance of a 1:1 ratio

## Every. Single. Time.

"Every single time I bring out the nail file, I will give you some delicious chicken."






*and*

"Every single time I touch your paw, I will give you some delicious chicken."

*and*

"Every single time I touch your nail with the file, I will give you some delicious chicken."



-  This is the bargain you are making, because, when using classical conditioning, maintaining a 1:1 ratio is super important. What this means for you is that you are never going to work on part of this process without being ready to feed your dog.
-  Any time we do not do this, we weaken the association for the dog and we need to be extremely careful not to do this. This isn't just important for scared dogs, it's important for all dogs, if we want them to be willing participants in this process.
-  As you move through the plan, your 1:1 will become "I will file one nail and then give you some delicious chicken" and then to "I will file one foot and then give you some delicious chicken" and so on.
-  It is of the utmost importance that we do not rush this process. Moving at human-speed is what often trips us up when working with dogs. We must move at the dog's pace. How do we do this? By paying attention, and listening, to their body language.
-  In an upcoming section, we'll talk to a veterinarian about options for nail care if it is needed while you are working through this process.

# Food, delicious food!

Throughout this process, you will be using food. I am not encouraging you to use food, or asking you to use food. I am telling you that you will be using food. Boy, I'm bossy, huh?!



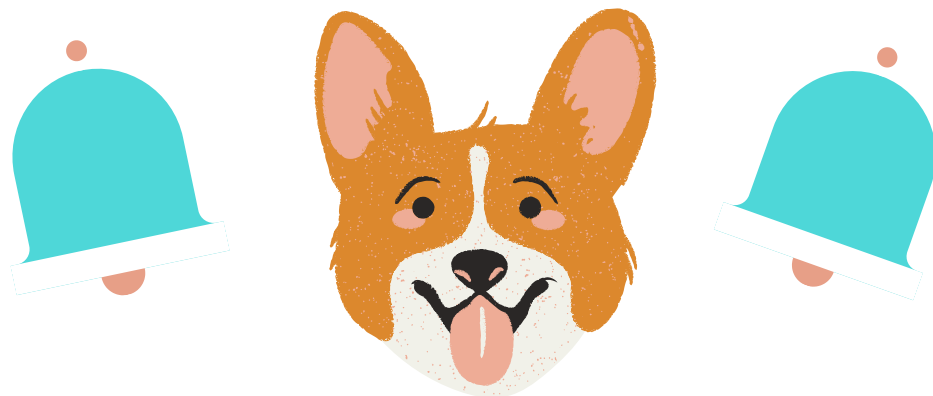
There's a reason you'll be using food. It is extremely important and simple: dogs like it. We need to get dogs liking this process. Food is the easiest, most effective and most efficient way to do that. And there's an even more effective and efficient way to use food to our advantage here: by using novel, high value foods.



When we combine something the dog loves with something new, we can - by association - make the dog love that new thing, too.



Remember the video about Pavlov's dogs and the bell ringing?  
(Revisit the section called "How Classical Conditioning Works" if you need a refresher!)



# Food, delicious food!

## (2)

**Maintaining the "Wow" factor.** There is something very important here: you cannot present your implement to the dog without giving her some deliciousness. Ever. We need to maintain a 1:1 ratio of implement: food (reference our discussion in the last section). If we don't do this, we weaken the association. If we weaken the association, our job is that much harder. The objective here is to have a dog who willingly participates in her own nail care. We aren't bribing, we aren't forcing, we aren't even rewarding. We are building, and keeping, a strong association between two things that allow us to proceed effectively.

**What's so important about novelty?** Novelty allows us to build a "WOW!" factor. If we try to skimp and just use kibble or the same treats we use for when our dog sits, we are missing an opportunity. Nail maintenance is "bigger" than sit. We are asking the dog to show up and voluntarily let us do things to their feet- and there are real reasons that this is a big deal. Go big. Don't skimp. Use something your dog has never had before and will love.

**Defining high value.** A high value food is something wonderful and delicious that your dog loves and only gets for the "big" things. This might be chicken for coming-when-called. It might be pecorino romano for loose leash walking. It might be tuna fudge for nail maintenance. It is very important that you don't use these foods for basic behaviors if you are using them for bigger ticket items. They will lose their wow factor and it will become less wonderful to the dog. We don't want any part of this process to become "ho-hum". We want all of it to be something the dog really, really loves!

**Treat Bag Fashion Shows.** One of the things that's really important here is that you keep your order of events clear. We want the tool to be the "tip-off" to the dog that something great is about to happen, not going to the fridge or clipping on your treat pouch. For this reason, wear your treat pouch at various times throughout the day and have nothing happen. At first, your dog will be curious and interested in it, but over time, when she realizes that it doesn't always mean good things for dogs, every time you pull out your tool and start, delivering the tool becomes the meaningful thing, not the bag on your waist carrying deliciousness.

# A Bit About Fear

Many dogs are uncomfortable with restraint and for good reason. Although sometimes we talk about previous bad experiences with things like nail trims, there's also a good amount of biology at work.

The domestication of dogs worked because as we humans were creating what we now see as pet animals, we were "pushing back" against some built in tendencies, including things like fear of new experiences and being restrained.

You may be wondering why new things or restraint might be scary because our pet dogs are often exposed to new things and we do things like hug them all the time. The truth is most dogs probably like hugs less than we think. And restraint of a leg can be even scarier. In the natural world, loss of a limb means you're more susceptible to predators, won't be able to hunt and will likely die.

Because of these reasons: fear of new experiences and fear of restraint being built into our dogs DNA, it's important that we take it slow. Once dogs are past the socialization phase of puppyhood, if they haven't been exposed to something, the likelihood they will be afraid of a new experience or thing will be stronger. Will all dogs experience this? No. But it's worth our while when we are working on anything potentially invasive to take our time and help our dogs, rather than expecting them to do something they just might not be able to do.

Here's a bit of imagery that's always stuck with me and helped me slow down: In Rocco's mind, holding his leg and paw was very much like getting a leg stuck in a trap and just as scary. Once I understood that, it made it much easier for me to move forward in a way that didn't cause dogs that level of fear.

# Homemade

# TUNA FUDGE

When we are teaching dogs to love things like nail trims, it's important that we make it worth their while. And the food we use in training needs to make a really big impression.

A high value food is something wonderful and delicious that your dog loves and only gets for the "big" things. This might be chicken for coming-when-called. It might be pecorino romano for loose leash walking. It might be tuna fudge for nail maintenance. It is very important that you don't use these foods for basic behaviors if you are using them for bigger ticket items. They will lose their salience (important, primary and meaningful) and it will become less wonderful to the dog. We don't want any part of this process to become "ho-hum". We want all of it to be something the dog really, really loves!

## You will need:

- 1 lg. can white tuna in water
- 2 eggs
- 1 and a half cups of flour
- Handful of parmesan

## Additional Options:

- Wet food instead of tuna
- A bit of pumpkin puree
- White, wheat or tapioca flour work well
- Canned salmon, sardines or smoked oysters

## To Make:

Mix all ingredients together, including liquid from tuna can. Spread thinly on a lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake at 300 degrees for roughly 30 minutes. Cooking time will depend on thickness. Toothpick should come away clean when used, edges may be crispy, but middle section should be soft.


## Notes:

- A pizza cutter can allow for quick cutting into small pieces for training
- A pyramid baking mat can eliminate cutting time completely!
- Store in multiple baggies, freeze a few for later!

# Treat Prep & G&R Building


Step One of the plan is an extremely important one. If we skip this step, or underestimate its value, we risk compromising the whole process. We want our dogs to be team players from the get-go, so start here! This process can go pretty quickly over the course of just a few days. As long as you are remembering a few key concepts, you should be able to proceed from here without issue.

 Prepare your food well in advance of executing the plan. We want the file to predict the food, not for the food to predict the file. This is how we build the association we want.

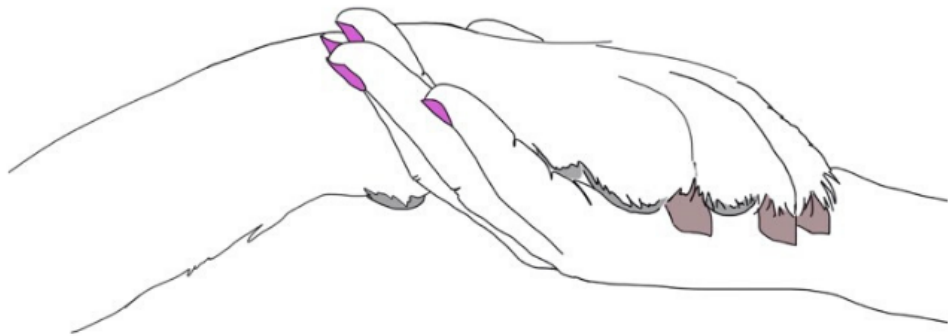
 Wear your bait bag or hang out with your food handy for a bit before you start working. If you strap on your bait bag and immediately pull out your tool, your dog will think: "Something is happening...this looks promising!" and that's not what we want. We want: "He pulled out the FILE! THIS is promising!"

 Do this randomly throughout the day. Have your food handy and stick the tool in your pocket (hoodies with kangaroo pockets are great for this!) so you can do it easily.

 Make note of your dog's reaction when you pull the tool out. Wagging tail? Check! Look of anticipation? Check! Eagerly and willingly showing up? Check.

 If you are seeing indifference or avoidance- stick at this step. Consider increasing the value of your food. If boiled chicken isn't cutting it, try a stinky cheese. Your dog needs to love this game- not just tolerate it.

# Nail Tips



# Expert Interview

## [Dr. Carol Haak, DVM, DACVECC, CTC](#) (click name for video)

Dr. Carol Haak is a veterinarian (and Academy for Dog Trainers grad) who specializes in critical care- she calls herself "the vet you never want your dog to have to see!", and yet, we think if our dogs needed special care, we'd want them in her able hands. She's also a dog mom to three beagles. Penny, Sam and Howie. She's maintaining all of their nails at home, on her own, but has had her struggles with it, just like the rest of us. In this interview, you'll hear her expertise about paw anatomy and her wisdom about how being gentle with yourself if you've struggled in the past is the key to moving forward.



# Paw and Nail Anatomy (1)







**Dog paws are complicated little things. Made up of multiple bones and lots of ligaments, in addition to nails that extend away from the body, there's a lot of moving parts to consider when working on them.**



**When we are working on the nails, we are often restraining and manipulating toes individually and placing pressure on areas that may be sensitive, and we might not know it until we start working. One of the things I noticed as I went through the footage of early participants is that some dogs seem to be more uncomfortable having one paw or one toe in particular touched. If you suspect injury, please see your vet. In the case of the dogs who have already gone through the plan, we determined that it's just been mild sensitivity and I advised participants to just go slower on that paw or toe. In all of these cases, we were able to proceed without incident.**

# Paw and Nail Anatomy (2)

## A few things to keep in mind:

-  As mentioned by Dr. Haak, dog's nails are made up of layers and these layers protect the quick. The quick is the blood supply that runs through the nail. We always want to be mindful of not hitting the quick, because in a great number of cases, it is the pain that comes with this injury which causes dogs to become fearful and anxious about the whole process.
-  As you file, Dremel or clip, you want to be working towards pushing the quick back. The goal is to gradually do this and avoid cutting it. To do this, you will work a little bit at a time and do it often. Dogs' nails can grow fast, so keeping up with it is crucial. Once you have reached the desired length, this is easy to do. Remember that it can be easier to quick dark nails, very long nails or if you are using a clipper. Slow and steady will get the job done. One false move could undo it. Be conservative and mindful.
-  There is something that can help push the quick back, and that is working along the "alternate cut line". By working on not only the fronts of the nail, but the sides and up from the bottom to the top (and this is near the tip, not all the way back towards the toe itself), we can push the quick back and round it off. Remember, even if you are doing this, it will still take some time for the quick to recede, so it's not a license to speed ahead, it's just information to help you be able to push the quick back in a more efficient and effective way. I don't focus on this in the training video, but it's something to keep in mind.
-  Often you hear that you know nails are short enough if you don't hear clicking as a dog walks. Our veterinary expert, Dr. Carol Haak, advises that the best way to know if nails are the right length is if they are sitting slightly off the ground when your dog is standing. This isn't to say that you can't make "no clicking when you walk" your goal, just know that this need not be the ultimate measure. My house is all hardwood and tile and I sometimes hear Hazel click, especially if she is running. Nails provide traction and some grip, so I am perfectly fine with her current length.

# Useful Information

## Note:

You may notice that I do not focus very heavily on back paws in the video. That's for a few reasons: time involved in producing content and to avoid boring you with too much video! **The process is exactly the same on back feet as it is front** and many dogs don't need quite as much work on their back feet. Remember that your dog, just like you, uses her feet to move through the world, and just like us, maintaining her nails will help her do so comfortably and safely.



The way you hold the Dremel can really make a difference! If you are using a Dremel, check out this quick video starring Hazel!

[Dremel positioning](#)

Here's a list of articles and blogs I love on relevant topics:

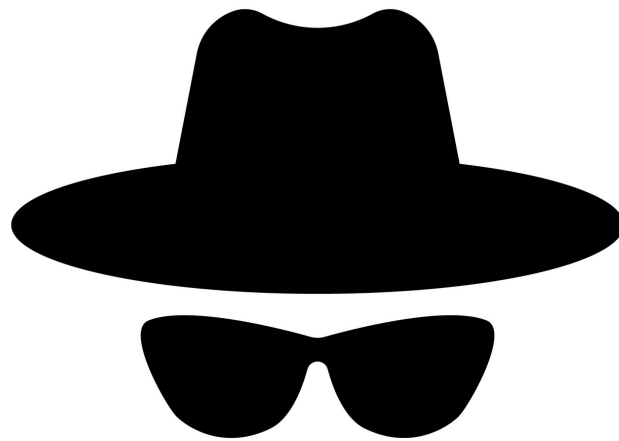
[Fluffy Dog Problems](#)

[Desensitization/Counterconditioning Resources](#)

[The Importance of Clipping Dogs Nails](#)

[Trimming a Dog's Nails- 2016 Update](#)

# Checklist of needs (1)




**First and foremost, you are now approaching this process with a cool head - think of yourself as a special agent....with a very unique skill set.**





All of the preparation you've done up to this point has you feeling confident and ready to begin the real work. Those nerves you had early on? Gone. You may feel nervous about beginning to put the actual tool to nail, but you've also really absorbed the process and have a true understanding of why we are doing things this way. You've also made "**slow and steady wins the race**" your new motto....right?!

# Checklist of needs (2)

**You've decided on your tool, your location and your dog is ready to go:**

 **For filers:** Make sure you've got a few files as back-up. One thing to keep in mind is that if you switch file types, you may need to build a separate +CER. You might not, but a foam block looks different from a salon file, and your dog may respond a bit differently. I recommend choosing a type early on and sticking with it, at least until you are sure your dog is happy and comfortable with the whole entire process.

 **For Dremelers:** Make sure your Dremel is charged and ready to go. You've got some extra filing bands as back-up and you are confident about using it. I recommend starting on the slow speed, as fast is really fast and quite a bit louder. You may run the risk of grinding too much nail on high speed, so start slow until you get a real feel for how much nail it removes.

 **For Clippers:** If you are using a clipper, it's sharp and fast. It's not rusty and the springs function properly. You feel comfortable holding it in your hand and know the best angle at which to place it on the nail and then clip. You are ready to be modest with the amount of nail you take off at a time and are aware that quicking may be more of a risk than with the other methods.

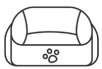
# Checklist of needs (3)

## You can check all these boxes:



### **You have a treat bag and delicious treats.**

Have you been wearing your bait bag at times other than "nail time"? Have you made sure that it's not a tip-off to your dog that nail time is coming? Remember, we want the +CER to be to the tool and the process of nail care, not to the treats or treat bag.



### **You've chosen a comfortable location to work.**

Whether it's the floor, a dog bed or the sofa, you are working in a location that is comfortable for your dog. One thing to keep in mind is that, if you suddenly decide to change locations, you may have to do some warm-up with your dog. One of the ways to know if your dog is comfy with the process and the location, is that she will go running towards the usual "spot" in anticipation of spa time!



### **You are sure your dog is comfortable.**

You'll know your dog is comfortable by her body language. She'll stick around willingly. Her ears will be relaxed, her eyes soft. She may trot over to the "spa time" area when she sees the tool, she may wag her tail and lick her lips in anticipation of the accompanying goodies. A dog who is not relaxed will run in the other direction or look away. She may lick her lips in worry, rather than anticipation. She may tuck her tail and duck her head.

Successful reading of body language is really crucial here, so be sure you are reading accurately. To do otherwise could poison the whole process, so be aware.

# Go slow, be generous



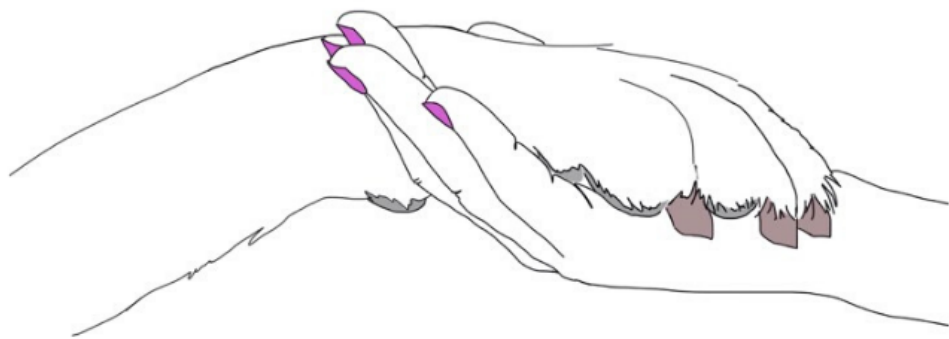
One of the really important things to keep in mind throughout this process is that slow and steady wins the race. This is not meant to be a quick fix, it's meant to be a sustainable way for you to maintain your dog's nails throughout the course of her life.

Going at your dog's pace is extremely important. We want to be sure your dog's body language is telling you that she's comfortable having her nails done and, as we've already discussed, providing delicious food as we move through the plan is the best way to do this. We also need to take our time and be sure that our dog is a willing participant. If we do not, we risk "poisoning" the process, which might bring us right back to where we started, or with a dog who is even more sensitized to nail maintenance.

It's best to do short "bursts" of filing, Dremeling or clipping at first. If you push too fast and work too long on each individual toe, your dog may become upset and try to vacate. This is a sure sign that you should work slower. Any time your dog pulls her feet away, or tries to get up and leave, this means you are going too fast. There is no reason to be concerned about going back a step if you feel you've gone too fast, but there certainly should be concern if you push too much at the current step, or move to one that your dog is really not ready to begin.

If you are interested in learning more about canine body language, check out [ispeakdog.org](http://ispeakdog.org)

# Time to get to Work





# About The Training Plan

It's almost time to get to work....I'd like you to read through the plan a few times and watch the [training video](#) at least once before you get started, though, and make sure you are really ready and not just itching to get going! Though I am working with a Dremel with Hazel, the steps are the same for all tools. And your dog doesn't need to be laying on their side. The "down" position can work just fine, as well.

Each step in the plan is important, so please don't skip any of them. I know it may be tempting, but it's written the way it is for good reason. It's all about the dog's comfort, rather than our human need to be speedy! In some cases, you may breeze through certain steps, which is great! For some, it may seem as if you aren't getting very far. Stick with it- slow and steady will win the race!

**Note:** You may proceed more quickly at some steps than others. This is completely normal. **You may also need to insert a "split" in between some steps.** A split is a step that is not quite as hard as the next one, and also not quite as easy as the previous one. I have left space on the training plan so you can make note of these.

**PS:** While I don't recommend printing the whole ebook, you may want to print out the training plan pages (34-36).

**PSS:** Refer back to the section called "Deciding on the right tool" for a refresher if needed. A file is always a good starter tool. Some dogs may need more conditioning to a Dremel or clippers.

# The Training Plan (1)

## **Step 1: Build the positive conditioned response (+CER) to the nail file.**

You build the +CER by bringing the file out randomly a few times a day and showing it to the dog, while feeding a high value food (I use tuna fudge, chicken or cheese). The only requirement here is that the dog actually sees the file before the party starts. You know you have a strong +CER when your dog looks anticipatory and happy (see: wagging tail and bright eyes in the +CER video.) You want to make sure that your food party stops as soon as you put the nail file (or other tool) away.

**NOTE:** You may get some bang for your buck here if you are lucky. The nail file is likely to be a completely novel object, so you won't have any fears to overcome like you might clippers. File this under: WIN!

**Splits:**

**Completed:  
Y/N & Date**

## **Step 2: Get your dog comfortable with handling of legs and feet.**

This may mean simply starting with touching the upper legs, moving down to elbows, lower legs, feet then nails. Touching means no restraint at first. If you have to start here, have no fear. You will get there, but it pays to go slow if necessary. This will look like: touch on upper leg (no nail file in sight just yet!), migrating down to elbows and lower legs for a few seconds (don't get greedy!), overlapping touch and high value food. You want the touch to predict the food and the end of the touch to predict the end of the food.

**Splits:**

**Completed:  
Y/N & Date**

## **Step 2.5: Get your dog comfortable with restraint of legs and feet.**

You may need to start up at the upper legs or elbows again for restraint. This is okay! You are going to migrate down the leg to the feet again. This will look like: restrain on upper leg (no nail file in sight just yet!), migrating down to elbows and lower legs for a few seconds (don't get greedy!), overlapping restraint and high value food. Again, you want the restraint to predict the food and the end of the restraint to predict the end of the food. **NOTE:** You may be able to move straight to restraint, but if you do, be absolutely sure your dog is comfortable with it. The signs of comfort may not be as obvious, but you should see a relaxed looking dog, who still has that look of anticipation and is not pulling his/her leg or foot away. You may see a wagging tail or you may just have a dog who is looking for the good stuff (the food!) to begin upon restraint.

**Additional Notes:**

# The Training Plan (2)

## **Step 3: Working on toe manipulation.**

Once you have completed the migration to the feet, and you are sure you have a dog who is sticking around willingly, work on manipulating the toes. Run fingers down the length of the toe towards the nail and feed from your other hand. Again, toe touching stops, food delivery stops. Toe touching predicts food. You are going to feed for each toe. In addition to running through the steps too quickly, fading the food too quickly can be harmful to the cause. Don't be stingy! And don't hold on to the toes for more than three seconds initially. We don't want the dog to feel the need to pull away, because that will set you back. With Hazel, I had the benefit of having done this work a long time ago, so we were able to breeze through it, but unless your dog is used to it and, more importantly, likes it, take your time.

## **Step 3.5: Begin to restrain foot as if you are about to file.**

This will include putting some pressure on each toe to gain extension of the nail and the ability to manipulate toes. I began by holding Hazel's foot with my hand, then manipulating the nails and toes. At this point, your dog will still be fed for each toe.

**Splits:**

**Completed:  
Y/N & Date**

## **Step 4: Restrain foot, manipulate toes and touch toe with file.**

Feed. Continue toe by toe. If your dog pulls away, looks upset or is resisting the touch of the file or being restrained, back up a step. Remember that "foot stuck in trap" thing. It'll set you right every time! This is the point at which this becomes a true two-handed procedure, so overlapping can be hard. Just be sure to stop the food party as soon as you have stopped touching toes.

## **Step 5: Restrain foot, manipulate toes, give one nail a swipe with the file.**

Feed. Celebrate (in your inside voice, so your dog doesn't feel the need to get up and celebrate with you!) and continue nail by nail, feeding after each one. This is another "don't get greedy" spot. You don't want to increase your duration (the amount of time between each food party) prematurely. Please don't, you could blow it all.

**Splits:**

**Completed:  
Y/N & Date**

# The Training Plan (3)

**Step 6: At this point, you can move on to filing each nail with a little longer duration.**

Continue to feed after each nail. The temptation may exist to file in two directions. I have found this to leave little shards of nail on the feet and to not be as comfortable for Hazel as just going in one direction, being that I need to use a little more pressure to hold her toe in place.

**Splits:**

**Completed:  
Y/N & Date**

**Step 7: Once you are comfortably filing a foot at a time, you can move to feeding after each foot.**

Then two feet, three feet, then all four. I will typically give all four feet at least a little bit of attention in each session to make sure that Hazel is staying comfortable with the procedure and to keep her nails even.

**Splits:**

**Completed:  
Y/N & Date**

## Additional Notes:

**Step 8: Bask in the glory of your dog's gorgeous nails!**

I wish you and your dog much success!

Thanks so much,

*-Lori*

