

examiner.com

LIFE / PETS / DOGS

See also: dogs, animal assisted therapy, love dog adventures

EDIT ARTICLE

# Prepare for your Pet Partners therapy animal evaluation

January 17, 2016

9:50 AM MST



The perfect Down - a happy dog

*SG during evaluation; owner permission*

You have completed the Pet Partners Handler Workshop and you have trained with your animal. You feel ready to move forward to the Evaluation phase of becoming a registered therapy team. What is the best way to prepare?

Review all the 20+ elements of the Pet Partners Skills and Aptitude test. Take yourself and your animal through each element one by one in the required order. This is important as it is designed to build in a manner that may create stress in your animal and it is important to understand that. Watch your animal closely. Does he respond better to verbal or hand signals? Does he get bored easily and need encouragement along the way? What causes just the smallest amount of stress that would lead you to ask for a break. What elements does he just not have down pat and need more training and practice?

The most important thing however to remember is that this is a *team* evaluation and the handler is being scored as well as the animal and that score supersedes the animal. The human end of the leash has to be calm, effective, engaged and engaging. During the evaluation there is quite a bit of role playing not just obedience. It is more important that the team can easily and thoughtfully interact with the evaluator and testing volunteers while still maintaining awareness of their animal. The team must enjoy meeting the new people and being put to the test of unexpected situations.

Make sure your animal is clean and freshly brushed and arrive at the evaluation location early enough to give your animal a good walk and the opportunity to become familiar with the new surroundings. Remember you are being tested from the moment you arrive. Is your dog walking calmly on a loose leash not being tugged or pulled? Is your dog relaxed and in tune with his owner?

Do not test if you or your dog is not 100% well. Even just having a bad day can influence how you behave and in the real world of therapy work, you would not bring your animal or go yourself to volunteer if you were not well. Remember if you or your animal have some special needs that need to have a Pet Partners' approved accommodation to the testing process, this must all be arranged well in advance. Don't arrive and then tell the Evaluator your dog cannot go in the down position because of a hip issue. Discuss all this prior to testing.

The best way to prepare is to take your time and schedule your evaluation when you feel you and your pet are ready. Then be calm and go for it! Remember the evaluation is not the end but just the very beginning of your therapy animal career so enjoy it!