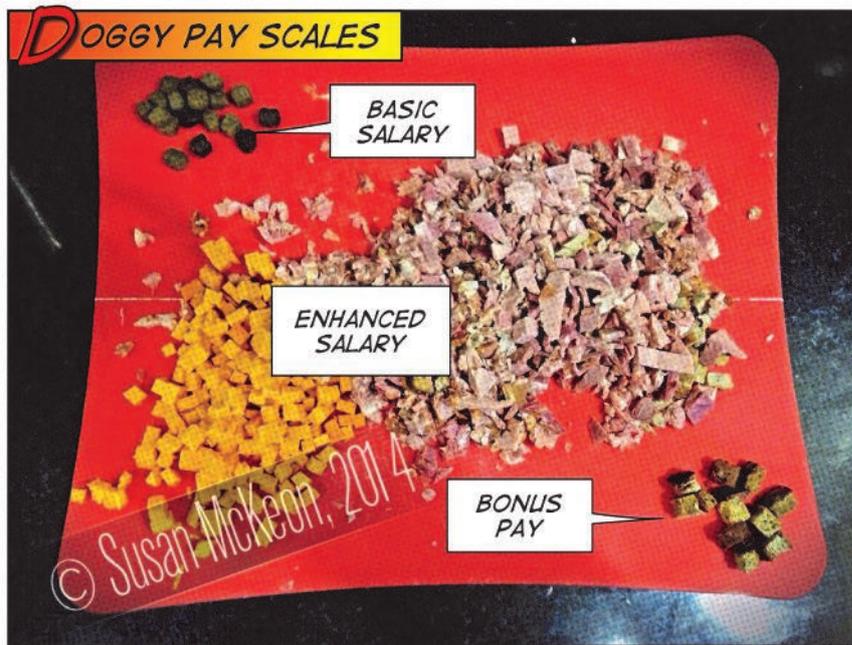


Doggy Pay Scales



Using food in dog training

At Happy Hounds we sometimes come across people who are reluctant to use food when training their dogs; they feel that their dogs 'should just do what they are asked' or that they are 'spoiling' their dog by giving them food treats.

We don't like to think of the food as a 'treat'. To us, the word 'treat' is synonymous with being spoiled or indulgent—thanks, mainly, to chocolate and luxury goods adverts - whereas, in reality, food is a dog's pay for doing a job we ask them to do. We prefer to compare the use food in dog training to that of wages or pay and use the concept of 'doggy pay scales' to explain it.

Basic salary

Routine jobs may only merit a basic salary - represented by kibble in the photo. A routine 'job' can be a behaviour the dog knows well, or is still learning, but knows well in a certain context - such as practising loose lead walking in your garden, where there are minimum distractions; or waiting politely for you to put the food bowl down before eating.

Enhanced salary

When we start increasing the difficulty of the 'job in hand', we need to start paying an 'enhanced salary' (represented by chopped cheese and ham in the photo) - especially if we want to guarantee that our dog learns how to do the job well.

Once you start adding in distractions, distance or duration to a 'job' - you need to increase your dog's salary. Just as different jobs in the human world require different salaries and attract different candidates, the same is true for our canine companions. You need to find the right salary level that works for your dog - to help them succeed. (For some dogs, a tennis ball, or special toy/game may trump cheese/meat - you need to find the right salary for your dog!)

Bonus pay

Once your dog knows their 'job' and can reliably perform it on a regular basis, you can then switch to 'bonus pay' (represented by liver cake in the photo). The idea of the bonus pay is that it keeps your dog motivated and ready to perform their 'job' - they may not know when the bonus is coming but it certainly gives a reason to continue doing a job.

Bribes versus Pay

As for food being a bribe... well, it 'could' be viewed as a bribe when used in luring behaviours where the food is used as an inducement (the lure) for the dog to perform the cued/desired behaviour. However, in most cases, the food is delivered after a behaviour/job is completed successfully. For this, the delivery of the food is contingent on the dog performing the cued/desired behaviour and, to me, this is the equivalent of pay - pure & simple.