From teaching your dog basic obedience to advanced training for dog sports, a great dog trainer can make all the difference. That’s particularly true for new dog owners. But even if you have years of experience with dogs, a professional trainer can help you troubleshoot problems and hone your abilities. Plus, group classes have the wonderful benefit of socializing your dog. But how do you know when you’ve found the right dog trainer?

Dog training is an unregulated industry. Anybody can print business cards and charge for their services, regardless of background, education, or experience. It’s essential to evaluate potential trainers before trusting them with your hard-earned money and your precious pet. Don’t simply pick the closest training school. Do your research to determine if a potential trainer is the right fit for you and your dog.

What to Look For in a Dog Trainer  
First, ask the trainer about their methods and training philosophy, and make sure you’re comfortable with their approach. Look for a trainer who uses positive reinforcement training — rewarding the dog for appropriate behavior with praise or treats and teaching alternative behaviors in place of inappropriate ones. These techniques are based on the science of animal learning and have the bonus of strengthening the dog-owner bond and fostering a love of learning in dogs.

It’s also important to determine what you need from a trainer. Are you dealing with a problem behavior like jumping on guests or does your new puppy need to learn to “sit” and “stay”? Find out if a particular trainer provides classes or private training that meet your needs. Not all trainers offer the same services. Usually, a class environment with other dogs provides the added benefit of socialization and distraction training. But sometimes, your dog will learn best in a one-on-one situation, especially if other dogs overstimulate them or make them anxious.

Private training can be done at the training school, in your home, or out in the world. For certain issues, this can be ideal. Some dogs simply aren’t ready for a classroom, or perhaps your dog’s problem only happens at your front door. However, not all trainers offer services outside their own facility, and you can expect to pay more for someone to come to you.

What to Ask a Potential Dog Trainer  
Ask a potential trainer about their education and any credentials they may have. Some trainers have learned through apprenticeships and years of experience, whereas others have taken a more academic route in building their skills. Certification with an organization like theThe Association of Professional Dog Trainers and Certification Council of Professional Dog Trainers isn’t mandatory for trainers, but it shows dedication to the profession and an interest in continuing education. Speak with thetrainer to get a feel for their personality before making a decision. It’s not enough to read the brochure or website. Dog trainers teach people, so you’ll need to make sure you’ll feel comfortable being their student. Look for someone who uses the same positive reinforcement with their human pupils that they use withthe dogs. A dog trainer should be patient, encouraging, and respectful. Try to observe a training class. Watch the dogs and studWhere to look for training candidates

Where to Look for Training Candidates  
The most reliable places to search are trainer directories of professional organizations that have education requirements and hold their students, members, or certificants to reasonable standards in the application of humane, science-based dog training methods and ethics. Training and behavior professionals who care about professional standards pursue ongoing education and membership in and certification offered through one or more dog-training organizations and companies. The Association of Professional Dog Trainers offers a search feature to locate certified trainers in your area and can be found at *apdt.com*.