

This template is an educational tool for use in collaboration with a qualified service dog trainer. It is not medical advice.

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Tiered Training Plan Template

Handler: _____ **Dog:** _____ **Date:** _____

Use this template to organize your training across three capacity levels. Fill in with behaviors specific to your dog's current training stage.

You **do not** need to work on foundation skills, tasks, and public access every day. You may choose just one or two based on your capacity. Capacity can also shift throughout the day — it is fine to mix and match tiers. For example, you might train at a high-capacity level in the morning and a low-capacity level in the evening.

	LOW CAPACITY	MODERATE CAPACITY	HIGH CAPACITY
Description	<i>Flare, high fatigue, or pain. Work in a position that is more comfortable — seated or reclined. Keep sessions short.</i>	<i>Managing but not at full baseline. Moderate session length.</i>	<i>At or near personal baseline. More energy and focus available for longer or more complex training.</i>
Session Length	Example: 3-5 min or less	Example: 5-10 min	Example: 10-15 min
Foundation Skills	Example: Chin rest, offered eye contact, nose target to hand	Example: Platform work, paw targeting, mat work with duration	Example: Chaining foundation skills, adding distance or distractions
Task Training	Example: Reward known task(s) from a comfortable position	Example: Work on increasing criteria for a task currently in progress	Example: Introduce a new task, or troubleshoot a task challenge
Public Access Training	Example: Work in a different space within the home and set up an indoor distraction or two	Example: Work in an immediate outdoor area near home, or visit a close by familiar location to do a very short practice session	Example: Work in new settings appropriate to the dog's current training level, as recommended by your trainer
Daily Enrichment	Example: Puzzle feeder, scatter treats indoors	Example: Short play, scent game or brief sniff walk	Example: Full-length sniff walk or outdoor hike on long line.

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Using This Plan as a Pacing Tool

For some handlers, choosing a training tier is not only about how the day feels — it is part of a deliberate pacing strategy.

What is pacing?	Pacing is a strategy used by people with certain health conditions to manage energy and avoid triggering a flare or crash. Rather than pushing through on good days and resting only when forced to, pacing means staying within a sustainable activity range every day — including good days.
Who might use this approach?	Handlers with conditions such as POTS, ME/CFS, long COVID, mitochondrial disease, or other energy-limiting conditions may find that training at a high-capacity level on a good day leads to increased symptoms the following day. For these handlers, choosing a moderate-capacity training activity even on better days is not a limitation — it is good self-management.
How does this affect the training plan?	For a handler using a pacing strategy, the tiers on this plan represent sustainable activity levels, not just reactive responses to a bad day. Collaborating with your trainer and your rehabilitation or healthcare provider — such as a physical therapist or occupational therapist — can help you identify which tier aligns with your pacing envelope and build a plan that supports consistent progress without triggering post-exertional symptoms.
Notes from your trainer	

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Tiered Training Plan — Working Copy

Handler: _____ **Dog:** _____ **Date:** _____
Fill in each cell with behaviors from your current training plan. It is fine to mix and match tiers within the same day.

	LOW CAPACITY	MODERATE CAPACITY	HIGH CAPACITY
Description	<i>Flare, high fatigue, or pain. Work in a position that is more comfortable. Keep sessions short. Ask for support if needed (caregiver, dog trainer/walker)</i>	<i>Managing but not at full baseline. Moderate session length.</i>	<i>At or near personal baseline. More energy and focus available for longer or more complex training.</i>
Session Length			
Foundation Skills			
Task Training			
Public Access Training			
Daily Enrichment			