

2010 Junior Handler Scholarship Essay (age 14)
Responsible Dog Ownership

I remember my first two dogs. They were already a part of my family before I was even born. They were Shetland Sheepdogs and were the two best behaved playmates any child could have. Now I have four other dogs that have come into my life. Watching over them and training them is a big responsibility, yet completely fun at the same time.

There are many responsibilities that come with owning your first dog. You need to be ready to make the commitment to keep your dog safe, healthy and happy. The first thing that you should do before going out and finding the dog that is perfect for you is to research the type of breed that you would like to have as your companion. You never want to just go out and buy a dog that you know nothing about. You have to make sure the dog will be happy in your home and that the type of dog is right for you. If you're a calm person looking for a lap dog, you won't want to purchase a Border Collie since they love to play all the time. Second, you will want to make sure that your dog has somewhere comfortable to sleep whenever he needs rest. Your dog will also need a large yard to run around in for exercise. When you aren't home, leave your dog with toys that he can play with because dogs can get lonely when you're not with them. If you don't give him something to play with while you're away, your dog may find other ways to entertain himself such as digging holes or chewing on furniture. Third, dogs like to be on a schedule. Every morning when you wake up, you need to let your dog go outside to potty and then feed him. You will have to keep enough food to feed him twice a day and give your dog fresh water every morning. When you get home later in the day you need to take your dog on a walk. Dogs, especially puppies, love to explore the outdoors and learn what else is in the world besides their home. Fourth, even if you don't want to train your dog for agility, you should still teach him the obedience basics such as sit, down, come, stay, leave it and heel. Once you start training your dog in obedience you should practice with him every day. Life with your puppy will be more enjoyable if he has manners.

When you get your first dog you should be prepared for some difficult situations. If your first dog is a puppy, he probably won't be potty trained. You will have to be cautious and watch where your puppy is all the time and help him learn where to go potty. Since pups love to chew on things, give him lots of toys to keep him busy so he won't chew on your couch. Sometimes your dog may have wild moments. This means that your puppy will suddenly start running around the yard or running laps in the house for no reason at all. You must make sure your pup doesn't hurt himself while running around. You should also train him to calm down on command. Some dogs have barking issues and may bark at every sound they hear. This can cause issues with your neighbors. It all depends on the type of dog that you have chosen.

Owning a dog can be expensive because you have to pay vet bills. You need to take your dog for shots every year to make sure he doesn't get sick. Taking your dog to the vet will cost you a lot of money but it's worth it to keep your dog healthy. You should always be aware of where your dog is when you're at home to make sure he isn't getting into anything that could be dangerous. Having a puppy is a lot like having a child. You need to give your dog the same amount of love and attention that you would to your own baby. It will make the connection between the two of you stronger.

You may get yourself a dog that you want to train in agility and find out your dog doesn't seem to enjoy the sport. Some dogs may not like agility but love herding. Let your dog be himself and do the things he loves. Don't make him something he's not. When I first started agility, I had a dog that I thought wasn't quite right for the sport. My agility instructor told me that some dogs take a long time to train. We kept working hard together and are now a stronger team. We both listened to each other and our respect for each other has grown.

The most important piece of advice that I have to give is to love your dog and let him love you back. You and your dog won't be together forever so you'll want to spend as much time with your companion as you can. Have fun with him and love him all the time and every day. I can't imagine my life without dogs. You've already taken the first step by asking for advice so that you will be better prepared to take care of your first dog. You're going to love being a dog owner!