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Dogs don't naturally speak the Queen's English. Their vocabulary is restricted. This is a well known fact even to non-dog savvy people. But most of us talk to our dogs, especially if you have an Irish wolfhound, because they seem so darned attentive. And we know it's probably not just because they know we have cheese in our pocket.

So, besides "sit," "stay" and "leave it," what good does it do? Are they really listening? Or do they get frustrated and wish we'd just shut up? Here's some things we know about a dog's grasp of

human vocabulary and its effects:

They understand us as well as your two-year-old does.

The average dog understands about 100 words, which puts them on par with a two-year-old human infant, except the average two-year-old doesn't steal pot roasts off your countertop. There may be exceptions.

Should we be more careful with our words, then?

Sure, especially with puppies, endless chatter could be wasted, or even confusing. If they top out at 100 words, you want to choose more deliberately. It's probably not important that they can identify the credenza from the Barcalounger. Keep it simple. Stress useful words like "door," "food," "walk" or "couch."

One wonder dog knows more than 1,000 words.

Chaser, a border collie owned by South Carolina psychologist John W. Pilley, has a tested vocabulary of 1,022 words. But Pilley began when Chaser first came home as a puppy from the breeder, spending four or five hours every day. He taught her the name of one or two new objects every day, repeating the word as many as 40 times, hiding the object, and then asking her to fetch it.

Border collies are also notoriously driven. Chaser still insists on four to five hours of training. Pilley told the New York Times, "I'm 82, and I have to go to bed to get away from her." Your dog will likely not be so compulsive. But Chaser shows what we can accomplish with consistent work.

Talking to your dog hones their intelligence.

As with any training, vocabulary building strengthens your bond, keeps them more attuned to you and encourages your dog to use

their brain. It helps them be all they can be.

How you say it is just as important.

Even when they don't comprehend the exact meaning of a word, your tone of voice is telling. Your dog learns to read you as he or she gets older. If you're praising them, speak in a warm tone. If they've just put the cat in their mouth, use a more cautionary tone. My girl, Oona, is a lot more likely to listen when I say, "Dammit, Oona." The murderous look in my eye is probably also a clue to my general mood.

Baby talk will get you just so far.

Most of us use an excited, higher-pitched voice when we encourage a puppy to come along because they respond so well. Since an Irish wolfhound puppy will quickly top 100 pounds, any edge is productive, possibly lifesaving. But to keep piping to the puppy wuppy when they hit adolescence and older may amuse you but it's not doing so much for your hound. At best, they ignore the baby talk. They could also wonder what the crazy human is up to since you're obviously faking this irritating voice.

Keep talking to them, of course. You love them. They can tell from your tone. But respect them. Talk to them as you would a friend. Keep it real. Speak gently in a natural tone. And enjoy the camaraderie.