

Graduation Leader Checklist

- When presenting the dog to the graduate or presenting the breeder, there is a 2-3 minute time limit per dog for comments. All raisers who wish to speak must coordinate before they go on stage. All aspects of the presentation are included in the time limit, including songs, poems, donations, and gifts.
- Discuss the puppy raiser(s) speech, including what is appropriate to discuss on stage and what is not (*see below). For dogs that were co-raised or raised in more than one home, it is appropriate to express appreciation for the other raisers.
- Discuss etiquette when meeting graduate: greeting person first; waiting for permission to take the leash; expectations vs. reality; etc. Provide raisers with ideas for ice-breakers.
- Review the "mechanics" of the leash hand-off on stage (fold leash in three parts to make it easier to pass off and take hold of).
- Determine which raiser (one per puppy raiser household) will stay on stage with the dog. The rest of the raiser(s) will leave the stage and sit in the audience for the remainder of the ceremony.
- Inform raisers that there is no food available on campus for them. Perhaps provide a list of local places to get lunch before they arrive on campus.
- Remind raisers that they are welcome to write longer messages to their graduates, and give photo albums and other gifts when they meet the graduate. They should keep in mind that most graduates travel home by plane.
- Inform raisers about the opportunity to: donate towards the dog's harness (\$300), or breeder package (\$300); designate a specific department for a donation or make a general donation to GDB. Inform raisers if your club will make a donation in honor of the graduating dog. Explain to raisers that the check/money order or club donation information can be handed to the instructor on stage during their presentation, or can be given to the Puppy Raising staff member working graduation.
- If a raiser, family or club member sees a dog in training that they have raised or had extensive contact with, the volunteer should not approach the dog or call out its name, as doing so will only create confusion for the handler and distraction for the dog.
- Discuss what to wear. Remind raiser of photos and variable temperatures. Suggest a visor, sunscreen and water.

- ❑ Graduation is a time to celebrate puppy raisers and the graduating teams. To allow the focus of the event to remain on these very special people and dogs, and to make the best use of limited space, attendees are asked to leave career change dogs and current program puppies at home.
- ❑ Counsel raisers to say their good-byes at recall. Promote graduation as a celebration of hard work and good times. Inform raisers that excessive displays of affection or emotion may make the dog and/or graduate uneasy.

Excerpt from “Graduation, What can you Expect?” by puppy raising leader Jim Howard

After many months of raising your puppy, you receive a letter from the school. With great anticipation you open the envelope to find a graduation notice! Congratulations! The primary goal has been achieved and now you can prepare for a trip to the Guide Dogs for the Blind campus and participate in a graduation ceremony.

This is a special time as well as a potentially delicate time that requires careful thinking about what you say to this new team. Many graduates are experiencing life with a Guide Dog for the first time and many may not have been around any kind of animal before this. The graduate’s confidence with their new guide could be fragile and easily broken if you share less than positive experiences. Loosely spoken comments such as “I can’t believe this dog passed!” or dwelling on less desirable puppy behavior might be of concern to the graduate and begin to break down a critical trust.

After the visitation time, the graduate will be led to a stage area and you will take control of your graduating Guide Dog. Keep in mind that when your puppy was returned to training, he was just that, a puppy. Now you will see a well trained and much more mature dog. A Guide Dogs staff member will line up the raisers, with dogs in hand, in the order that graduates will appear on stage. After the graduate has been introduced, you will be introduced and at that time the staff member will give you the signal to proceed onto the stage for the presentation. This is where you as the raiser will officially give the guide to the graduate. Each of you will be given a brief moment to say a few words about your experiences. This is once again an opportunity to share those positive memories and words of encouragement that will help strengthen the bond of the graduating team. A staff member will then lead both the graduate team and raiser to a seat on the stage where the raiser will stand behind the graduate.

There are several things to keep in mind when planning this special day. The first is to enjoy every possible moment with pictures, on stage visiting your puppy, getting to know the graduate and perhaps a tour of the campus. The graduates will most likely be dressed up in suits and dresses, as this is an extremely important and special time in their lives. A professional photographer will be taking pictures so we hope you will help honor this occasion as well with appropriate attire.