

Teaching Your Dog The Basics

SIT

- Get yourself some yummy treats and cut them into tiny pieces.
- Stand in front of your dog and place a treat to his nose.
- When he starts sniffing for the treat, move your hand slowly towards the back of his head. This will cause him to lift his head towards the treat and his butt should automatically go down.
- As soon as he sits, say "yes" and give him the treat.
- Repeat this several times with the treat as a lure, but as quickly as possible, put the treat in your pocket and just use your hand motion to direct him into the sit. We don't want to bribe the dog to sit; we want to teach him that sitting brings rewards.
- After several times of luring your dog into a sit with your empty hand, stand in front of him and wait. If he has learned that sitting gets reinforced he will sit without any luring. When he does, say "yes" and give him a treat and huge praise. Your dog has learned that his own action brings on the reward.
- Now its time to add the cue "sit". When you first start adding the verbal cue you must do it **AS** the dog is engaging in the behavior. This way he learns to associate the word with the action.
- Stand in front of your dog and wait for him to sit. When you see that he is about to sit, say the word "sit" as he moves into the position. Say "yes" when his butt hits the floor and give him the treat. Do this several times to make a good solid association. Once this is done you can use the word "sit" to elicit the behavior.
- When you get to this point you should put the reward on a variable schedule, which means that he doesn't get a treat for every sit. Maybe he has to do 2 sits, or 4 sits, or a sit and a down, before getting a reward. Keeping him guessing will improve his motivation to do as you ask.

DOWN

- When your dog is sitting in front of you, hold a treat to her nose and slowly lower it straight to the ground between her legs. Some dogs will fold down if you just hold your fist there; for others you may need to either pull the treat slightly out in front of the dog or push it back between her legs. Do whatever it takes to get her to lie down without pushing on her back. If she stands up, tell her to sit and try again - do not reprimand her.
- When your dog lies down, say "yes" and give her a treat.
- Some dogs will not go all the way down the first time. For these dogs - at first reward any lowering of the body towards the floor. Then require her to go lower and lower each time before you give the treat. This is called "shaping the behavior".
- Once your dog is going all the way down for the lure, follow the same procedure you used to teach sit. Fade the lure and use only your hand motion to get her to go down, then wait for her to offer the behavior, and then add the cue "down", at first **AS** she is going down, later as a cue to elicit the behavior.
- Don't forget to put the behavior on a variable schedule of reward once it is learned.

STAY

- To teach a dog to stay, ask her to sit and then say "stay" and give the hand signal of an open palm in front of her face (like you are stopping traffic). Count a few seconds and then say "yes" and give the treat.
- It's very important when teaching, "stay" that you go slowly. Add time in second increments. Start with 2 seconds, then go to 4 seconds, and then 6 seconds, etc. This is how you build a strong stay. If your dog can sit-stay for 20 seconds, do not then expect him to sit-stay for 2 minutes - you have to build up to that amount of time.
- Once your dog can sit-stay for 30 seconds without you moving at all, you can start to add distance by stepping back one step after asking for the "stay". Repeat this adding a small step back each time. Soon you will be able to be 10 steps back and your dog will stay until you return to her to give the treat.
- Use this same procedure to teach a down-stay.

COME

- Teaching a dog to come when called is very important. The fun game of "doggie in the middle" is a great way to start. Starting in the house where there are few distractions, two people should stand about 6 feet apart and take turns saying, "come", having the dog run back and forth between you. When he gets to you say "yes" and give him the treat. Slowly add distance until you are at opposite ends of the house and your dog is running back and forth to the cue "come".
- Once you have a strong recall in the house, go outside and teach your dog that "come," means the same thing in the yard. Start over, about six feet apart, because there are now a lot of distractions vying for his attention. Once he will come to you from opposite ends of the yard, move on to the park. Again, start 6 feet apart - the park has even more distractions than the yard. Be patient - this is one of the most important things you will teach your dog.
- Reinforce the recall by calling your dog to you at all different times. Reward him for coming to the word "come" with a special treat. Never ever ask your dog to come and then do something bad like cut his nails or yell at him. If you need to do these things - go get him. Coming to the word "come" should ALWAYS be positive.

Training your dog should always be a positive experience for both of you. To do this follow these few simple rules:

1. Keep training sessions short and fun. No longer than 5 minutes at a time.
2. Choose a reward that your dog finds reinforcing. Food is the best for most dogs, but some will work just as hard for toys or play (simple praise is usually not enough).
3. Reward the behaviors you like and ignore the behaviors you don't.
4. The rules of learning say: behaviors that are reinforced will be repeated, those that are not will go away.