



# Support for adopters

INFORMATION FOR NEW DOG OWNERS

## Teaching your dog basic commands

Some dogs that come into our care may never have had the opportunity to learn basic commands and others may need a little help brushing up on their old skills. You can teach an old dog new tricks!

### TOP TRAINING TIPS

- Never punish your dog for any mistakes they make during training. Simply ignore the mistakes and the behaviours that you don't want and reward those that you do.
- Find out what motivates your dog to help them learn. Work out what your dog's favourite treat is but remember some dogs might prefer to work for a game or praise and affection. When training in a distracting environment or teaching a particularly difficult command you might find that a tastier reward like chicken or hotdog works best. Remember that the treats are part of your dog's daily food ration.
- Be patient. Don't get frustrated if your dog doesn't pick it up straight away; remain calm and consider how you can make it easier for them. All dogs are individuals and will learn at different rates.
- Short sessions are best. Overloading your dog won't help them to learn. Break your training up into regular short sessions.
- Allow your dog time to settle into their new home before you start training. It can be hard for dogs to learn when they are adjusting to a new life and routine.



## Teaching your dog to sit

- With your dog in a standing position hold a treat in front of their nose.

**Tip!** Make sure you hold the treat tightly and do not let them get the treat until they are in the sit position.

- Keeping the treat close to your dog's nose, slowly move it upwards and backwards over the dog's muzzle back towards their tail. As your dog lifts his/her nose to follow the treat their bottom should automatically sink down towards the floor. Do not lift your hand too high or else they may jump up or lift their forepaws off the ground.

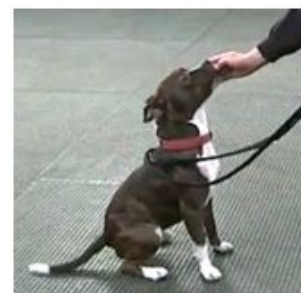


- As soon as your dog's bottom hits the floor (with their forepaws on the ground) give the treat to reward the behaviour.

**Tip!** If your dog is backing up to get the treat rather than sitting down you are probably holding it too far back and too low. You might also be moving too quickly. Go slow - move the treat up and slightly back.

Practice these steps a number of times. Short and regular sessions are best to help your dog learn; avoid overloading your dog with long sessions.

- After plenty of practice your dog should learn that in order to get the treat he/she needs to sit. You should now find that your dog is sitting as soon as you hold out a treat above its nose; if they are doing this you can start to add in the voice-cue 'sit'. Ensure you say the word 'sit' clearly just as your dog's bottom hits the floor. Quickly reward with a treat and praise your dog.



**Tip!** If your dog isn't automatically sitting when you hold out a treat they may need some more practice of the first three steps.

- Repeat the above step - present a treat above your dog's nose and give the voice-cue 'sit' just as they sit down. This will help them associate the word 'sit' with the action of sitting. Practice in short sessions until your dog is sitting everytime a treat is held above their nose.
- The next step is, without a treat in your hand, to say your dog's name to get their attention and then say the word 'sit'. At the same time move your hand in the same way you would if you were holding the treat and luring your dog into a sit (this is known as the hand-cue). This will get your dog used to getting into the sit position without having to be lured with a treat.
- After many repetitions of step 7 you will find your dog begins to learn the voice-cue and starts to sit without you using the hand-cue. When your dog does this, feed him the treat and give him lots of encouraging praise.
- Practice often in different places with more distractions.

**Tip!** When you start to practice in different environments and with more distractions it will be harder for your dog. Be patient and if your dog doesn't respond to just the voice-cue 'sit' then go back a few steps and use the hand-cue or even hold a treat in your hand to lure them into position. After a few repetitions of these basic steps you can start to work your way through the rest of the steps again.

## Teaching your dog to lie down

- Start with your dog in the sit position.
- Hold a treat in front of the dog's nose and slowly lower the treat downwards so that his/her nose will follow. If your dog's head follows the treat to the floor it means it will be easier for them to lie down than sit hunched over. Give your dog time to go into this position. If he/she stands up instead of lying down, get them back into the sit position and start again.



- As soon as your dog lies down give them a treat and lots of praise.
- Repeat this action many times. When your dog is easily following the treat into a down position you can start give the voice-cue 'down' just as your dog is getting into the down position.

**Tip!** Remember that if 'down' is your dog's cue to lying down it should not be used in other situations such as when you may want them down off your sofa - this will just confuse them and they may start to forget what 'down' really means.

- The next step is to remove the treat from your hand. Move your hand in the same way you would if you were holding the treat (but keep the treat out of sight) - this is the hand-cue. As before, give the voice-cue just as their elbows hit the floor.
- After a few practices without the treat in your hand you can try giving the voice-cue first and see if your dog will go into the down position. You should give a hand-cue at the same time as you give the voice-cue.

**Tip!** When we first introduce a voice-cue we say it as the dog is performing the behaviour so that they build an association between the word and the behaviour. Later, after having put the word and behaviour together many times we can give the voice-cue as a signal that we want our dog to perform that behaviour.

- Practice often in different places with more distractions.

**Tip!** If your dog is struggling to get into the down position using the above steps you can try sitting on the floor with your knees bent into a 'tunnel'. Hold a treat under your leg on the opposite side to the dog, slowly move the treat away from the dog so that he/she follows it under your leg. Keep your leg low enough so that he/she has to crawl under to follow the treat, as soon as his/her belly touches the floor then reward them with a treat.

## Teaching your dog to stay

As this exercise requires your dog to remain still it is best to teach it when they are a little tired rather than full of energy.

- To teach your dog to stay, first choose a position you want them to be in, e.g. sit, down or stand.
- Once your dog is in the chosen position give the voice-cue 'stay' and a hand-cue. A common hand-cue for this command is to extend your arm out in front of you with the palm of your hand facing your dog.
- Don't move anywhere, just count to two and reward your dog with a treat and some gentle praise. Don't reward your dog if they move out of position, try them again or reduce the time to 1 second.

**Tip!** Gentle praise is best here because excited praise may cause your dog to get up and move.

- Gradually build up the time. Repeat the above steps but slowly increase the time that your dog stays in position. It is very important to do this gradually - don't expect your dog to be able to wait for 10 seconds when they previously only waited for 3. Continue until you can count to 20.

**Tip!** Set your dog up for success not failure - it will help them to learn quicker and will reduce frustration from not receiving a reward. Build the time up very gradually.

- Once your dog has successfully managed to stay in position for a count of 20 a few times you can start to practice moving away from your dog. Repeat steps 1- 3 but this time take a small step away from your dog. Step straight back and reward your dog for staying in position. If your dog comes out of position you may have taken too big a step away or for too long, try again with a small short step.
- Continue to practice moving away from your dog. As with before, building it up gradually is the key. Continue until you can walk around your dog without them getting out of their position.
- It can be useful to teach your dog to 'stay' in both a 'sit' and 'down' position, follow the procedure again when teaching it with a new position.
- Practice often in different places with more distractions.

**Important!** Never use this command to leave your dog alone in a situation that is potentially dangerous. For example do not leave your dog with this command outside a shop without restraining them as they may spot another dog or something interesting over the other side of the road and run.

## Teaching your dog 'off'

The 'off' cue can be a really helpful command when you want your dog to back-off from something they are doing like taking food or picking up something you don't want them to have. The command doesn't just mean 'stop' it means 'stop what you are doing and you will be rewarded'.

- Firstly offer your dog a tasty treat in the palm of your hand and let them take it.
- Next time offer them a treat in the palm of your hand but instead of letting them have it, curl your fingers closed around it and give the voice-cue 'off'.

**Tip!** Don't shout 'off' or say it in a threatening way, use a calm and clear cue.

- With your hand closed around the treat your dog will likely attempt to get the treat from your hand by nosing, mouthing, licking and maybe using their paws. Just ignore all these efforts and wait patiently until your dog gives up and moves their nose and paws away.
- The very moment your dog moves his nose and paws away open your fingers and allow them to take the treat.

**Tip!** Timing is key. Your dog may only give up for a very short period of time so make sure you release the treat as soon as they do - otherwise you may end up rewarding the mouthing behaviour instead.

- Practice the above steps a number of times over short sessions and you should see your dog starts to back off sooner each time they hear the voice-cue 'off'.
- You can then slowly and gradually build up the time that your dog has to wait for the treat; the reason for this is to help build their self control so that they do not become frustrated if they have to wait for you to produce a treat (i.e from the bottom of your bag!). Practice until your dog can reliably wait for a count of up to ten.
- Once you and your dog have mastered the above steps you can start to practice in different situations for example with food placed on a low table or on the floor. If your dog successfully leaves the food when given the 'off' voice-cue then reward them generously! If they attempt to take the food you can calmly place your hand loosely over it and give the command 'off' again and keep practicing until you no longer need to cover the food with your hand.

**Tip!** This can be a difficult command for dogs because they are naturally opportunistic scavengers so reward generously when they respond correctly.

## How to teach your dog to walk on a loose lead

Dogs pull on the lead for many reasons. Some dogs pull on the lead because:

- They have never been taught to walk on a loose lead.
- It succeeds in getting them to where they want to go faster.
- They may be feeling anxious and want to get away from something that is worrying them.

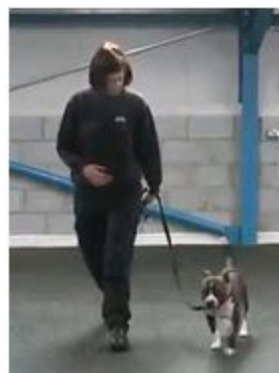
Teaching your dog to walk nicely on the lead can be one of the hardest things for you to teach and also for your dog to learn. Below are some brief instructions to get you started but taking your dog to training classes or having 1-1 training sessions will be the most helpful. Walking on a loose lead is hard for dogs to learn due to the fact that dogs naturally walk faster than humans so be patient with him/her.

**Tip!** Consistency is key. Your dog needs to learn that pulling on the lead means that they stop rather than go forward. To help your dog to learn this you need to ensure that whenever the lead is on you consistently never allow them to pull.

- Have the dog on the lead next to you with a treat in your hand, show him/her the treat and hold it fairly close to their nose.

**Tip!** If your dog is jumping up at your hand you are holding the treat too high.

- Say 'heel' and begin walking still holding the treat next to their nose, when you have taken a few steps and he/she is walking nicely beside you then you can give him/her the treat.
- Carry on practising this until you can walk for longer distances (releasing a treat every few steps) with him/her nicely beside you. This should help your dog to understand that walking next to you is a rewarding thing to do.
- The next step is to move away from holding the treat right in front on your dogs nose - your back is probably getting sore by now! Show your dog that you have another treat, stand up and straight and hold the treat up out of their way. Say their name to get their attention, give your voice-cue 'heel' and move forward one step. Then bend down and feed your dog the treat.



- Carry on practicing this with you standing up straight and gradually increase the number of steps you take before you bend down to give the reward.

**Tip!** If your dog ever comes out of position or attempts to pull forward hold the lead tightly against you to stop them being able to move forward and then encourage them to get back into position using a treat and reward when they do.

- Once you have mastered the above steps you will need to start to practice in different situations - being outside will be much more distracting for your dog so practice in the garden first. When you do start to venture outside the house remember to be consistent and patient - this is can be a very hard task for your dog to learn.

Although teaching this command means an investment in time and training classes, it will be worth it for both you and your dog to enjoy relaxing walks together.

**Your dog may benefit from training and socialisation classes. Find a good class in your local area that uses reward-based methods and a trainer that is a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.**