

Teaching Your Dog To “Sit”

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Definition

“Sit where you are.”

Practical Uses

Have your dog sit before you set down his food dish, put on his leash, let him out the door, pet him, etc. This concept is called “nothing in life is free” and can help prevent many common problems, such as door-darting, jumping up on people and squabbles over food. It also helps him learn that **you** are in control in a positive, no-force, subtle way. When in doubt, SIT! This stops whatever inappropriate behavior he may be engaged in.

How to Teach “Sit”

Hold the treat in your fingers and put it near the dog's nose. Slowly move the treat up over the dog's head and slightly back (toward his tail). As he watches the treat go back over his head, his rear end should naturally go down. When his rear end hits the floor, **immediately** *click and give him the treat. If your dog doesn't get up after you click, use your release word, such as “OK,” “free” or “all done.” Let him get up and move around, then repeat.

Comments

Remember to follow the click with the food reward each time. When he is first learning any new behavior, click and reward him with the food treat every time.

If he sits only part way down the first time, you may shape his behavior by clicking and rewarding him for a partial sit the first few times, then waiting until he moves closer to a true sit before you click and treat. If he jumps up, you are probably holding the treat too high above his head. Depending on your height and the height of the dog, you may need to kneel while you are teaching the dog this behavior for the first time.

If he really doesn't get the idea and keeps backing up, first try getting down closer to his level. If he still doesn't sit back on his haunches, try letting him back gently into a wall or piece of furniture. Or put the arm that is not holding the treat behind his lower back legs, and as he backs up, gently hold steady while continuing to entice him with the treat. As soon as he gets into a sit position, click and treat.

Once your dog consistently goes into a sit position when you entice him with a treat as a lure, add the cue “sit” as he goes into position. When he sits, immediately click and give him the treat. When he sits reliably (about 80% of the time) for your cue “sit,” start using the food as a reward instead of a lure. Use the same hand motion as if you are holding the treat, give the cue “sit,” then click and give him a treat from another source, such as your treat bag, your pocket or your other hand, when he sits. Gradually change your hand motion to the hand signal you want to use for “sit,” such holding your hand out, palm up.

Practice sit when your dog is at your side and you're both facing the same direction, as well as when he's in front, facing you.

Begin to vary your reinforcement, which is the click and treat, schedule when he consistently performs sit on cue for a reward. Click and treat randomly, every second or third time he sits, instead of every time. Then click and treat only the faster or straighter sits.