

## Teaching "Sit"

**Rambunctious, rumbustious, delinquent dogs become angelic when sitting.**

*- Ian Dunbar*



Sit is probably one of the most basic things that any dog is taught (and probably one of the easiest too). Start out by holding a treat at your dog's nose, and then draw it back toward his ears until he sits. Be careful not to raise your hand, or your dog will probably jump for the treat instead of sitting. Practice this a few times, and then start to work in the hand sign. You can use the obedience sign (at left), or you can use the ASL sign for "Sit." If you use the obedience sign, place

the treat between your thumb and palm while you make the sign. Once the dog knows the sign, you won't need the treats in your hand.

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## Teaching "Down"

Down is another very basic command, but it is sometimes a bit harder to teach. The usual way to teach it is to have the dog sit, and then lower a treat from the dog's nose to the floor. Be careful that you are not moving the treat forward, as sometimes the dog will stand up (with her head down) to get the treat. This gesture will naturally turn into a down sign, but you can also use the ASL "Down."

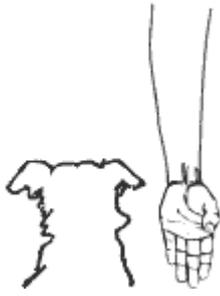


Some dogs simply will not lie down this easily. Another way to do it is to sit or squat on the floor with one leg in front of you. Pick up a treat, and reach under your leg to show it to the dog. Lead her under your leg, which should be low enough that she must lie down to fit. As soon as her elbows and belly are on the floor, sign "down" and give her the treat. She should figure it out fairly quickly so you won't need to be on the floor very long. You can also use this method with a low table or under a chair.

Another way is slower, but will still work. Hold a treat in front of the dog's nose, and lower it a few inches (enough that she lowers her head). Be sure that her tail stays on the floor, don't give the treat for standing (you can hold the treat between your thumb and palm, so that your hand is in the "down" hand position). Once she is doing this regularly, lower it more. When she will lower her head all the way to the floor, start to draw the treat forward (just a smidge at a time). Again, be sure that her tail stays down. Your dog will eventually move a paw forward, so quickly give her a treat. Keep luring further and further along, until your dog will lie down. This may take a few lessons, but you will get there.

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## Teaching "Stand"



Stand is not a command that is used a lot, but it can come in handy when brushing your dog, or at the vet's office. With the dog sitting, lure him into a stand by passing a treat in front of his face. Most dogs will get up to get the treat. Give him the treat, and then put one hand in his collar and the other under his belly (so that he must stay standing). Just hold him a few seconds, then release. As he gets used to this, extend the time, and touch him all over (including tail, toes, mouth, and ears). Give more treats if necessary. The idea is that the dog will stand comfortably, no matter what you are doing to him. The sign will start out going from the dog's nose forward, but should be gradually angled upward (it will be a sweeping straight arm motion up), so that the dog will just stand instead of walking forward to get the treat.

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## Teaching "Stay"



Stay is an exercise that teaches the dog self control. Have the dog sit, and sign "stay" (your hand held palm in front of her face, or the ASL "Stay" which uses both hands). Quickly give a treat, then sign "Stay" again, another treat, "Stay" and one more treat. Then an enthusiastic "OK!" and she's done (you want her to change position when you release her). Gradually make the time between the treats a bit longer, so she will stay sitting for longer periods of time (still use 3 treats, and then an "OK" when she is done working). Once she seems to understand, move on to the next step. Place the 3 treats on the floor in front of her. While she is still, feed her one treat at a time, fairly quickly (don't ask for the same length of time you had before, this is a new exercise for her). You may need to hold her collar at first, but don't try to hold her in a sitting position. If she insists on getting up, just do not let her have the treats. Scoop them up, cover them with your hand, or step on them. Tell her to sit again, and replace the treats. As she starts to understand that moving means the treats go away, start to stretch out the time between each bite again. Gradually add some distance (keeping the treats near you, pick each one up and bring it to the dog). Do not try to do distance and duration at the same time. If you want her to stay longer, you stay close. If you want her to stay with you further away, keep it short. Be sure to use your release sign, so that she knows when she can move. As your dog gets better, add in distractions (like jumping or spinning, or tossing toys). Staying while down is taught the same way.

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## Teaching "Leave It"

"Leave It" is a way to tell your dog that he cannot have whatever it is he is looking at. To teach it, hold a treat in one hand, open palm (if you sign your release word with your right hand, hold the treat in your left, and visa versa). Sign "leave it", and when the dog tries to take the treat, close your hand and turn it over. Do not pull your hand away or raise it up high. The dog will probably nose or lick your hand, or maybe paw at it. When he gives up and turns away, even for a second, sign "OK" and let him have it (still don't move your hand either forward or back or lower). As you practice, your dog will realize that he cannot have the treat unless you tell him that he can. Eventually, you will be able to hold a treat right

under his nose and he will not touch it. Once he knows that, you can sign "leave it" regarding other things as well (such as food on a coffee table). You will need to practice, starting slow (such as putting food on the floor, then on a table, and so on), but this behavior usually transfers well.

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## Teaching "Come" & "C'mere"

The most important thing to remember about teaching come, is that you must never, ever punish your dog when she comes to you. This includes giving baths, or trimming nails, or anything else that your dog does not like! No matter what she did just before you called, the only thing that she will remember is that she came, and you yelled. If your dog is misbehaving, or you need to do something unpleasant, you must go to her. You don't want your dog to wonder whether or not it's safe to come this time. Also, when teaching "come," do not give your dog the opportunity to be wrong. In other words, don't call her to come unless you are certain that she will. Once she knows it down pat, you won't have to worry, but until that time, go get her instead of calling. Teaching a reliable come takes time (some trainers suggest that it's impossible to have a reliable recall until the dog is at least 2 years old).



That said, teaching come is much like teaching anything else. Usually, you will end up with two forms of come. The first is an informal "c'mere" that you would use when the dog is close to you. The ASL sign for "Come" works well for this. The other is a big sweeping gesture used when the dog is further away from you (sometimes this is done over your head, to really get her attention).

C'mere is a very casual come. It is optional for the dog, and is used when you don't really care if the dog comes or not (if you are going from the kitchen to the bedroom for instance, or outside, or inviting the dog over for petting). You don't need to give treats for this, since tagging along or getting her belly rubbed is usually reward enough (and it's optional anyway).

While teaching a serious "Come," especially with an older dog who may not have had good experiences previous to this, it is probably a good idea to use a line on the dog's collar. **Never** leave this on the dog when you aren't there to supervise! It can be pretty short in the house (4 to 6 feet), and longer for outside (20 feet is probably plenty). Do not use this line to pull the dog to you! Arm yourself with some pretty good treats, and encourage your dog to come to you (if she's a little slow, turn around and run the other way, she'll speed up to catch you). When she gets there, step on the line (quickly), so that she can't run off again, give her the treat, and then take her collar. Don't pick up the line until last. Praise her, and let her go play again. (If your dog thinks you only call her to make her come in from playing, she won't want to come either.) Practice this at least 3 times each training session. Eventually, you will be able to leave the line off, because coming to you is the most wonderful thing she could do!

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## Teaching "Go" and "Move"

Go and Move are very similar, but slightly different. "Go" means the dog should move to a specific place, or in a certain direction. "Move" means simply to get out of the way, or leave the immediate area.

To teach "Go," start out with your dog sitting next to you. Tell him to "Stay," and then walk over and put a treat on the floor a short distance away. Come back to your dog, and sign "Go" (pointing at the treat will work too). He should go get the treat. After practicing this a few times, put treats in two or three small containers (35mm film canisters work well). Have your dog sit and stay again. Place the treats in different places. Direct your dog to one of them. If he goes to it, quickly give him a treat (either from your hand or open the container). If he goes to the wrong thing, give a mild no (shake your head) and take him back to where you started to try again. Once he understands that he must go where you tell him, hide the containers. You want him to go where you say, whether there is food visible or not.

To teach move, sign "Move" to your dog, and then shuffle your feet toward him. He should scoot out of the way. Do not try to run your dog down, just get him to move. When he does, sign "good dog," give him a treat, and then work on something else for a few minutes before trying it again. After a few times, he should understand that "move" means to get out of your way.

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## Teaching to "Walk Nice"

Dogs are taught (unintentionally) to pull on the leash. Whenever they are taken for a walk, they pull, and their person follows along behind, so the dog think that is what a walk is. It is easier to teach a puppy with no bad habits how to walk nice, but an older dog can be taught too.

Teaching your dog to walk nice on a leash is often easier to start training off leash first. Start with a handful of treats, and while out playing, reward your dog every time she walks next to you. As she starts to do it more often, introduce a sign (such as patting your leg or hip). Once she seems to be doing well at that part, introduce walking on the leash. After she will walk nice in the back yard, try walking on the sidewalk.

Dogs that have already learned to be very determined pullers can be controlled by using a head halter (such as the [Gentle Leader](#)). There are several manufacturers, but all work basically the same way. The principal is the same as a horse halter; when the dog pulls, her head is turned and her body must follow. A small person is able to walk a large strong dog using one of these. Your best bet is to find a trainer to help you learn how to fit and use them, as most dogs will object at first (much like they did when first introduced to a leash and collar). Some dogs will not adjust, and something else will need to be tried, but most will get used to it. The only real drawback is that a lot of people will think that your dog is wearing a muzzle (in spite of the fact that the loop is not around her nose and her mouth is open with her tongue hanging out).

There are many other ways to teach a dog not to pull. Two of the most common are to stop moving whenever your dog pulls (eventually, she will come back to see why you aren't moving), or to turn and go the other way when your dog pulls (better stick close so as not to

get lost). Sometimes your best bet is to talk to a trainer for help, as some techniques really need to be demonstrated to be effective. Regardless, your dog **can** be taught to walk nicely, it just takes practice. ([Diamonds In The Ruff](#) has a very good article on teaching your dog to "[walk nice](#)")

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