



Basic Manners

These foundation skills are the most common ones that people will teach their dogs and can be very useful in day-to-day life. As well as giving your dog something to learn and the opportunity to use their brain, it also helps to build a bond between you and get your relationship off to a good start!

Note:

*All of the following protocols are written with the intention of using a clicker. While clickers are often the most effective and efficient way to mark and train behaviors, you do **not need** to use a clicker for these plans to work. You can simply switch out the clicks for verbal markers such as “yes,” “good,” etc. if desired.*

Touch

Teaching the Behavior:

1. Hold your hand out (palm facing them) as close to your dog’s nose as they’re comfortable with (an inch or less is best, but if they give any stress signals, hold it further away). If they don’t immediately touch your hand, as most dogs usually do, just wait at least a minute—they usually eventually will touch your hand.
 - a. Be as non-threatening as possible—kneel or sit down, look away, etc.
 - b. If they don’t touch after a minute or so, and don’t express any interest in your hand, try moving your hand around or moving it **away** from them to trigger a chase drive. If they still don’t touch your hand, start with just rewarding any time they **look** at it.
 - c. If they get up or move away, just wait for them to settle, reset, and try again.
2. Once they touch your hand with their nose, mark (click or say “yes”) and reward, giving a treat from your opposite hand. Continue to offer your hand 5 times total and keep track of how many times your dog is successful. After 5/5 successful targets, move on to the next step.
2. Repeat, gradually moving your hand further and further away from the dog and alternating hands. Once the dog is reliably touching your hand with their nose, then you can add the verbal cue “touch” **just before** they touch your hand. If your dog targets your hand 4/5x or less, drop to moving your hand closer, or remain at the same distance if you’re already as close to your dog as they are comfortable with you being.
3. When the dog is *consistently* touching your hand without hesitation, you can start rewarding additional body contact. **Any time the dog makes contact with you, be it their paw, shoulder, hind end etc., mark (click or say “Yes!”) and reward.**

Troubleshooting

- Be patient and wait for your dog to touch your hand. It can take several seconds to a minute at first sometimes.
- Give lots of breaks and do very short sessions (5 minutes or even less) or however

long your dog **wants** to train.

Sit

Teaching the Behavior:

1. Put a treat in your hand and close your hand into a fist. Get them interested in it by placing it an inch—no further!—from their nose.
2. Let them sniff your hand and move it very slowly so they will follow your hand. Once they are reliably following your hand, place the treat in front of their nose and then slowly bring your hand up and then over their head.
3. They should follow your hand and drop their bottom onto the floor in a sit position. When they do sit, immediately click and reward.

Troubleshooting

- It's important to slowly lure your dog into the sit position. If you move your hand too fast they either won't be able to follow you or they will simply back up or spin around towards your hand.
- Is your dog jumping to try and reach your hand? You may be holding it too high and this is encouraging them to jump up. Try lowering your hand closer to their head.
- Is your dog seemingly uninterested in following your hand? Try increasing the value of the treat or using anything that they find very interesting.
- Is your dog flinching when you move your hand over their head? Try slowing your motion down, or use a different hand signal altogether. This would also be a good time to begin working on hand targeting.
- If your dog simply moves backwards instead of sitting, try with a wall (or some sort of barrier) behind them so they don't back up (assuming they aren't backing away because they are fearful of you!).
- If nothing else works, simply watch your dog and wait for him to sit on their own, and then mark and reward! Repeat several times until they start offering the behavior, and then use the cue "sit" **just before** their butt hits the ground.

Down

Teaching the Behavior:

Just like with "sit", you are going to use the same luring technique to teach your dog "down." Begin by asking the dog to sit and then, with a treat in your hand, put your hand in front of their face and slowly move your hand towards the ground. This is where you can do a few different things, depending on what works for your dog:

Plan A:

1. Bring your hand all the way to the ground and then begin moving it out and **away** from your dog.
 2. They should follow your hand and once it gets far enough away their front paws will slide out and their stomach will touch the ground. Click and reward!
- ★ *Be careful not to move the treat **too quickly** away from them—move the treat **very slowly**—or they will just stand up to follow it!*

Plan B:

1. If plan A isn't working, instead of moving your hand **away**, begin moving your hand in

towards them.

2. They should start to bunch themselves up and eventually their back end and hind legs will slide out from under them. Click and reward!

“Tunnel” Down:

If neither of the above two techniques work then you can try luring your dog under your leg and into a down position.

1. Begin by kneeling down on the ground and extend one leg out.
2. With the treat, lure your dog underneath your leg. Make sure they have plenty of room to crawl underneath, but not enough where they can simply walk through.
3. As they begin to go under your leg, slowly extend decreasing the amount of room he has until the only way to go underneath is to lie down and crawl under. The moment they hit the ground, click and reward!

Break it Down!

You can also teach the cue by breaking it down into approximations. So, for a dog that's having difficulty picking up on the full behavior all at once, reward for every little step of the way.

1. Click and reward your dog for bending their legs.
2. After a few times of doing that, wait for some paw movement, typically them putting their paw out, almost like they're about to take a step. Once they do that, click and reward
3. Keep breaking it down until they lay all the way down on the ground, each step earning a reward while the previous does not anymore!

Leave It

Teaching the Behavior:

1. Start by holding several treats in your closed fist and hold it out for your dog to investigate. Most dogs will sniff, lick, and/or paw at your fist.
 - a. Do not give the dog any instructions or direction; instead, simply ignore all attempts to get at the treats.
2. The **second** your dog shows any sign of disengaging with the treat (most dogs either back away, sit down, or look away), click and reward with a **different** treat.
 - a. **Do not** give your dog the treat you told them to leave, to avoid confusing them in the future!
3. Repeat until the dog is reliably disengaging as soon as you show them the treat. Now you can add the cue “leave it” when you show them the treat. If they don't immediately disengage, that's okay. Simply wait until they do to click and reward! **Don't repeat the cue!**
4. Once your dog has repeated this exercise many times, try increasing the difficulty by doing the same exercise but placing the treat on a chair, bench, or couch, instead of in your hand.
 - a. **Always be ready with your hand close to cover the treat if they go for it!** If they get the treat after you say leave it, you will weaken the cue.
 - b. Remember not to add the cue “leave it” until they are reliably disengaging when you place the treat down.
 - c. Remember not to repeat the cue if they don't look away as soon as you say leave it—give them time to think and react, and then click and reward when they do!

5. Increase the difficulty again (after many repetitions) by placing the treat on the ground now.
 - a. It may help to have your dog “sit” or “down” for this, as it will be easier for them not to go for the treat in a sit or down position. The further away you place the treat from them, the better. You can increase the difficulty by **gradually** (over many repetitions or sessions) placing the treat closer to them.
 - b. Be ready with your foot to cover the treat if they go for it!
 - c. Remember not to add the cue until they are reliably disengaging when you place the treat down.
 - d. Remember **not to repeat the cue** if they don’t look away as soon as you say leave it—give them time to think and react, and then click and reward when they do!

Stay

Teaching the Behavior:

The cue “stay” instructs your dog to stay in their **physical location** and not move until you give them a **release cue**. The dog’s **position** (sitting, down, standing) doesn’t matter so much as long as they don’t move from the **physical location**. That’s why using a mat or bed/blanket makes this easier for dogs to learn as they can see a visual boundary. It’s easiest to teach the stay cue if your dog already knows a sit or a down cue. You *can* teach stay from standing, but it’s often more difficult as the dog will be more inclined to move—though not always! Some dogs may find it easier to stay from standing, so it may take some trial and error to see which position your dog prefers!

1. Stand directly in front of your dog and say “stay” while holding your hand out, open palm facing your dog (as if you’re giving a “stop” signal). Count to one, then **immediately** give your release cue (“all done” or “release” for example) and click and reward.
 - a. Never click and reward until you’ve given your release cue! A stay without a release cue is not a stay.
2. Now do the same thing, but count to two instead of one.
3. Repeat, gradually adding **one second at a time**, until you reach about 10-15 seconds.
 - a. Remember, you are **not moving at all** at this point! It helps to get a solid stay in place for at least 10-15 seconds before you ever start moving, as this is much more difficult for the dog.
4. Now you can begin practicing adding **distance** to your stay. Give the hand signal and “stay” cue, then take only **one step** back, then **immediately** return to your dog and click and reward.
5. Repeat, and add only **one** step each repetition. **Always return to your dog instead of releasing them to come to you**, as this will help them understand that they will not get the reward unless they stay in place.

Recall

Though recall is one of the most difficult things to master, it can, and **should**, be one of the most **fun** things to practice! The best way to teach recall usually involves games, since you want your dog to learn that **coming to you is fun!** The reason that recall is so difficult to master is because

the environment will almost always be more rewarding than you, so you have to reprogram your dog's brain to think that *coming to you* can be more rewarding than chasing the squirrel that he's targeted! **Make sure that you are saving your highest value treats for practicing recall!** This can be meat, cheese, whatever your dog loves most. And always make a huge deal and be very excited when your dog comes to you. **If your dog does not *enjoy coming to you* (i.e. if you ever punish them when they come to you!), then you'll never be able to have a *reliable* recall.**

Teaching the Behavior

1. Start with your dog on a regular leash, in a quiet, non-distracting environment.
2. Face your dog, show them you have a treat or favorite toy, and while they're looking at you, say "come!" and take just a few steps backwards so that they follow you. Then immediately give them the toy or treat!
 - a. The quicker you move, the more likely your dog will follow you! Quick, playful steps backwards, like a light jog, are more exciting for your dog, and thus more likely to get them to follow you.
 - b. Until your dog has a reliable recall (**which typically takes months of dedicated practice**), **don't give your dog their recall cue ("come!") until they are already looking at you!** If they aren't looking at you, get their attention first, and ***then*** give the recall cue.
 - i. Teaching your dog to look at you when you say their name works well for this! This way you also have *two different cues*: one means look at you, and the other means come to you, both of which can be very helpful in different situations!
3. Repeat many times, then begin gradually increasing difficulty, one element at a time. For example, use a longer leash (you can find any different types of leash—or just make your own with a light rope!) and start practicing with longer and longer lengths of leashes so that your dog is further and further away from you.
 - a. **Each time you give your dog their recall cue and they don't complete it weakens their recall response.** Until your dog has a reliable recall, **don't call them to you unless you're holding a leash or they're already almost to you.** This will ensure that your dog will comply with your cue, thus strengthening their recall.
 - b. Don't start adding difficult distractions (like other people/dogs) too early! Your dog needs a solid history of coming to you before you add any temptations *not* to come to you.

Recall Games

- For **Round Robin**, have at least three people spread out and take turns calling the dog, telling them "come!" excitedly *right before* they get to you, and moving further and further apart each time. **The dog should already be coming toward you when you give the cue at first—ideally, the dog should be already almost to you.** Be sure to mark (click or "Yes!") and reward lavishly *each* time the dog comes. Eventually, you can even practice this with everyone in separate rooms in separate rooms. Keep it random so the dog doesn't predict a pattern!
- You can also play a game of **Chase**—if you start running away from your dog, chances are your dog will chase you! Use this chance to say "come!" as they're running toward you, and reward them for reaching you, to incorporate the cue into your daily playtime. You can play this game on walks even by suddenly backing up at random times and telling your dog

excitedly to “come!” in the middle of walks. This will also help to keep your dog on their toes and generalize training so that they understand that they may be expected to listen to cues anytime, anywhere—but in a way that is fun for them!

- Play **Hide and Seek** with your dog! Hide in another room (you may need someone to help and stay with the dog for this) and then call their name in an excited voice, and then as they see you, right before they get to you, say, “Come!” and reward them.

Troubleshooting

- The most common way that people ruin their dog’s recall is by only using the cue for situations that the dog sees as unpleasant, such as coming inside after playing in the yard, going into their crate, etc. If you *only* use “come” for situations like this, then the dog will quickly learn not to come at all! To avoid this, every few times you ask them to come inside or go in their crate, also use “come” just to call them over to you, and then give them a treat or play with their toy. If they’re outside playing, call them to you, and then give them a treat, and let them go continue to play.
- Never chase *after* your dog if you want them to come. Dogs are hardwired to chase, which also means they’re often going to run away if *you* chase *them*! **Chase is a great game for most dogs and they’ll run as long as you chase!**
- If the dog doesn’t come when you call, **don’t continue to repeat the cue**. It will quickly become background noise to your dog. Give the dog time to think and react to the cue, and if they don’t come after a few seconds, make exciting noises to tempt them, or start running away—they will almost always chase you! Then you can mark and reward!

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- ★ Now practice all these cues in multiple different locations (even **different rooms of your house** are completely different contexts for your dog!), adding distractions **gradually**. You can also practice giving cues **from different positions** (sitting, lying down, kneeling, facing away from the dog, etc). Keep in mind that changing *any* element will be an increase in difficulty and should be done **slowly**. **Remember: increase only one element of difficulty at a time!**