

Foundation Class Basic Obedience

Sit: This is usually the first control exercise taught. It is very hard to get into trouble in a sitting position. The goal is an immediate sit after the cue. It can be taught using luring, or shaping. You can teach a sit fairly quickly by using a food lure. Place the food almost directly on your dog's nose and move it up and at a slight angle (away from the dog and towards you). Your dog's nose should follow the food and he should tuck his hind legs under him as he sits. (If you angle the food back above the dog's head toward his ears, he will rock back on his haunches. Rocking back on the haunches may be of no consequence for agility but has implications for obedience competition, because a dog that rocks back is way out of heel position, or too far away on a front.) Then click and give your dog his treat.

Do this for 3-4 repetitions try using the same hand motion without the lure to entice your dog to move into the sit. Most dogs will still follow your hand even without the food. Then you can mark and treat following the sit. When your dog is regularly following the hand motion add the "sit" cue just before the hand cue. So this is the order: Verbal Cue > Pause > Hand Motion > Click/Treat. When the response starts before the hand motion, it's a good time for a jackpot (generous food reward).

Be careful not to add a specific body position into the cue. Vary your position. Start upright and turned slightly away, for example. Stand beside on either side, then a few steps away. The dog should learn that our position does not matter. Work on a fast response. Don't reward the slow responses, maybe just a "good dog".

Down: You can teach a down fairly quickly using a food lure. There are two ways that a dog can move into the down position. First, from a sitting position, the dog can move his front legs forward and lower himself to the ground. Second, from a standing position, the dog folds back, collapsing into a down, with no sit required. Referred to variously as the *fold-back*, *sphinx*, or *accordion* down, this is the preferred down in performance dogs since the dog can drop into and pop out of this position quickly.

Starting with the dog in a stand, move a food lure from his nose to the middle of his chest, slightly into the dog and toward the ground. Your luring should cause the dog to lower his head. Mark and treat this head movement. Repeat several times. The next step is to move the lure further toward the ground so that, in addition to lowering his head, the dog also folds his front legs back and his elbows touch the ground. Continue moving the food lure toward the ground, and wait to mark until the dog bends his elbows. Repeat this step several times. Finally, once the dog's head and elbows are on the ground, move the food lure up slightly. This should cause the dog to drop his rear end as well. Mark and treat when the dog's rear end hits the ground.

Close (left side) and **Side** (right side): Teaching your dog to come into your side facing the same direction that you are and to maintain that position is vitally important for keeping control. Your dog needs to learn to come to the desired side of your body and to stay there until released. Your dog can either sit or stand at your side, but he must make eye contact with you in this position. The eye contact gives you a connection to your dog. If you have already taught your dog to target your hand, you can use your hand to bring him *into* position next to you. Mark and treat when your dog is beside you and facing the same direction that you are. For this exercise be sure that your dog is not in front of you when he gets the treat. Dogs tend to gravitate to the spot where they receive treats. So, if you want your dog to move into and stay at your side, you need to provide the treats in that position. If your dog does not target your hand yet, you can teach this exercise using a food lure instead. Teach each side separately. Start with one and train until your dog quickly and easily moves into that position before training the other side.

Wait and Stay: Although many trainers use the cues *Wait* and *Stay* interchangeably, others make a clear distinction between these two. We use *Wait* to mean "Hold still, but be ready since you will be receiving another cue soon." On the other hand, *Stay* means "Do not move out of position until I formally release you." Whatever you decide, use your cues consistently. Throughout this section we use the term *Stay* for simplicity.

Being still can be difficult for many dogs. High-drive dogs have a hard time turning down the adrenaline enough to inhibit action whereas less confident dogs may be worried about what might happen to them when their owners leave and they are instructed not to move. A positively trained stay can work for both types of dogs. It gives high-drive dogs the motivation to hold still, and it gives less confident dogs a feeling of security.

To start, your dog needs to be able to sit and remain sitting while you continually feed him small, soft treats (like feeding quarters into a slot machine). Feed in this manner for 30-second intervals, then release your dog from the sit and ignore him for 30 seconds. Repeat often. If your dog gets up during this process say *Oops!*, ask him to sit, and begin feeding again. Once your dog is sitting still for continual feeding, slow the rate of reinforcement to a treat every 3 to 5 seconds. Continue to gradually slow your rate of reinforcement until you are only feeding at the end of the 30-second interval. Next you should add distance, one step at a time, away from your dog. When you start adding distance, you will then need to return to a higher rate of reinforcement. This means that you will step away from your dog, step back to your dog, reinforce, then step away again. Continue in this fashion until your dog can stay for 30 seconds with you one step away before adding more distance. When your dog can stay for 30 seconds while you are six steps away, you can move on in your stay training.

Advanced stay training involves having someone else come in to feed your dog while you move even further away. This technique is very useful since your dog learns that staying in position, even when you are gone, will be reinforced. When your dog can hold his stay reliably in this situation, you can begin adding mild distractions. When you start adding distractions you should move back to your initial stages of continual feeding while you are next to your dog, then move forward as previously described as your dog becomes successful. Building your stay in small steps will lead to a strong, consistent behavior. Skipping steps and rushing ahead too quickly leads to stays that fall apart in competition. When your dog breaks a stay while training, the worst thing that ever happens is that you say *Oops!* and withhold the reinforcement. Our recommendation is that you release your dog from a stay using a verbal cue, given only while you are stationary. Releasing your dog while you are moving could confuse your dog.

Proofing the Stay

Place dog in stay. Walk away and turn back. Then walk away again. This teaches the dog that facing toward her is not a release.

Do stay with distractions. Take your dog to a low distraction area to begin. Place in a stay and toss treats or a toy. Release to get the toy and play. Then, during the stay, go to the toy and kick it around before releasing.

When your dog is in a stay, half the times go back and release and half the time call your dog. Sometimes call her, throw her toy in a different direction and send her to *Get It*.

Teach your dog that you moving does not indicate release. Place her in a stay and run out and around in different directions. Throw toy, run and pick it up; run again and throw toy. Release your dog to get it.

If you are doing agility or higher levels of obedience, ask your dog to sit and stay in front of a jump. Create all kinds of distractions behind her, such as dogs playing, kids running, etc. This is a high level of distraction. If your dog can stay with that type of commotion, she is ready for a stay and lead out at an agility or obedience trial!