

Intro to Agility Week 2 Fun at Home: Table skills

You have to learn to be a bit silly with your dog. Your voice must be a sublimely happy voice. You need to whoop and holler and cavort. When your dog does something right-*anything*-reward the performance with joyful celebration.

If your dog does wrong, all it really means is that the dog didn't get it. So you don't do anything you don't chastise and you don't bark. Don't draw your arm back like you're going to hit your dog and never, never, never... hit your dog.

When your dog piles into the car to go to agility practice, you want to see him excited and happy and knowing that he's getting ready to have the most fun in the whole world-and there should be no one in the world he'd rather do it with than you.

Teaching "Table Manners"

Your dog will need to know down and sit well to learn the agility table obstacle. You don't really need a table. Your dog's response to your down and sit commands just needs to be reliable.

Sit! and Down!

Train Sit! as follows. Hold a bit of tasty food in your hand, above the dog. Move the food back so the dog turns his head up to watch you. When he sits, exclaim happily and give the treat. This is fun to do just before a meal, using bits of dry food, or tiny (pea-size) bits of cheese or hot dog. *Sit* has traditionally been taught in puppy training classes and books by pushing down on the dog's back, but it's always better when you can stay away from force.

For the remainder of the training session, you will give the dog an opportunity to respond to your *Sit!* command before you follow through. Then praise and reward.

Teach quick sits. Click and reward as soon as your dog gets in the sit position. Do this multiple times in a row quickly, until your dog is responding quickly (same for the down). Use high value rewards.

Ask for *Down!* while your dog is on lead, positioned in front of you. Use a hand signal- an upraised arm with the palm flat and facing towards the dog- in conjunction with the voice command. If your dog goes down, reward. Your dog quickly learns to associate the upraised palm with your desire for him to assume the down position. Don't give more than one cue. If your dog does not go down on the first cue, tell him, "Oh dear, look at these great treats that you are not going to get!" Then move to a different location and try again.

To teach down, hold in your hand a tasty, high value treat and with your dog in front of you move your hand, palm down, toward the ground and between your dog's front legs. His head should follow, and then the rest of his body, into the desired position.

Once your dog is reliably doing a down, you can start moving further away from the dog and asking him to maintain the down for longer periods of time. Try standing 6' or 10' away while your dog is on his down. The dog should not break from the down position until you release him. If you have problems, put the dog on lead and decrease the distance.

Training Tips

When first teaching *Sit!* and *Down!*, always make sure that you are in control of a situation before you give a command to the dog. For example, do not tell a dog to *Sit!* when he is across the room. If he does not do as he's told, which is very likely if he doesn't completely understand the command, then you will have lost control of the situation. After this happens once or twice, your dog learns a lesson detrimental to your training program-that he is in control, not you, when he is out of arm's reach. Obeying commands at a distance is something that you will teach the dog only when he understands the commands *very* well while he is at your side and only after he is accustomed to immediately obeying your commands.