WAITING AT THE DOOR

Why is it important?
Expecting your dog to wait before exiting a door or crate is an important tool. Not only does it teach impulse control and polite behavior, but it can be a critical safety issue should your dog try to bolt out of any open door. While you are teaching this behavior it’s important to manage your dog so that he is not allowed to exit any doors without permission. Every time your dog escapes successfully, it becomes more likely that he will try to do so again in the future. This is the same training whether you are standing at a doorway or your dog is sitting in her crate.

Sit happens
It's important that your dog first knows how to sit. If she doesn't, teach this first. Then begin to ask your dog to sit for everything she wants including, treats, meals, toys, petting and attention, putting on her leash, and anything else you can think of. This will create a dog that is used to sitting for things she wants.

Let's begin
Step 1: Choose a time when you’re not in a hurry, your dog has already been outside to potty, and you’re feeling cool and patient. Leash your dog and ask her to sit. As soon as her rear touches the ground, reward her. Now reach for the doorknob. Odds are, she’ll instantly get up. “Oops!” you say pleasantly, and take your hand away from the door. Again ask her to sit, reward, then reach for the door. Once again, she’ll probably get up; once again, you’ll say “Oops!” and take your hand away from the door.

After a few tries, though, your dog will start to get the idea -- you may see her put herself back into the sit after getting up. Now she’s on her way to sitting automatically in order to get you to open the door. Resist the urge to use the leash to pull her back into the sit. She needs to learn to choose the right behavior.

For this first training step, count it as good progress if your dog learns to hold her sit while you turn the doorknob and just barely open the door. Reward her with several treats and praise her for doing such a good job.

Step 2: When she has been able to sit patiently and successfully for 5 repetitions of your hand holding the doorknob, it’s time to up your criteria. Now, while she is sitting, open the door an inch or two. If she gets up, say “oops” and immediately close the door. Ask her to sit again and repeat. Continue at this stage for 5 successful repetitions, rewarding and praising each time.

Step 3. Keep increasing how wide you open the door until she can hold her sit for one or two seconds with the door wide open. At that point, say your release word and invite her to go out the door; then take her for a short walk so the training ends in something positive and happy. You can do another quick session as soon as you get back, again rewarding your dog with permission to go through the door, plus a quick walk.
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Step 4. Increase the period of time she needs to wait before you release her. (You’ll need to choose and consistently use a special word or phrase, like “Okay” or “All done.” This is the same word you will use when teaching “stay”.) Reward her while she is sitting and staying politely.

Step 5. The moment you and your dog exit the door, quickly say her name. As soon as she turns to you reward her with several treats in a row and enthusiastic praise. Practice this every time you exit. This will teach her to turn back to you after exiting a door and not immediately bolting out when she is released. (If your dog does not respond to her name quickly, ask for our handout, Name Game.)

Step 6. Practice off leash in secure places. Continued practice will help teach her that an open door is not an invitation to bolt outside.

The more doorways you can practice this behavior in, the more solid the behavior will be. Besides the front door and the crate door, you can practice at the:

- bathroom door (you know your dog likes to follow you in there!)
- bedroom door, if dogs are allowed to sleep in your room or on your bed
- garage door
- car doors (both going in and getting out of the car)
- gates at the dog park, if you frequent one
- entrance to the training classroom, if you attend training classes with your dog
- door to the backyard
- door to the pet store
- any other doors you can think of!

**Training Tip:** Teaching your dog to remain in a sit, and having her wait to be released from her crate is taught in a similar fashion. Your dog should be able to learn to wait in the crate with the door completely open before she is released to exit. Make a game of having her run into the crate (toss treats inside as soon as she does), immediately sit, and then after varying periods of time, call her to come to you and reward with a handful of treats or a game of tug. Vary the distances for sending and calling.

**Training Tip:** If your dog gets very excited about going outside, you can begin to practice at an interior door first, such as a bedroom or bathroom.

**Training Tip:** If your dog is not succeeding at least 3 times out of every 5 repetitions, make the next try a little easier so she can succeed.