

(It's a good idea to read this a few times before starting.)



Congratulations on your new dog or puppy! Teaching your dog to sit is an important tool in teaching other desired behaviors such as proper (human) greetings, staying in one place, waiting for the leash to be attached, and helps prevent a myriad of behaviors we don't want from our dogs, like jumping on people, nipping at heels, or “helping” put the groceries away! You name it, “Sit” prevents it!

First: Get your dog associated with the exclamation “Yes!” to mean that he just did it right. It’s much better than saying “Good dog,” which then becomes an unintentional release word (explained later). When your dog is just laying around doing nothing, approach with some of his kibble or tiny cheese pieces and say “Yes!” while delivering a treat right to his mouth. Be sure your dog isn’t doing anything so you don’t accidentally say “Yes!” to a behavior you don’t want repeated. Do this for about 15 seconds, with sessions throughout the day, totaling about five or six sessions. Now, the word “Yes!” can instantly be used for letting your dog know he’s on the right track during training.

Let's start training! Here's what you'll need:

- ❀ Five minutes or less.
- ❀ Some yummy, bite-sized, easy to munch on, healthy treats; for example, little cubes of low-fat & low-sodium cheese, some of his regular kibble, or anything else he enjoys.
- ❀ Patience, for both you and the dog; remember, you're both learning here!

First steps: Without speaking, take a treat and bring your hand just over your dog’s nose. Keep bringing the treat back so that your dog's nose follows it. This motion will cause his rear to go down. Keep your hand low to his nose; otherwise he'll jump up after the treat.

Immediately reward your dog with the treat. Timing is everything in training. Remember, you're not speaking at this point, just shaping the behavior. Repeat this sequence as quickly as possible for 10 repetitions. If you get a gorgeous response all 10 times, he's ready for the next level. Remember that the more you “break it down,” meaning teaching small approximations at a time, the more the command will stick.

(If your dog doesn't fully sit the first few times, reward him for even a hint of a sit so that he learns he's on the right track. Reward each approximation toward the ultimate goal!)

Now, wait a half an hour then follow up with another short training session. If at this point your dog is sitting, quickly use the same motion with your hand but have the treat in your other hand behind your back. When he sits, deliver the treat quickly from this hand

instead. Also, begin “naming the behavior” (in this case, “Sit”) as his rump heads to the floor. Say it in an upbeat, but calm manner.

Rule etched in stone: Say “Sit” once! Your dog does not yet know what “Sit” means, and repeatedly saying “Sit! Sit! SIT!!” means nothing to him and ruins the use of the word.

Start saying “Yes!” the micro-second his rear touches the floor. It also allows you to quickly wean him off the food while still letting him know his response was great. This step will become invaluable in all your training efforts.

Next, if your dog sits quickly, request he sit with just your hand signal (just once!). Just wait for it and fight the urge to say or do anything. It may take a few seconds the first time you ask, but it will happen!

Next steps: Get the hand signal close to your body. Ask your dog to sit with both hand signal and voice, with your hand signal now at your waist rather than over his head. Just lift your hand with palm facing up a bit past waist level, elbow at 90 degrees, gesturing with a swift upward movement that doesn’t go too far above the waist. This is your dog’s hand signal to sit. Wait a full second before rewarding him after he sits. You’re teaching him that “Sit” means “Sit and stay there until I say otherwise,” which is either when you say his release word or another command. You can quietly say “Good dog” a few times to let him know he’s on the right track and that you haven’t forgotten about him.

Now, it’s time to introduce his release word. After he sits, wait a second, then say “OK!” and turn around and walk away. When he knows his release word, begin stretching the time between the sit and his release by one second, then two, then three, etc. (great groundwork for when you start training “Stay!”).

Start phasing out food rewards by treating him for only the progressively better responses. Once the “Sit” is perfect, you can go on to “random reinforcement”, which is an extremely powerful way to keep a behavior sharp. Reward randomly, with treats hidden in indiscriminate places, like shelves or atop the fridge, where your dog will not see them. Grab one once in a while to reward. This way he no longer thinks you’re packing treats. (Always carry treats everywhere you go with your dog. Be ready to reward him when he sits nicely instead of pulling on his leash toward someone!)

Keep all of your training sessions short and sweet – always end on a good note. Five minutes is plenty of time for a great training session, and you can train as you walk from the couch to the kitchen! Training in short bursts is very easy, and extremely effective.

Troubleshooting:

🐾 “My dog sits, but if I move a few steps away he gets up.”

That happens when distance wasn't brought into training. Teach distance when training by taking a step back away from him each time. Increase distance and time separately.

🐾 “He's fine at home, but on walks, or at the dog park, if I ask him to sit he ignores me.”

Remember these two things about requesting a behavior outside the usual context (living room, den, etc.):

🐾 Dogs don't generalize like we do.

🐾 The environment is constant competition for his attention (great things to sniff/chase/chew).

You can see why sit needs to be re-taught in new environments, and with varying degrees of distraction. You need to generalize the command for your dog. Teach sit to your dog everywhere you take him. Start at square one. He needs this training to understand what you want in all environments and contexts (with varying degrees of distraction). The more you do this, the faster he'll learn in each new environment. He'll focus on you more because he'll learn that he has to sit to get to anything in the world, and sitting requires him to look at you!

Be patient, have fun, and set your dog up for success. Happy training!

Note: All training tips are written by i Love Dogs' in-house trainer Eugenia Vogel who has over 20 years of dog training experience as “Canine Coach.” For more questions about canine behavior, visit i Love Dogs' Ask-A-Trainer section on www.ilovedogs.com!