

Training Your Dog Down

Teaching dogs "down" will keep your guests happy.

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The next command on your puppy-training agenda is the down exercise. This is initially taught during the Round Robin game. It should be interspersed with the sit commands. In one round, your puppy sits and in the next round, he sits and then lies down before the next person calls him. This is very important, as you don't want the puppy to believe that he arrives and immediately lies down. He should always come and sit first, awaiting his next command. Dogs are easily pattern-trained. Should you repeat something as few as three times, puppy will learn the pattern and tend to anticipate your commands. While its nice to know that your puppy really wants to please you that much, it doesn't mean he's obedience-trained, only pattern-trained.

The down can sometimes be difficult to teach because it is a submissive position. However, due to most young puppies easily giving in to dominance, it shouldn't be an issue. Some pups might feel dominant at an early age and not take to going down easily. Be certain to make teaching this exercise as positive as possible by using a treat or toy that is totally irresistible.

Once your pup has come and sat in front of you, put the reward beneath his nose and bring your lure and signal down to the floor as you say Pup, down. He should follow the lure, at least with his nose. Even if he only looked at it, reward him for the gesture. Next time, ask for more of a response, such as moving his front end down. The time after that, he should put his front elbows all the way down and the time after that, he should touch all the way down to his tummy, tucking his haunches under. If your pup is resistant to putting his entire body all the way down, apply a little pressure just behind his shoulder blades as you show him the lure and give the down command.

When your puppy understands the down during the Round Robin game, you can add it to your heel and sit repertoire. Every two or three times that you stop, have your pup sit and then lie down prior to receiving his reward and going into the heel again. The more you practice this exercise and maintain everything in a positive manner, the less your pup will think of the position as a vulnerable one and the more he will consider it a rewarding experience. After all, he gets treats and tummy rubs while lying down. What could be better?

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