

## Sit & Down

### Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to create the positions of "sit," and "down," without any physical force or manipulation.

Avoid the use of cues at this time.

### Procedure

1. Choose the hand you prefer to use when giving your hand signals. By using only one hand to signal, your dog will learn to focus on the signaling hand making learning easier.
2. Hold two treats in your signal hand.
3. If your dog is moving around excitedly, hold its collar with your other hand to prevent excess movement.
4. Hold the treat in front of your dog's nose and move it from side-to-side to ensure targeting. If you can move your dog's nose you can move its entire body.

### Luring Into Sit

5. Place a treat in front of your dog's nose. Move it slowly between your dog's eyes, then ears, then over its head. Your dog's head will go up as it follows the treat. The loss of balance this creates causes most dogs to sit.
6. The moment your dog's rear end hits the ground give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.



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### Alternatives

- Offering Sits – Not all dogs will sit when lured. For some dogs it's better to show them the treat holding it up and out of reach and wait for the sit.
- Hold the Treat out of Reach – Other dogs respond better if you show them the treat and then hold it out of reach above their heads because it's easier to see the treat when sitting.



### Note

- If your dog is jumping for the treat, you'll want to either move it closer to its nose for luring or further out of reach as shown above.

### Luring Into Down

1. To move your dog from the sit to the down position, keeping your momentum from the sit position, immediately place another treat in front of your dog's nose with your palm facing the floor. Slowly move the treat down your dog's chest to the floor until it lies down.
2. The moment your dog lies down, give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.



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### Alternatives

Some dogs will not follow the lure into the down position. This is a common problem with small breeds and fearful dogs.

- Leg Bridge with a Lure – Sit on the floor with one knee raised just enough to allow your dog to fit under your leg. Lure your dog under your leg with a treat causing it to lie down as it crawls through the small opening. The moment it lies down, give your reward marker and reward your dog with a treat.



Once your dog is lying down quickly you can switch back to the lure. Switching back is necessary because your lure movement will soon become a hand signal.

- Leg Bridge with a Trail of Treats - For dogs that will not follow a lure under your leg, your other option is to create a trail of treats for your dog to follow. The moment your dog lies down, give your reward marker “YES” and reward your dog with a bigger treat.



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- Arm Bridge – You may choose to use your arm instead of your leg as a bridge and can choose between the trail of treats and the lure. Remember, when using an arm or leg-bridge, you are not pushing down on the dog – you are simply providing an opening that requires the dog to lie down in order to crawl through it.



- Capturing – It's not uncommon for timid or fearful dogs to avoid lying down in what they perceive to be a threatening environment. If your dog won't respond to the above techniques even at home, you can capture the behaviour at home by having your treats handy. When you notice your dog circling or preparing to lie down, quietly give your "down" cue. The moment it lies down, give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.

When this is going well, try one of the above techniques. When your dog is responding at home, practice in other locations with low distraction. As your dog's confidence increases at the training facility and in new environments, your dog will perform there as well.

### Note

- It's easier for a dog to lie down from a sit than it is from a stand position, so if your dog stands up, lure it back into the sit position and try again.
- If your dog stands up instead of lying down, avoid moving the treat away from your dog's chest or it may stand up to walk to the treat. Since every dog is different, some respond better if the treat is moved down its chest *then* across the floor away from it.
- If you lose your dog's attention, get your dog focused on the treat and try again, this time moving the treat more slowly so it stays on your dog's nose as you lure into the down position.



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- With a few repetitions this position change will become easy for your dog.
- If you're having difficulty achieving the down position, don't reward the dog for sitting, only for lying down. This way it learns that lying down is the only way to get the treat and it speeds up the learning process.
- When luring your dog into a down position, hold your treats in the palm of your hand with the palm of your hand facing the ground. This causes a "bridge" effect giving your dog the illusion that it must get under your "bridge" in order to get the treat.



### Putting Sit and Down Together

Lure your dog sequentially into the sit and down positions, giving your reward marker "YES" and a treat after each position change.

Sit



Down



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### Add the Cue & Signal to Sit & Down

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this exercise is to turn the lure movements for sit and down into hand signals and to add the word cue to each position.

Asking your dog to respond to a cue it doesn't understand confuses it. If on the other hand, you label a behaviour your dog is already performing with a word cue, the dog will begin to associate that word with the behaviour. After a few repetitions, when the dog hears the cue it will understand what it means and that something good will happen if it chooses the correct response.

*Pairing up something with no meaning to the dog with something that has meaning, in order to create an association between the two is called "Classical Conditioning."*

#### Hand Signal for Sit

You've been luring your dog into a "sit" position by placing the treat in front of your dog's nose and moving it up between its eyes, ears and over its head. This lure movement will now become a hand signal.

Creating the hand signal for sit:

Position your signal hand, straight down in front of your body with your palm facing out. Now bend your elbow bringing the palm of your hand up to your shoulder.

#### **Procedure**

1. Give your cue to sit and lure your dog into the sit position. When your dog's rear end hits the ground, give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.
2. Give your cue to sit followed by your hand signal with both the palm of your hand and the treat *facing your dog*. When your dog's rear end hits the ground, give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.

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- Now give your official cue to sit followed by your hand signal with both the palm of your hand and the treat *facing your shoulder*. When your dog's rear end hits the ground, give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.

Sit Signal



### Hand Signal for Down

You've been luring your dog into a "down" position by placing the treat in front of your dog's nose with your palm facing the floor, then slowly moving the treat down your dog's chest to the floor until it lies down. This lure movement will now become a hand signal.

Down Signal



## Sit & Down

Creating the hand signal for down (See previous page):

1. Begin this exercise crouched in front of your dog while it's in a sit position.
2. Your hand signal is the opposite of the "sit" signal. Begin with your hand at your shoulder with the palm facing out.
3. Using a quick, smooth movement, bring the palm of your hand from your shoulder down to the floor.
4. The moment your dog lays down give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.

### Stand Up on the Down Stay

#### Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to teach your dog to hold the down stay position as you stand and move away from it.

#### Procedure

1. Crouched in front of your dog, using your cue and signal, put your dog into the down position.



2. Practice your "leave it" cue to teach your dog to keep its nose off the treat while in the down position.





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3. Give your cue to stay and either signal with an empty hand or quickly remove the treat from in front of your dog's nose to avoid luring your dog up with the treat.
4. If your dog reaches toward your hand go back to your "leave it" cue. When your dog relaxes into the down position, give your reward marker "YES" and give it the treat.



5. Repeat this until your dog is relaxed in the down position.
6. Gradually change your body position until you are standing in front of your dog, reward and release your dog using the release cue you chose for the sit stay exercise. With each small change in body position, reward your dog for not standing up with you.



Norma Jeanne's holding her hand signal higher requiring Scruffy to look up without getting up



She rewards Scruffy each time she makes a change and he holds his position



She is now holding her hand signal even higher requiring Scruffy to look up while holding his down position

### Note

Norma Jeanne is not holding Scruffy down by the collar – she's simply using one finger to prevent any forward movement toward the treat.

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Because Scruffy is relaxed into the down position, Norma Jeanne releases his collar



She rewards him for holding his position



She now rises slightly from the crouched position and Scruffy holds his stay



Norma Jeanne rewards Scruffy for holding his position



She stands a bit taller



Norma Jeanne is now standing while Scruffy remains in a down position



She rewards him again...



then releases him from the stay

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7. When your dog is relaxed in the down position with you standing in front of it, move one foot back and forth and reward your dog for not getting up.
8. When this is successful, take one step away from your dog and immediately return as though you were a rubber band, reward and release your dog.
9. When this is successful you can take one step back and hold your position for the count of three.
10. When your dog is successful you can expand one of the two criteria for any "stay:"
  - a. Length of time
  - b. Distance from your dog



Cordelia gives her stay cue and signal, takes one step back from Scruffy then immediately returns to him



Now she takes one step back and holds her position for the count of three before returning

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This time she takes two steps back and holds her position

### Note

- This exercise is the foundation of your dog's stay for the rest of its life. If you succeed now, your stay will become longer and stronger, and something you'll be able to use in real life situations. If your dog gets in the habit of breaking the stay before it's released now, it'll be more difficult to create a reliable stay later. Remember, if you build a house on a weak foundation it will not stand.
- Always remember to reward your dog while it's holding the stay, before releasing it – never after. If you reward your dog after the release it'll continue to get up thinking that's the behaviour that earned the reward.
- Set your dog up for success. Only ask your dog to perform a stay it's capable of achieving. If you set your dog up to succeed it will. If you set it up to fail it will. For example, although you may have achieved a ten second stay during your previous session, if your dog is not feeling well or is highly distracted during your next training session, this may not be a reasonable request. Like us, dogs have good days and bad days, and times when they're more distracted than others.
- Be aware of your environment, how your dog is feeling, and adjust your expectations accordingly.



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If your dog is not feeling well, is experiencing physical discomfort, is in pain, stressed, anxious or fearful your expectations should be limited to only what's necessary at the time and what the dog can successfully achieve. Under these circumstances I tend to avoid training unless absolutely necessary. For example; when my dog is not well she may require a visit to the vet clinic – these visits are always used as opportunities to train; but, if my dog is not up to it we simply avoid other dogs and people. In cases such as these, treating the illness problem is your first concern.

If your dog is exposed to a new distraction or the distraction is more intense due to volume or proximity – it becomes increasingly difficult for your dog to concentrate on you and respond to your requests.

When choosing your goals take the following into consideration:

- How your dog is feeling
- Your dog's ability to focus and concentrate at that particular time
- Your location

New locations – even choosing to work on the opposite side of the room must be viewed as a new distraction. Just walking out your front door adds a myriad of new and potent distractions for your dog to process in the form of sights, sounds and smells. Keep in mind that your dog has four times your hearing and can smell things you're unaware of.

- a. Always allow your dog to set the pace

Only take the next step when the previous step is easy for your dog. Make sure your next step increases only one of the following criteria at a time and is a small increase to once again ensure success.

- ✓✓ Length of your stay
- ✓✓ Distance from your dog
- ✓✓ Distance from the distraction

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✓✓ Volume of the distraction

### b. New distractions in the environment

Once your dog is able to focus with a particular distraction at a distance, you can gradually increase the intensity of the distraction by shortening your distance or increasing the volume.

- If your dog breaks the stay, lure it back to where it was and reposition it in the down stay but do not reward your dog. Then go back further than your last point of success and progress more slowly to ensure success rewarding your dog for holding the stay.
- When working on short stays, always take a play break after three repetitions of the exercise. Once your stays are thirty seconds or longer, take a short play break after each release to help your dog clear its mind.
- When expanding time or distance, only expand one criterion per exercise. Make sure time or distance is expanded in small increments such as one step each time or a few seconds longer to set your dog up for success. Only take the next step when your dog is successful with the last – let your dog set the pace.

#### References

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