



Woofles
Gourmet Petfood Kitchen

Sit... Stay... Roll Over... Play Dead... Take out the rubbish....

[Part I]

Teaching your dog to sit on cue is one of those basic behaviour that every dog should know, and luckily it's a simple behaviour to teach. Teaching your dog a completely dependable 'Stay', no matter what the distraction on the other hand, can take a lot more practice and will be covered more in depth in Part II.

Ok... so my title may be slightly misleading... we aren't going to teach your dog to take out the rubbish... that might be pushing the limits a little bit... the roll over and play dead... well with time, that can be taught using the same principles as these two lesson.

A dog sits dozens of times a day, on its own. If we make it a point to reward him a good percentage of the times when he does, he'll do it even more, because living beings repeat behaviours that are rewarding to them.

Reward Markers

A reward marker is a word or a sound that tells the dog the instant he has exhibited a desirable behaviour. Clickers are commonly used as reward markers because the 'Click' sound is so distinctive and consistent. Reward markers can also consist of the word 'Yes' (or any other word you choose), or any other consistent, distinct sound. The 'Click' or 'Yes' is a promise to the dog that a treat is forthcoming, and every 'Click' earns a treat.

Test your dog's response to the clicker by clicking it in your pocket to muffle the sharpness of the sound. Then feed him an irresistible treat. Click and treat. Click and treat... do this several more times, as the dog will soon start to associate the sound of the click with receiving a reward. Assuming the dog doesn't react badly to the sound of the clicker, remove the clicker from your pocket and continue to click and reward. This process should be done over a period of a few minutes... allowing the dog to take a few breaths in between mouthfuls of treat. Usually, it takes no more than a half-dozen treats to convince the dog to rivet his attention on you.

Once this happens, stop the constant flow of treats, and hold one up near your chest. Often, the dog will try to jump up for the treat. If he does, simply whisk the treat out of sight and turn away, without making eye contact or paying him any attention. Eventually he will sit,

because it's easier to look up at you (and the treat) when he's sitting. The instant he does, Click! and treat.

It takes most dogs less than a few minutes to become sitting machines, offering sit after sit in order to make the 'Click' happen and earn his reward. This is the secret of the Reward Marker. Once you have established this, the dog is ready for training.

Putting Sit on Cue

There is no point in using a work to ask the dog to do something when he has no idea what it means. Once we know we can get the dog to offer the behaviour, then we should add the word so that he can start to make the association between the word and the behaviour.

This is easy with the sit. Take a step backward. The dog gets up to follow his treat machine. Stop, and he sits to make the Click! happen. As soon as his bottom touches the floor, say "Sit" in a clear voice, Click and treat. Repeat this several times, and then start saying

"Sit" just before he sits. By watching his body language, you can predict when he is about to sit. He does not yet understand that the word is his prompt to sit.

Test his assertion. Ask your dog to sit at a time when his body language tells you he is not about to sit - he is distracted, sniffing the floor, or looking away from you. Lo and behold... he doesn't sit! He has not "refused" to sit on cue - he simply doesn't understand the slightly different context. Don't nag at him with repetitions of the "Sit" cue. Rather, get his attention, and when you can see that he is ready to sit, say the word. He promptly responds. Click and Treat.

The most valuable aspect of this training method is that it teaches a dog how to learn. This is a skill that the two of you can rely on for the rest of his training career - whether for formal competition, or to perform party tricks to impress your friends. His ability and interest in learning behaviours that please you will also help make him a more enjoyable housemate and companion.

This information can also be found on our website www.gourmetpetfood.co.nz