

It's A Dog's World™

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PRIVATE LESSON: WEEK 1

The goal for this lesson is to begin teaching your dog five commands: Watch, Sit, Down, Heel and Come.

REWARDS

You need to develop a reward system for your dog. A reward could be tactile praise (touch), verbal praise, toys, or treats. We will be teaching your dog to perform various behaviors using a technique called "luring". Food is the easiest method of luring your dog into doing certain behaviors - most dogs are motivated to work for food! Try to work with your dog by using treats to start off with. If your dog isn't showing enough motivation to work for the treats, try holding off feeding your dog until after the training session or change the "value" of the treat you are using. Remember, the item has to be important to your dog in order to keep your dog motivated and focused.

The size of the treat should be about the size of a little fingernail. It should be moist and easy to eat quickly. Good examples of treats to use are hot dogs, cheese, beef jerky treats or *Natural Balance* treat rolls. A bad example would be something like a dog biscuit. You don't want the dog to be distracted by what it is eating - it should just be a quick flavor burst on the tongue.

RELEASE WORD

Before starting, pick a release word to use to release your dog from a command. It's similar to the "at ease" command for a soldier. Once you have given the release command, it signifies to your dog that he or she has completed the command to your satisfaction. Don't choose a release word that you use in your every day language. Examples of good release words that you may choose are: break, release, k.o., kick – back, chill out, take 5, free, etc. Steer clear of using the word, "ok" as this is frequently used in everyday language. Later on in the training, the only things that can release your dog from a command, out of the house or car is the release word, the "come" command, the "heel" command or the "let's go" command.

WATCH

"Watch" is a fundamental and essential command for all dogs to know. Teaching your dog the "watch" command teaches your dog to have good eye contact with you. Good eye contact keeps your dog focused on you, instead of other dogs, skateboards, or in general various distractions that can excite or agitate your dog.

To teach the "watch" command start by having a treat between your thumb and your index finger. Take the treat up to your eyes and give the command "watch". Once your dog makes eye contact with you, say, "Yes!" and give the treat. Gradually increase the time that the dog is giving you the eye contact by having your dog give you the eye contact and delay the moment that you give the treat.

When you begin to work on this command, train in a low distraction area. For example, work on this command while you are watching television in your living room. Eventually, increase the distraction level in the environment that you are working in. Your dog should be able to give you the “watch” command while you are sitting in the waiting room at the veterinarian’s office or while at the park.

SIT

First, start off by holding a treat between the thumb and index finger of your right hand. Put the treat on the tip of the dog’s nose. Draw the treat straight up the dog’s nose and in between the dog’s eyes and give the command “sit”. Naturally, when the head goes up, the bottom goes down. Once the dog’s bottom hits the ground, release the treat into the dog’s mouth and say, “good sit!” Before you move your hand away, give the dog its release word. Then go ahead and play with your dog. This would be a perfect time to throw the ball around or play with your dog and his or her favorite toy.

By about the second day, you are going to take the treat and hold it in your left hand along with the leash. Pretend that you have the treat in your right hand. Lure the treat like you did previously. Once the dog’s bottom hits the ground, pop the treat into the dog’s mouth from your left hand. You are teaching the dog that the treat will not always come from your right hand.

You will start using the hand signal for sit after the third or fourth day. The hand signal starts with your arm straight at your side with your palm facing outward. Bending your arm at the elbow, bring your hand straight up. (It is similar to throwing a bowling ball.)

By the third and fourth day, before you start your training session, hide treats in easily accessible spots in the area that you are going to be training in. By now, your dog should know to sit on command. Stop luring with the treat and simply ask your dog to “sit” while giving the hand signal. When asking your dog to sit, be sure to be near your hidden treats so that you may give the treat to your dog quickly upon successful completion of the behavior without you or the dog having to move. The dog has just learned that treats can come from your right hand, left hand or even from anywhere around where he or she is standing. This makes the dog want to work for you even though there isn’t a treat in your right hand!

By the end of the week, you are going to start weaning your dog off the treats. Give your dog a treat for every other good sit, then every third and finally for only the best sits. You are also going to try to get your dog to start holding the sit for longer and longer periods of time. Start by milking the treats out to your dog. You may have to continuously feed your dog treats at first. Slowly build up the time in between giving treats. Give a treat every second, then every 5 seconds, then every 15, and so on until you are giving only 1 treat out once a minute.

LEAVE IT

There may be times when you may need to get your dog’s attention BEFORE he or she gets something in his or her mouth, i.e. another dog, dead bird, food, etc. We are going to teach your dog to look at you every time you give the command, “leave it”.

Step 1 - To begin teaching the “leave it” command, start with your dog on a leash and hold the treat in your closed hand. Offer the hand with the treat to your dog and say, “Leave it!” Don’t pull your hand away from the dog. Keeping repeating the command

until your dog gets frustrated and looks away (usually up at you). As soon as your dog looks away, praise him and give him a treat from your OTHER hand. Repeat this over and over until your dog is consistently looking away from the item in your hand. If your dog starts looking immediately toward your rewarding hand, switch hands and start over.

Step 2 – Now that your dog is grasping the idea of “Leave it”, it’s time to make things more difficult. Start by placing a treat on the floor or counter top just beyond your dog’s reach (be sure to have your dog’s leash on). If your dog starts to move towards the treat, give him a verbal correction (e.g. – “No!”) while holding the leash firmly. Once your dog relaxes, stops attempting to get the treat on the floor, and looks away from the item, promptly reinforce him or her by giving your dog a treat from your hand along with verbal praise. Soon, your dog will understand to ignore the treat on the floor. Once this begins to happen, you can begin saying to your dog, “leave it” right after you toss a treat on the floor. You want your dog to learn that when he or she hears “leave it”, he or she comes to you for a reward rather than picking up what is on the ground.

Next, begin to watch your dog for signs of avoidance when you toss a treat on the ground. Signs of avoidance can vary from dog to dog. Watch carefully, or you may miss your dog’s cue for avoidance. Typically, most dogs will look away, look at you, or simply move its head away from the treat. Once you have determined that your dog is displaying signs of avoidance, immediately praise him or her and reward with a treat. When the response is reliable, you can introduce other items and practice the “leave it” command on those.

HEEL/LET’S GO

As with the “sit” command, start by placing a treat between your thumb and index finger. Put your right hand, with the treat, across your body by your left knee. Get your dog to follow you while you walk with the treat in this position repeating the command “heel” or “Let’s Go”. Bunch up the leash in your left hand. You only need to walk a few steps, then stop and lure your dog into the sit position.

The hand signal for “heel” is patting the left side of your leg as well as stepping off with your left foot. You can start using the hand signal straight away.

By the third or fourth day, try to get your dog to pay attention to you by giving you good eye focus while you are walking. Do this by drawing the treat up from your knee to your eyes while you are walking. You should no longer be bending over and should be standing upright.

For the rest of the week, try to keep adding steps in between auto sits (sitting automatically in the heel position) and adding turns.

COME

When your dog is at the end of the leash, run backwards while calling your dog’s name with the command “come”. Have a treat in your right hand. When you come to a stop, have the dog sit in front of you and give the dog the treat, while saying, “good come!” Before allowing your dog to get up, be sure to give him or her the release word. The hand signal for come is your right arm straight out away from your body, bend your arm at the elbow and bring your palm to your chest.

HOMEWORK

Work with your dog several times a day for only 10 – 15 minutes in each session. Keep your lessons upbeat and always end on a good note.

By the end of the week, you should be able to:

- Get your dog to consistently give you eye-contact when you say “Watch”
- Get your dog to perform sit without luring.
- Give the hand signal and verbal signal simultaneously.
- Work up to a one minute sit - do not move any further than six inches from your dog.
- Get your dog to consistently look away from any “Leave it” item.
- Get your dog to heel alongside you, while you are standing upright.
- Have your dog come to you the first time you give the command and have him or her sit in front of you at the end of the command. **Do not practice recall commands off-leash, except as discussed with your trainer!**

Do not give any corrections this week. Remember to have fun!!!