

Sit and Down

Some of the first commands we teach our dogs are sit and down. Although neither of these is the most important, in my opinion it is come, they are easy to teach and are very useful as they lay the foundation for your dog's good manners and your ability to control him under a variety of circumstances around the house and in the field.

As in any command you ever give your dog, whether it is a verbal or hand signal, only give it once then enforce it if the dog does not comply. As a competitor in American Kennel Club obedience trials, I was initially surprised at how easy the transition was from verbal commands to hand signals. I have successfully used hand signals with my German Wirehaired Pointer in hunting situations while trying to sneak up on those PhD pheasants in South Dakota. There is always more than one way to complete a task but here is how I see sit and down taught to beginner pups and dogs in formal obedience classes. You can train both behaviors in the same session.

Get your dog's attention and have a handful of small tidbits ready. Let your pup see the tidbit in your hand and now raise your hand with the treat slightly over his head. Your hand should end up just over his head. This will cause him to lift his nose and he should naturally sit. When his butt hits the floor he gets the treat. As in any training, timing is very important. If he tries to stand up on his hind legs, you are holding the treat too high. If you wish, you may give the sit command as you raise your hand over his head, but only once. If you choose to wait on the command, you may introduce the command later when the pup has caught on to the concept. Be patient, the pup may spin around to get the treat or try some other method, but dogs are problem solvers so let it work through the wrong behaviors until it hits the sit that produces the treat.

Down is taught in a similar method, but because the treat will be near his mouth, you should place the treat in your closed hand. Put the treat in your hand, close it then open your hand and give it to pup. Repeat this until pup realizes there is a treat in your fist and tries to get at it. Now, with the trainee either sitting or standing, lower your treat fist right between his front feet. His nose will go after it and if he lies down, open the fist and reward him. He may want to paw at the fist while standing or sitting but only laying down opens the fist. This method is used as it teaches the dog to fold backwards into the down position. If you hold the treat in front of the forefeet, the pup will learn to step forward into the down. Not a big deal but in obedience competition, taking a step or steps into the down costs points.

Keep your training sessions short and fun. Always stop when pup shows any signs of losing interest and always end on a positive note even if you have to resort back to a behavior that pup knows well.

Next month, we will cover another basic command. Until then if you have a new pup or just need a refresher course for you and your established dog, you both can benefit a great deal by attending an obedience class. I am not talking about taking a class where you buy your dog food. You can easily find a kennel club that holds obedience classes near you on the AKC website at www.AKC.org. From the home page, click on the button in the gray banner labeled *Club*. Now, in the center of the page is a list of links, click on the one labeled *Club Search*. On this page, select the *Obedience Clubs* link. Not all of these clubs

Sit and Down

will offer obedience classes but you can bet they can send you in the right direction for an obedience school near you. Also, under the *Obedience Clubs* link you will find another link labeled *Training Clubs*. This is a smaller list of clubs but they all do offer training classes. If you need further help, email me at grgdubois@comcast.net.