

Teaching Sit, Down, and Stay

When teaching sit and down, start by using just a hand signal, cupping your hand palm- and fingers-up. We only add a verbal cue once a hand signal is reliable. Practice this with the hand signal 4-5 times marking and rewarding with food every instance, then pair your hand signal and verbal cue 4-5 times.

Now try just a verbal cue; if the dog does it, have a party! Reward them, play with them, give them a quick break. If they don't do it, don't repeat your cue! Use your hand signal to show them what you want them to do.

Do the same with down: use your hand signal, flipping your hand over, flat palm down, and bringing it to the floor in front of your dog's paws. There are alternative ways to teach a down if your pup is having difficulty: Move your hand slowly away from your pup, or bring your hand between their paws and slowly move it inwards closer to their bum.



Adding a stay takes time and patience. It's important to teach different elements of the behaviour – duration, distance, distraction and difficulty – separately and in increasing increments to ensure the stay is a solid behaviour that your dog can perform under many different circumstances.

Ask for a sit or down using just your verbal cue. Don't repeat your cue; if your dog doesn't get it, go back to using your hand signal. Begin adding duration to the behaviour by rewarding the dog periodically, at random intervals. Slowly increase the time your pup holds the stay, release them after every repetition, and reward!

Next, begin adding distance: take a step back, mark, return to your dog and reward. Release. Repeat, slowly adding more and more distance. If your dog moves from their sit or down, give them a break and try again, reducing the distance to a point where they are able to hold their stay before progressing.

Now begin to add distraction, bouncing a ball, squeaking a squeaker, or enticing with treats. Reward your dog when they offer the stay. If they come out their stay, choose something less distracting and work your way up.

Now that your dog is offering stay, begin to add a verbal "stay" cue after you place them in position, then repeat the above steps. Slowly add all your duration, distance, and distraction together. Once your pooch is doing really well, begin to make the stay more difficult by changing the places where you practise it.

