

Dog Tricks to Train Calm Behavior

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You know your dog is the coolest canine on the block. Want your friends and family members to know too? Whether your pooch is 7 weeks or 17 years old, has competition obedience titles or has never had any training at all, he can learn cool tricks and enjoy performing them too. He'll love the structured, fun interaction with you and will get both mental and physical exercise, which can help him behave better overall.

* Use bite-sized treats or the dog's regular kibble to reward the individual training steps at first. That way we can reward the right behaviors a lot in a short period of time (10, 20, 30 + times in the course of just minutes) and as a result your pooch will learn the steps quickly.

* Start by rewarding or sometimes luring a behavior that may look very different from your goal behavior. Then when the dog's good at that step, you'll start rewarding behaviors that are closer and closer to your goal behavior. In other words, you'll be shaping behaviors through little steps called successive approximations. By training in mini-steps you and your dog will always experience success. Even the most wayward dog will be able to learn the steps.

* Once the final step is learned train the cue word so that it becomes reliable. Avoid putting a word to the behavior until the behavior is actually learned. Otherwise, to your dog, the word will just sound like random babbling.

As an added step we can switch to other rewards besides food and we can train the pet to repeat the trick multiple times in succession without needing a reward of any kind each time.

Beg (sit on hind end with front legs up).

Sit your dog next to a wall or solid surface. Next have several treats or kibble ready in your hand. Put the treat up to your dog's nose and as he goes to sniff it, raise it just enough so that his front legs come off the ground. Then give him the treat. Repeat this 5-10 times until he consistently balances with legs slightly off the ground. In the next step put the treat up to his nose and then raise the treat so that he has to balance with his feet higher off the ground. Again repeat this until he consistently balances with legs that high off the ground. With each step hold the treat higher until he can balance with his back completely vertical to the ground.

Now train him to remain in this position for longer amounts of time. Once he's in the beg position, give him 3-5 or more treats in a row. At first have treats come frequently and then space them out so that he'll stay in position for longer amounts of time for the same amount of treats.

Now it's time to turn the lure into a hand signal. Take the treat and instead of putting right up to his nose, raise from farther away to a height where he will raise his body into "beg" position. You may only be able to hold your hand 2" away from him at first. But after a handful of trials you may be able to move your hand further away. When he can do this consistently, see if he knows the hand alone is a cue but raising it but without a food treat. Then give the treat with the other hand.

Training the verbal cue. Once he goes into “beg” with the hand cue consistently, add the verbal cue. Say “beg” and then follow with the hand cue. It’s important that the verbal word comes before the hand cue otherwise it will not come to predict the hand cue. If they come at the same time there’s no need for him to learn the verbal cue—since he’s getting the visual one. When you’ve done this 10x in a row, say the verbal cue and wait an instant to see if fido responds by “begging” without needing the hand cue. If he doesn’t then repeat the pairing 10 more times before you test again. Once he has the verbal cue there’s no need for a hand cue anymore.

Bang! (Lie on your side)

Start with Fido lying down with his belly on the floor. The trick to this trick is training him to turn his head to the side so that he will shift his weight onto one hip. Traditionally people try to put the treat in front of the dogs nose and get him to follow it until he’s lying on his side, but many dogs won’t follow the lure. So, instead, we just place the treat to the side of his nose just enough so he’ll turn his head a little. Once you give him the first treat, see if you can follow with several more before he moves his head back to a different location. This may require holding several treats in the treat hand. Do this 5-10x and then next time hold the treat further to his side so that he turns his head more. With each step, turn his head more. When he’s able to turn his hip so that he can lie on his side, then give the treat low enough so that he lays on his side. Give a sequence of treats to keep him on his side. AT first have the sequence of treats come frequently, then increase the interval between treats so that he learns to stay in that position for longer amounts of time for the same amount of treats.

When you get to the point that it’s easy to present a treat and have him immediately lie on his side, where he stays, you can start pointing you hand like it’s a gun if you’re going to make the trick “bang.” Next add the cue word. Say “bang” and the immediately follow by forming a gun with your hand and give him the treats once he lies on his side. Once he’s on his side give a sequence of treats spaced out as much as you can.

- For **more complex tricks** where communicating the exact right behavior can be difficult we may first train the pet that a sound such as a click from a toy clicker, or a word that they never hear, spoken in a very conspicuous manner, means that a treat is coming. As a result the dog will know that when he hears that “marker sound or word,” it means he’s done something right and will get a food reward within a second or two.
- When using the marker word or sound the goal is that when the dog hears it, he stops what he’s doing and turns to wherever the treat is being dispensed. That’s how you know the click or word is having an effect.

For cool videos demonstrating the teaching of dog tricks, go to <http://www.askdryin.com/dogtricks.php>