

Dog Scouts of America

Naked Dog Obedience Training Instructions

These instructions are very basic guidelines to help you achieve the objectives on your merit badge check-off sheet. They are not intended to supercede any of the information your instructor gives you at the Orientation & Safety Lecture or Field Session.

First, you have to pair the Unconditioned Reinforcer (UR), or reward (usually food), with the Conditioned Reinforcer (CR), or Reward Marker (RM), which will be the sound of the clicker (it could also be a short, one-syllable word, like "Yes!" You will do this by clicking then giving the treat, over and over until the dog makes the connection. This will probably take upwards of 25 repetitions.

Then you can begin shaping behaviors you want, by waiting until they occur naturally and then reinforcing them (respondent learning), or eliciting the behavior with some kind of lure and reinforcing that behavior (or an approximation of that behavior) with your Reward Marker.

SIT

Take a food lure and raise it above the dog's head, right between his ears. As you do this, the dog will try to stretch to reach the treat (unless he's dense, or doesn't like food). Sitting down helps the front end to stretch taller, so most dogs will sit when presented with this puzzle. I call this the "Teeter-totter" maneuver. Head goes up--butt goes down. The minute the butt hits the ground, and the dog is officially in a "sit" position, you want to immediately reinforce that behavior. Give your RM (click) and produce your UR (treat). Do this a few dozen times. You will start to notice that the dog tries to intentionally sit to earn the reward marker and ensuing reward. When "sit" becomes the dog's favorite behavior, and you can just about predict it, you can then NAME the behavior, and start giving the cue word, "SIT," every time you elicit the behavior with the treat. The luring hand now becomes what we call a "prompt," and you'll have to fade this prompt as you get the dog used to assuming a sit on your new, VERBAL cue. To make the response more reliable, put the rewards on a variable reinforcement schedule (don't click and treat every single time any more).

DOWN

With the dog in a sitting position, take a food lure and lower it down between the dog's front legs. As you do this, the dog will try to stretch and lower himself to reach the treat (unless he's dense, or doesn't like food). Lying down helps the front end to stretch further, so most dogs will lie down when presented with this puzzle. Be careful that you don't get the "Teeter-totter" maneuver by accident. Head goes down--butt goes up. You have to use just the right combination of down and forward to prevent the butt from popping up. The minute the chest hits the ground, and the dog is officially in a down position, you want to immediately reinforce that behavior. Give your RM (click) and produce your UR (treat). Do this a few dozen times. You will start to notice that the dog tries to intentionally lie down to earn the reward marker and ensuing reward. When "down" becomes the dog's favorite behavior, and you can just about predict it, you can then NAME the behavior, and start giving the cue word, "DOWN," every time you elicit the behavior with the treat. The luring hand now becomes extraneous (a "prompt") and you'll have to fade this prompt as you get the dog used to assuming a down on your new, VERBAL cue. To make the response more reliable, put the rewards on a variable reinforcement schedule

HEEL

This time, hold the food lure at your left side, where the dog will have to follow along at heel to maintain contact with the lure. Take a step forward with the dog watching the lure. If he

maintains a reasonable heel position for one step, give the RM and reward. Do this again, but require that the dog maintain position for two steps. Do several repetitions of each level before increasing the requirement to another step. Build up to at least ten steps of off-leash heeling. When "heel" becomes an automatic behavior, and you can just about predict it, you can then NAME the behavior, and start giving the cue word, "HEEL," every time you elicit the behavior with the treat. The luring hand now becomes extraneous, and you'll have to fade this prompt as you get the dog used to assuming a heel position on your new, VERBAL cue. To make the response more reliable, put the rewards on a variable reinforcement schedule.

STAND

Take a food lure and touch it to the dog's nose, then move it straight forward. As you do this, the dog will stretch to try to reach the treat (unless he's dense, or doesn't like food), when it goes out of his reach, he'll stand up to follow it. The minute the dog is officially standing, you want to immediately reinforce that behavior. Give your RM (click) and produce your UR (treat). Do this a few dozen times. You will start to notice that the dog tries to intentionally stand to earn the reward marker and ensuing reward. When "stand" becomes the dog's favorite behavior, and you can count on it, you can then NAME the behavior, and start giving the cue word, "STAND," every time you elicit the behavior with the treat. The luring hand now becomes the prompt, and you'll have to fade this prompt as you get the dog used to assuming a sit on your new, VERBAL cue. To make the response more reliable, put the rewards on a variable reinforcement schedule.

STAY

Have the dog sit. After a few seconds of sitting, give the RM and reward. Do this several times. Then, when you feel the dog is reliable, try dangling a treat just out of his reach. If he goes for it, he needs to hear a "No Reward Marker" (NRM), telling him that you are not "paying" for that behavior. He'll hear, "TOO BAD!" and he'll see the reward disappearing into oblivion, telling him, "OOPS--getting up was a bad move--it is a dead end behavior." This exercise teaches two things. It reinforces proper stays, and it installs a no reward mark, or extinction cue (don't persist in that behavior). Gradually require longer and longer stays, and use all of the various positions. Include context changes (distractions) and reward compliance in each new situation.

COME

For this one, you have to be able to control all of the external potentially rewarding forces which exist in the environment. When you call your dog, there should be nothing available which is more reinforcing than you with your RM and reward. There can not be any squirrels for him to chase, or edibles for him to pick up from the grass, or other dogs to get his attention. If there are, then you will have to control THOSE influences, by putting a leash on the dog (tisk, tisk) and showing the dog that only by coming to you does he get all good things in life. You can even reward him by letting him play with the other dogs, or chase the squirrels. The leash must never be used to drag or correct the dog at all. It is only used to keep the dog in your vicinity, so that you can prevent him from being reinforced inadvertently by outside stimuli.

COMBINATIONS

Begin combining your different cues. Try for immediate response to each cue. Start up close, and then change the context to include responding from further away. Try for five responses or position changes from five feet away (as in: SIT, STAND, DOWN, SIT, DOWN). You can throw in cues for which your dog already has a learned response, like SPEAK, WAVE, ROLL OVER, or anything else you want to include in your 5 behaviors.