

Dog: Heel Command



Benefit

The definition of heel is for your dog to be at your left side, walking parallel to you with no more than six inches between you. The right side of your dog's head is lined up with your left leg.

Heel teaches your dog not to pull on leash and is great for times when you need to walk your dog in a controlled fashion, for example through crowded areas, when passing by another dog you don't want your dog to meet, going by a group of children, or crossing the street, etc. It also teaches your dog to walk under control when off leash.

What You Need

- Treats like chicken or cheese, a favorite toy, or enthusiastic praise.
- A quiet area without distractions for practicing.
- A clicker, if you use one. Otherwise, say "yes!" to mark the behavior.
- Ten minutes 2-3 times daily.

Prerequisites

Your dog needs to be able to walk easily on leash.

How to Train It

Step 1. Hold a food treat in your right hand two inches above your dog's nose and parallel to your left leg. Your hand should be as close to your left leg as possible.

Step 2. Begin with your dog on your left side, facing the same direction as you when you say your dog's name, then say "heel," and begin to walk. Take no more than a few steps, be upbeat, and praise him every step of the way.

Step 3. When you find your dog next to you in "heel" position, click and treat (or praise and treat).

Step 4. Slowly build up to 30 seconds of heeling. If your dog starts drifting off, you are probably taking too many steps or not reinforcing him frequently enough.

Step 5. When your dog is consistently heeling for 30 seconds, continue to praise but gradually give fewer and fewer treats.

Pitfall

This exercise is very difficult for the dog to do for a long period of time. You do not want to ask your dog to heel every time you go for a walk. For most situations, "let's go" means you may walk ahead, but pulling isn't tolerated.

Tips

- When you ask your dog to heel, don't let him sniff the floor or look around. His attention should be on you.
- Keep heel training sessions short and upbeat. It's difficult for a dog at first, so be careful not to phase out the treats too quickly.
- Don't use punishment tools like prong or choke chains; you want your dog to be happy next to you—reinforcement is the key.