



Down Command

Benefit

Down is a great way to teach your dog impulse control and to make your life easier. A dog lying down can't jump, surf counters, knock over trash cans, or steal your shoes. A dog that masters a well-trained down is much easier to take out in public and to other people's houses.

What You Need

- High-value treats like chicken or cheese, or a favorite toy.
- A clicker, if you use one. Otherwise, say "yes!" to mark the behavior.
- A quiet area without distractions for practicing.

Prerequisite

Your dog needs to know how to sit on command.

How to Train It

Step 1. First, stand in front of your dog, facing her. Ask her to sit, then click and treat. Next, hold a treat within an inch of her nose using a flat hand with your fingers pointing toward your dog (this becomes the hand signal). Lure your dog into the down position by bringing your hand down toward the floor between her legs. Move slowly, so your dog's nose follows and she doesn't lose interest.

Step 2. When your dog's elbows hit the ground, she will probably sink into the down position. If so, click (or say "yes!") and release the treat. If her elbows hit the ground but her rear has gone up, move your hand away from her like you're tracing a line on the floor. As soon as she is in the down position, click and release the treat.

Step 3. Step back so your dog has to stand up to follow you and repeat the exercise. Get a sit, then lure a down position again. Do this 15 or 20 times until she easily follows the lure into a down position.

Step 4. Now, get rid of the treat as a lure. Face your dog and hold your hand (without the treat) in front of your dog in the same hand signal as before. If your dog lies down, click and treat her with the other hand. Repeat this step several times in different places around the house.

Step 5. Now it's time to add the verbal cue. Face your dog, say "down," and give the hand signal. When your dog lies down, click and treat her. Keep practicing this step until your dog gets it right nine out of ten trials using the verbal cue and hand signal.

Step 6. Now try without the hand signal. Say "down" and if your dog lies down, click and treat. If your dog needs a little guidance, show her your hand and indicate the downward movement. Keep practicing until your dog reliably lies down when given the verbal cue.

Step 7. When your dog is consistently lying down in response to the verbal cue, you can begin to practice in more distracting areas, such as your yard, a quiet neighborhood street, or someone else's house. Eventually, your dog will be able to lie down on cue at the park or the local café. Also increase the length of time your dog stays in the down position before giving the treat.

Step 8. When your dog is consistently lying down in more distracting areas, you can begin to use the treats only intermittently. Now only fast downs will earn your dog a treat, whereas a slow response gets her a pat on the head and a "good dog!" Also be sure to use "life rewards" to strengthen your dog's response. Ask for a down before throwing a ball, opening a door for her to go outside, allowing her onto the couch, etc.

Tips

- Remember to say "down" only once. Otherwise, you water down the word.
- Use the "down" command only for the laying down behavior, but not for other commands such as getting off the couch or discouraging jumping. Use a different word for those commands.
- If your dog is having trouble with any step, go back a step and practice that until it's solid before you move on.