

Top Ten Commands

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What does your dog need to know to be a good companion and how are you going to teach it? Our top ten commands are a great place to start!

1. Toilet time

The first and most urgent cue to teach your puppy is to toilet in front of you. Use context cues such as popping the puppy on a lead and taking him to your chosen spot in the garden. Use a phrase that you won't be embarrassed to say in public such as 'hurry up'. You may start with saying your cue "hurry up" only while the puppy is peeing. Then slowly, move the cue forward to when the puppy sniffs or circles – usually precursors to squatting and peeing. When the puppy has finished it's vital that he is rewarded with praise and – if you want the training to go as fast as possible – a treat. Eventually simply getting out the lead and heading for the garden with your cue words should be ample information to produce a toileting response. This is fantastic because now you know you can toilet your dog before you leave for work, or bedtime or a car trip. It puts you in control of the when and where of toileting.

2. Positions – sit/stand/down .

Position changes are like the 'abc's' of dog training. Although you can achieve a reasonable level of control over your dog just by having a reliable 'sit' – teaching 'stand' and 'down' gives you a greater variety of options and will make training more interesting for both of you. With three options your dog cannot predict which position will be next – really testing whether or not he understands the three different concepts. Ideally, your dog should respond to your word and/or hand signal both by your side, from in front and at a distance. Positions are most easily taught using a food lure.

- To teach 'sit' slowly move a small treat above your dog's head as the head goes up, the bottom will come down and 'sit' happens.
- For 'stand' -draw the treat straight forward from the dog's nose level. This will become the hand signal for 'stand'.
- For 'drop'- take the treat toward the floor between the dog's toes. This will become the hand signal for 'drop'.
- Remove the treat from your hand after about three repetitions and repeat using the exact same hand movement . This will soon become your visual command or signal for your dog to sit, stand or drop.
- When your dog is responding to the signal, add the word just before the hand signal.
- Reward AFTER each correct response sometimes use food sometime just praise.

Adding Distance

For an extra challenge work on position changes at a distance. Distance work provides extra control and safety whenever your dog is off lead. Imagine your dog running toward a road – a distant 'drop' command stops him in his tracks. Distance work is also essential for TV work where trainers have to be able to cue their dogs from behind the cameras. Start by leaving your dog in a stand and moving away just a few feet, turn and signal the drop or sit. Sometimes leaving your dog in a restricted spot such as a stair landing or table will prevent the dog from creeping toward you. Generously reward every correct response and soon you will have a dog that will happily sit or drop at any distance!

'3. Release' , 'Stay' and 'Wait'

'Release' is probably the most under-rated command in dog training. You must be sure to teach your dog that every behaviour has a beginning *AND* an end. Too often people ask their dog's to sit but forget to tell them to 'unsit'. If you are unreliable



your dog will also be unreliable. The first command tells the dog to start doing something, the release command tells him to stop doing it. Common release words are 'free', 'off you go', 'playtime' and "o.k."

'Stay' adds a new criteria – it informs your dog that you are now moving away and he is to stay. Place an open hand in front of the dog's face, say 'stay' and move just a step away. Slowly increase the distance and time away. Always come back to release your dog. This will prevent creating a dog who anxiously watches for a release signal the whole time you are away. 'Stay' should mean stay put until you return. Only your return will cue your dog that he will soon be released.

'Wait' is for a temporary pause or stay. It suggests that the dog remains attentive because in a moment he'll be asked to do something such as 'come', 'fetch' or 'follow'. Many people also use a different hand signal for 'wait' and 'stay'. Think carefully about what you want each of these terms to mean before you start to train your dog.

4. Come

'Come' is obviously one of the most important commands to teach your dog and one that many people have trouble with. Most people will get a new dog and immediately start calling 'come'. There is no point however in calling 'come' to your dog unless you have first taught him what 'come' means - you may just as well be saying "26! 26!" 'Come' can be described as either a direct movement toward you or a position close to you. If your dog is running directly toward you say 'come' to associate the word with that behaviour. Remember you need to reward your dog to encourage him to repeat this behaviour. Use a light long line and do lots of practices of 'come' and reward. When you have set the dog up for success – 'coming' when called will eventually become a habit.

5. Speak and Quiet

'Speak' and 'quiet' should always be taught at the same time – after all it's really just the 'on' and 'off' switch for the same behaviour. Most dogs will bark at predictable times such as when someone arrives at the door. Say 'speak!' (or whatever word you might like to use) and praise/reward your dog. Follow this with 'Quiet' and immediately reward with several treats in succession. Reward either the 'speak' or the 'quiet' more heavily - depending on which your dog finds harder, or which is more important to you. By 'labeling' both these behaviours you have more chance of putting them under your control. Note that choosing a different word for 'speak' such as 'alert' – will make no difference to your dog but will change the perception of your dog's barking to other people so choose your command carefully.

6. Take /Give/ Leave-it

These three commands concern the taking, releasing and ignoring of an object. 'Take' means you are giving your dog permission to put an object into his mouth – such as a piece of food, dinner or a toy. 'Take' can be taught right from when you start rewarding your puppy with food treats – precede the release of the treat with 'take'. This is particularly useful if you have young children at home who are likely to run around the house with food at dog-eye level. Teaching 'take' should prevent your puppy from opportunity grabbing. The 'take' can also be a great way to start teaching a retrieve by encouraging your dog to take a ball into his mouth. Follow this with 'give' - the release of the treat or toy. All games need rules and it is a good idea to teach your dog that in most cases, 'give' results in either a food treat or the continuing of a game. Not 'giving' results in end of game. Tug is a great game to play with most dogs but only provided they've learnt to 'take' and 'give' reliably on command.

'Leave-it' commonly means ignore that – look at me instead. This is a very useful command and may prevent the dog ingesting something harmful such as chicken bones or even baits. Practice at home, and reward 'leave-it' with a really good reward from your own hand. You can extend this exercise to prevent your dog taking food from other people too by doing lots of practices with different people.



7. Up and Off

'Up' and 'off' are general control commands to help move your dog around. 'Up' can be permission to come onto the furniture, into the car, onto the grooming table or even jump into your arms. At the same time you will need to train the opposite command 'off' – to remove your dog from such places. Again, reward the more difficult or more important part of this exercise more heavily. For some dogs and owners this may be getting 'off' the furniture for others it may be getting 'up' into the car.

8. Paces – fast, slow and reverse!

Your dog will walk better on a lead if you have taught him cues for walking slowly and quickly. This is very easy to do simply by having your dog on a lead and as you speed up say "quickly!" To slow up –exaggerate a little and as you say 'steady' creep along as though you're sneaking into your house late at night. Dogs will really enjoy responding to your changing body language as you play this game. Say 'quickly' in a slightly higher, more excited voice. Say 'steady' with a lower, slower tone – these sounds have been found to be universal in speeding up and slowing down lots of domestic animals.

Another aspect to add is 'reverse' or 'back'. This can be really useful in tight situations such as doorways where you may need your dog to step back. 'Back' can be taught in many ways. The main thing is to be on the look-out for when your dog naturally steps back. For many dogs this is when you hold a toy, or if you gently walk into your dog as he stands in front of you – be ready to label the step back with the word 'back' and follow with a reward.

9. Shake hands

This most famous of dog tricks is really a very useful command for several reasons. For starters, it's fun and it's a great way to make your dog appear smart, well trained and friendly – especially to children. It's a good way for shy dogs to greet strangers, rather than have them reach over their head for a pat which is far more threatening. It's also useful for general care such as cutting nails or checking pads for cuts or ticks. Many dogs – notably terriers- will lift their paw to get a treat within a few seconds of a treat appearing. Other dogs are much less inclined to use their feet. Persevere and be creative. Ask the dog to climb onto your lap – reward the moment the first paw is lifted. Your hand reaching down is the most common cue for this behaviour to which you can add "shake!" Practice will make perfect but remember it's the reward more than the word that will make the 'shake' reliable.

10. Relax

It's a great idea to put a label or 'cue' on the sensation of relaxation. This may sound silly at first but it's so easy to do and the benefits can be wonderful. Whenever your dog is relaxed after a long walk and dinner, while undergoing doggy massage- say a word such as 'relax'. You may like to use other 'context' cues as well such as soft music or scented candles. What you are doing is classically conditioning these cues with relaxation. Now, when you need to go over your dog for a tick, or put eye drops in his eyes, or clear out his ears, or cut his toe nails or sort out knots in his coat – you present your cues –music, scent and word – and the struggle disappears. The wilder and more difficult to handle a dog, the greater benefits can be derived from this exercise. If you are able to teach 'relax' cue really well, it can even be used to some benefit when out and about should you come across something that distresses your dog such as loud noises or a scary dog.

Every dog is smart enough to learn the Top Ten Commands but the most important thing of all is that you both enjoy the journey.

