



OKLAHOMA 4-H

TEACH YOUR DOG TO SIT



THE SIT

Sit is one of the most basic and important commands you will ever teach your dog. Not only is sit the starting point for many other obedience commands, a dog that promptly sits on cue will be perceived by others as being polite and well mannered.

Sitting on command can deter many negative behaviors. For instance, if you are dressed up to go to the county 4-H achievement banquet and your dog, Clover, comes running up with muddy paws and is about to jump up on you, you can simply tell Clover to, "sit." By simply sitting, Clover will stop the unwanted behavior of jumping on you.

This guide sheet will offer you three different methods of attaining a sit as well as some games for practicing the sit command. As with all dog training procedures, you should be consistent, patient, track your results and never behave in a manner that causes your dog to become afraid. Most of all make practice fun for both you and your dog.

Remember there is not a good replacement for experience, if you are having difficulties training your dog find someone with experience to provide you some help along the way.

METHOD #1—CAPTURING THE SIT

The sit is one of the easiest behaviors to capture. Simply have treats and your clicker on hand and be ready. Wait for your dog to sit, at the precise moment his rear hits the ground, "click" then treat. Then take a step back, most likely Clover will get up to follow you, then wait for him to sit back down and repeat the click and treat. Continue repeating this process and before long your dog will be sitting faster than you can get the treats to him.



CAPTURING -

Using a reward marker (clicker) to identify a desired behavior that your dog offers on his own.

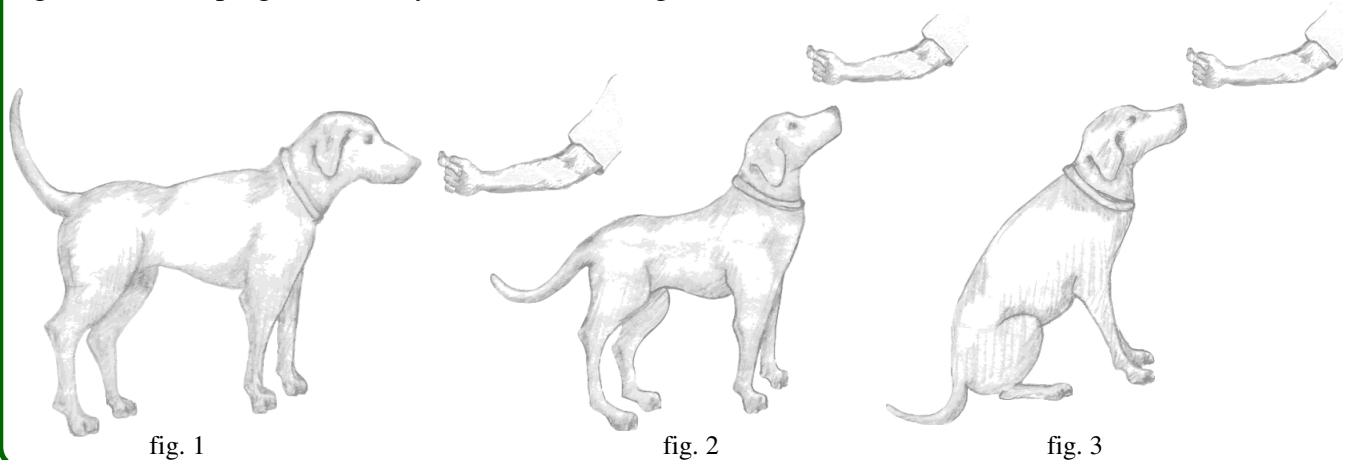
METHOD #2—LURING THE SIT

To lure a dog into position, you will use an item (typically food treats) to guide the dog. While your dog is facing you, hold a treat in your hand just above your dog's nose (fig 1). Then slowly move the lure back over the top of your dog's head (fig 2). As your dog's head moves up to follow the lure, his rear will lower to the ground (fig 3). As soon as his rear hits the ground, give him his treat and offer him lots of praise. You may also want to use a combination of luring and clicking by using the lure to position the dog and clicking to capture the precise moment his rear hits the ground.

While luring the sit, make sure to hold the treat just above your dog's head. If you hold it too high your dog will most likely want to jump up for the treat.

If your dog wants to back up rather than sit down, try starting with your dog in a corner. This way as you move the lure back your dog will be unable to back away.

As soon as Clover begins to reliably present the behavior start trying to lure the behavior without a treat in your hand. Still reward the sits but try to get him successfully sitting just by moving your empty hand over the top of his head. This way rather than watching a treat your dog will begin to recognize the scooping motion of your hand as the signal to sit.



METHOD #3—MODELING THE SIT

In some cases it may be desirable to physically move your dog, Clover, into position. In order to safely move Clover into a sit, place one hand on his chest while gently scooping your other arm under his rear legs so that his rear will lower to the ground. Once in position, reward Clover and offer lots of praise.

Occasional handling of Clover during training can be a positive experience by reinforcing that it is okay for people to touch and handle him. However, most positive dog trainers will discourage a lot of handling for training purposes. The idea is that when you model a behavior, the dog doesn't actually have to think about what he is doing and may become more reliant on touch in the future.

If Clover is afraid of you scooping his legs don't try to force him into a sit. Be patient and try some other techniques to get a sit. Start a daily routine of touching and feeling around on Clover whenever you are working with him, especially sensitive areas like his paws and ears. This will teach him that your touch is a welcome event and will make tasks like nail trimming and grooming less stressful for both you and Clover.



ADDING THE CUE

Make certain your dog is reliably giving you sits before you add the cue, “sit.” Clover, should be reliably sitting about 8 out of 10 times.

At this point say, “sit” before he sits. If you have been using a hand signal, give the cue before you move your hand and reward the sit. Repeat this step about 10 times.

If Clover continues to provide reliable sits, try saying the command, “sit” without offering the hand signal. If he sits, reward the behavior and offer lots of praise. If he doesn’t sit don’t repeat the command but go ahead and offer the hand signal and reward him when he sits. Continue to practice and offer lots of praise and rewards. Before long your dog should be offering sits at your command.

CUES— Are the signals given to elicit the behavior.

- Only give the cue once so your dog doesn’t learn to ignore your command.
- Once you have added the cue, do not reward Clover for offering sits if cue has not been given.
- While learning the cue, offer rewards every time your dog sits on cue.

DISTRACTIONS AND DURATION

When your dog is reliably offering sits on cue, it’s time to offer him some new challenges. First start slowing down your response time. Give the cue, “sit,” after your dog sits, wait for just 1 second before click/treat or praise/treat if not using a clicker. When your dog is successful, increase the time to 2 seconds, then 3 seconds and on until he successfully maintains the duration of his sit for up to 15 seconds. If your dog breaks the sit, don’t reward him and decrease the time of duration.

You should also start having your dog sit amongst distractions. At first the distractions should be small and may be just as simple as changing location. If you always practice indoors, try practicing outdoors or vice versa if your dog is used to practicing outside. Then start adding other distractions such as other dogs in the area, people passing by or if you are getting really good try a ball bouncing across the floor.

Be patient and keep the skill level so that your dog will be successful and confident.

RECORD KEEPING

Keeping records of your training is a great way to know how you and your dog are doing. It can provide you insight as to how consistent you are in your training efforts as well as how much your dog has improved. Not only should you keep track of repetitions and success rates, you should also take notes about what conditions may have influenced your results.

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|----------------|--|----------------|--|
| Sits <i>Example</i> | <i>Captured a sit and repeated 15 times Dog was successful 10 times</i> | <i>Captured a sit and added the cue sit, repeated 20 times. Dog was successful 20 times</i> | <i>Clover, began sitting reliably just by hearing the cue, “Sit.” 25 repetitions</i> | <i>25 Sits</i> | <i>Planned 25 sits but had company and Clover couldn’t concentrate</i> | <i>25 Sits</i> | <i>No planned practice just a few at random throughout the day</i> |
| Sits | | | | | | | |
| Downs | | | | | | | |
| Watch Me | | | | | | | |

PRACTICE FOR YOU AND YOUR DOG

Come up with unique ways to make practice a game. The idea is to offer healthy challenges that reinforce good behavior among a variety of distractions. Provide opportunities for your dog to be successful and build his confidence. Avoid games that are too hard for your dog so that you don't wind up confusing him.

It's easy to incorporate practice for a sit into everyday life. Have your dog sit before you let him out, or before you feed him. Have him sit before you pet him or toss his favorite toy. These are life rewards and should be used often to strengthen desirable behaviors.

4-H DOG CLUB CORNER

Games are a great way to increase 4-H members fun and motivation. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when using games.

1. Safety - we don't want any toes or paws stepped on. Too much excitement (running and screaming) can cause dogs to either get frightened and defensive or overly excited and play biting. Make sure dogs are well socialized and capable of safe handling for the desired game.
2. Skill level - games should not be an activity that confuse the dogs. Make sure the rules encourage success of both the dog and the child.
3. Competition - keep games short and remind everyone that the purpose is not winning but having fun with their dogs!

GAMES FOR CLUB ACTIVITIES

MUSICAL PAWS

Place carpet mats or similar items (paper squares will work fine just secure the papers to keep them from being a slipping hazard) in a circle on the floor. Start out with one mat for every dog/handler team so everybody has a chance to practice a sit. Start the music, something fun like 'who let the dogs out' and each dog/handler team walks in a circle until the music stops. Then everyone sits their dog on a mat. Have them stay at a sit for five seconds. Then remove a mat and start the music again. Have fun and adjust the rules to match your club's skill level.

RESOURCES

The Oklahoma 4-H Website <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu>

The National 4-H Dog Project online www.n4hccs.org/dog

Karen Pryor's Clickertraining.com www.clickertraining.com

Oklahoma 4-H Dog Obedience Rules and Regulations <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu/litol/file/animal/companion/dog/dogobedience/4Hdogobedience.pdf>

GREAT TIMES TO USE A SIT

- Sit at the door to prevent your dog from running outside.
- Sit politely when greeting people.
- Sit away from the table while the family eats.
- Sit to have ears and paws examined.
- Sit so you can easily put your dog's leash on.

REFERENCES

Miller, Pat. (2008) *The Power of Positive Dog Training*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing Inc.

Breech, S., Miller, L., & Stover, P. (2008) *Dog Resource Handbook*. The Ohio State University.

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