

How to Teach the Dog Scout Certification Behaviors

The following sections are arranged based on the [Dog Scout Class Outline](#) found in the “Scoutmaster/Evaluator” section of the Dog Scout website. The classes, and their order are suggestions only and are shown in the order that they are presented at camp.

This page also assumes that you understand the basics of clicker training and that you have your clicker and rewards ready when you start these exercises. If you do not understand clicker training, please first read the “[How Dog's Learn](#)” page on the DSA website.

Need more hands? If you find that holding the treats, clicker and leash is too much, try stepping on the leash or using a leash around your waist. You can also use a treat pouch to hold the treats. Both the waist leash and treat pouch are available from [the DSA store](#).

A note about treats: Use real food. Use something your dog really, really loves. Things like pieces of hot-dog, pieces of cooked chicken, cheese, soft cat treats like Pounce, etc. You will get faster results if you use a motivator (treats) that the dog has a strong desire to obtain. You also don't need to use large treats. Pieces about the size of a pea work well with all size dogs. If your dog does not like food treats, use a toy that the dog gets really excited about and only gets to play with during training sessions. If your dog doesn't like food or toys, talk to a Scoutmaster about how to train your dog to be motivated by toys.



General Dog Scout certification requirements:

Treats are allowed and encouraged for training, but they are not allowed on you during the “check-out” part of the certification process. You are also not allowed to make the dog think you have a reward (luring) to get the dog to perform a behavior. See the section on “Variable Schedule of Reinforcement” below to learn how to “phase out” the use of treats.

Leash Corrections (Jerking) is not allowed at any time, during training or the “check-out.” Harsh verbal corrections or physical threats are also prohibited.

You are allowed to talk to your dog and encourage them during any portion of the “check-out” and multiple cues (within reason) are also allowed.

For more detailed requirements based on each exercise, see the “[Dog Scout Certification Requirements](#)” in the “Scoutmaster/Evaluator” section of the Dog Scout website.

CLASS #1 (Leave It and Heeling)

LEAVE IT training:

Having a dog that will respond to a “Leave It” cue can save the dog's life! The Dog Scout certification requires that you be able to show that your dog understands and responds to a “Leave It” cue. It also requires that it be demonstrated with both food and another animal. This is because there are many dangerous situations your dog might face. Being able to call the dog away from these situations can help you avoid embarrassment, having people see your dog as rude or needing a trip to the vet.



Some of the situations your dog could get into in which you could use “leave it” include:

- Trying to steal a child’s snack
- Raiding the garbage cans as you walk down the street or visit a friend’s house
- Finding a baited hook on a beach or shoreline
- Going for dropped medication (yours or that of a nursing home patient you might be visiting with your therapy dog)
- Trying to visit someone that is afraid of dogs
- Finding a dead animal carcass or other things dog’s like to roll in
- Seeing an animal run across your path in front of you (cats, squirrels, chipmunks, etc.)
- Coming across a skunk or porcupine (they usually don’t run, because they don’t have to!)
- Approaching a less than friendly dog
- Any time the dog’s eyes lock onto something they can’t have for more than 3 seconds
- This list could go on and on!

The Set Up:

If your dog doesn’t know a “Leave it” command, it is fairly simple to teach it. Start with some so-so treats (kibble or something the dog will eat, but isn’t crazy for, or a toy your dog likes but that isn’t his favorite) these will be the “bait.” Set the “Bait” on the floor on a paper plate or something to make it more obvious to the dog. You also need some of the dog’s favorite treats or his favorite toy (can be hidden in a pouch or pocket). This will be the dog’s reward when he does what you want.



Be a post: You are simply going to stand like a post, holding the leash still (no jerking) so that the dog can’t reach the bait. The dog will do any pulling or loosening of the leash, not you. You can even use a waist leash for this to insure that you don’t pull on the leash.

Don’t let the dog take the bait: Be sure you are far enough from the bait that the dog can’t lunge and reach it, or use his paw to drag it closer. If he does get the bait, be sure you at least make an attempt to get it out of his mouth (even if you know there is nothing there to get). This will help clarify to the dog that he made the “wrong choice.” You will now need to be VERY careful that the dog is NOT able to steal another piece of bait. If he continues to self-reward the stealing behavior, it is that behavior that will continue.

Shh, Don’t say a word: Don’t say anything during this exercise. It is up to the dog to figure out what wins him the prize (favorite treats from you). What you are looking for is the moment that the dog backs off a little from his attempts to get the bait. As soon as you see this, click and back up a few steps (to focus the dog’s attention on you) then praise and give the dog one of the really good treats that you have near or on you, but out of the dog’s reach. Repeat this exercise until the dog looks like he understands that he has to “back off” in order to get the good treat. How fast the dog reaches that understanding depends on the dog. If the dog is too focused on the bait, move away from it a bit and try again. You may even need to be so far away that the dog can barely see the bait (especially when the “bait” is another animal—but that comes later)



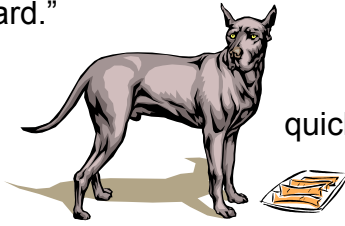
Next step

Now you will be raising the criteria a bit. Instead of simply requiring the dog to “back off” a few steps, the dog needs to look at you. Withhold the click until the dog does a quick glance in your direction. When he does, you are still going to back up a few steps to deliver the reward.

When the dog figures out that it is *looking at you* that gets him the click/reward, and then you can drop the “backing up to reward.”

Add more time

When the dog is looking at you into his mouth, you will longer and longer “look at you”



quickly, instead of trying to stare the bait gradually add the requirement of a before you click and reward.

OK, you can add a cue now

Once he is reliably backing off and/or looking at you to get the good treats, start saying, "Leave it" just before the dog turns to look at you. The "Leave it" command should be said quietly, about the same as you would say "Hello" to a stranger. It should not have an implied “or else” tone because it won't need to. You may need to move the bait to a slightly different location to get the dog interested in it again. Moving it just a few feet makes it “new” again. Notice that we didn't add the cue right away. This is because dogs don't know English. If you add the cue before the dog understands the behavior, then "Leave it" is just babble you keep saying when there is good stuff present. If you add the verbal command too soon, he may even learn that "Leave it" means “there's good stuff here, try to get it!" Let him learn the action expected before you give it a name. That way he is clear that "leave it," means just that... ignore it, and good things will come his way!

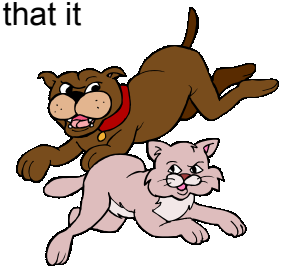
Making it harder

Once he is responding to the "Leave it" under the above circumstances, now you can change things a bit. Put the really good stuff as bait. Pretend that you are starting all over again. Your dog will go through the steps MUCH faster this time. Now try it in a different location. Again, start from the beginning. Again, your dog will progress through the steps quickly. Now try to walk by the food (like for the Dog Scout certification). Keep in mind that each time you add a variable (different bait, different day, new location, distractions, etc) it is now a new concept for the dog (because dogs don't generalize well).

Really learning the behavior

If you use a positive training method and let the dog know that it is OK for him to try to figure things out on his own (to truly learn), then he will first try what he already knows. This is why he will progress through the steps faster each time. He will soon figure out that it doesn't matter where he is, or what the bait is, or who's walking by...when mom or dad says "leave it" it means something specific.

If you progress through the steps as outlined, your dog will know the cue means to leave alone what ever it is that has caught his or her attention. It is also likely that the dog will look at you when you give the cue. That's an added benefit and another opportunity to reward eye contact.



Variable Schedule of Reinforcement

Once your dog has a solid understanding of the "Leave it" in a given situation, start giving a treat for only 3 out of 4 correct responses. Since you have a choice of which ones get a treat, why not pick the faster responses? You can then progress to only giving a treat for 2 out of 4. Just remember to keep it on a random schedule. Always let the dog know that he has done what you want, by using a verbal marker or the clicker, but vary his reward. Sometimes he gets a food treat, sometimes he gets his favorite toy, sometimes he gets verbal praise only, other times he gets something else he likes, sometimes he just gets to move on to the next cue.

Make the behavior stronger

It is proven that this "Variable Schedule of Reinforcement" will cause the greatest amount of drive and speed in the dog's responses. You will also not need to always have food in order for your dog to respond to you. If you have enough other things that your dog really likes, you won't need to have food at all (once the dog learns the behavior).

Good luck! Remember to keep it positive! Let the dog's actions decide when you need to progress -- don't push it!



Heeling on Lead:

What is heeling? Heeling for obedience competition requires that the dog stay next to the handler's left side, with the dog's shoulder even with where a pants seam would be. The dog should be looking at the handler and remain in position regardless of where or how the handler moves.

The Dog Scout certification does not require the precision of obedience competition. It does require that the dog remain in heel position (or very close to it), on a loose lead, even when the person makes a turn or stop. Multiple cues or encouragement is allowed to keep the dog in position, but tightening the leash is not. Leash "corrections" are prohibited.

Auto Sit: Another component of competition heeling is that the dog automatically sits (in heel position) when the handler stops. For the Dog Scout certification, the dog needs to sit when the handler stops, but cueing the sit (with either verbal or hand signals) and sloppy sits (out of heel position) are allowed.

Note: Several of the things mentioned in the following section can be found in more detail on the ["How Dog's Learn"](#) page. Please read that before continuing.

Basics of heel:

Why dogs pull on leads (leashes): You know that dogs do what "works" for them (Whatever gets them what they want). You also know that a rewarded behavior is one that will be repeated. Since dogs repeat pulling on the lead often, it must be getting rewarded. The reward is forward motion, which gets the dog new sights and smells.



How to stop the pulling: You learned that if a behavior fails to get a reward, the dog won't repeat it. So what you need to do is remove the reward (forward motion) when the dog pulls on the leash (the behavior you want to end).

The Set Up: To begin, you will mark a "start line." It can be a real mark on the ground, or simply any point that you can easily find again. About 15-20 feet away from the start line should be something the dog really wants. This can be a person encouraging the dog to come to him or her (without using your come cue), or it could be food or a favorite toy, or it could be the door to the outside world when the dog wants to go for a walk.

No reward mark: It is helpful for this exercise if your dog understands a "No Reward Mark" (an NRM). This is a sound that lets the dog know that the behavior he just offered will not be

getting a reward. It could be equated to the “cold” signal given in the “Hot-Cold” game you may have played as a child.

Waist Leash: It is also helpful if you use a waist leash for this exercise that is adjusted to give a loose leash, but tight enough that the dog won't trip on it. The reason for this; everyone tends to want to either pull on the lead or “help” the dog by giving more leash (or both). By using a waist leash that you don't hold with your hands, the dog gets to learn on his own, without your “help” (which isn't really helping the dog learn).

Object of the game: Of course, is to get the dog to walk by your side, in heel position, all the way from the start line to the desired object.

Working on that goal: Start with yourself and the dog behind the start line. Be sure that the dog sees what is waiting for him at the other side. You can start with the dog either sitting or standing at your left side, your choice. Begin by walking toward the object that the dog desires.



“Oops, try again” – No Reward Mark

Of course, as soon as you take a step or two, the dog is likely to pull out ahead of you. You need to have a clear picture in your mind of exactly where “too far in front of you” is located. Know where that imaginary line between “heeling” and “not heeling” is located. As soon as the dog crosses the line, you mark the point of no reward with your No Reward Mark (NRM) and get back to the start line AS FAST AS YOU CAN!

Start over FAST

The timing of the NRM and a quick re-start are critical to the dog's understanding of the game. To help your dog understand the unwanted behavior (moving ahead of you) and the consequence (having to start over) you need to make the timing of the two as close together as possible.

If you delay your move back to the start until the dog has stopped pulling on the lead and is looking at you; guess what he will associate with having to start over? He will think that not pulling, and looking at you was the unwanted behavior! If instead, you go back to the start as soon as the dog moves past heel position (even before the leash gets tight), it will be much more clear to the dog what behavior caused the NRM and consequence. Just be patient with him and he will begin to understand.

Motivation

The more motivated the dog is to get across the game field, the faster he will try to figure out what is causing the delay. If the dog takes a few steps in heel position, be sure to “catch him in the act” of doing the proper behavior and praise it.

Notice I didn't say click

A click means that the dog has done what you want (which he has), but it also says the behavior is over (which it isn't) and he gets his reward (which he hasn't reached yet). Praise lets the dog know he's on the right track without ending the behavior. If you were to click half way to the prize, you would have to be able to ensure that the dog didn't pull (and then get rewarded) before he gets to the other side of the game field.

If praise causes pulling ahead

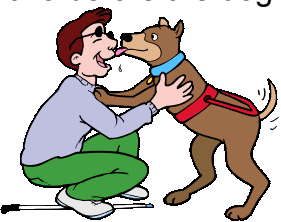
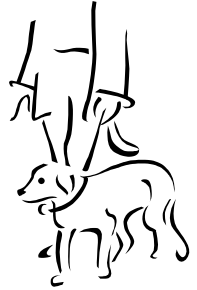
If you praise your dog for being in the proper position and that causes him to surge ahead, give a No Reward Mark and go back to the start. The dog simply has not learned that praise means “keep going, you’re doing it right.” The NRM will not remove the reward of the praise; it will simply help clarify for the dog what the praise means. The praise is important to let the dog know that he’s doing it correctly.

Most dogs get it quickly

Most dogs are able to quickly figure out what is going on if your timing is clear. You should be able to see improvement in as few as 10 repetitions (going back to start). Once the dog figures out the “rules of the game”, most are able to then get almost completely across the field while staying in heel position.

Don’t give in too soon

A common problem occurs, as the dog is just about to get to the other side. They just can’t contain themselves any longer and make a quick burst across the finish. This also means they left heel position too early and should not get rewarded (be sure he can’t get rewarded)! Don’t give in too early; it doesn’t help the dog. Just be ready for the burst and the need to make the move for the start line as soon as the dog breaks out of heel position. It will only take another try or two before the dog isn’t “cheating” at the end.



He made it!

When the dog finally makes it all the way across the game field while maintaining his self control and staying in heel position, pile on the rewards! It’s a big accomplishment and should be treated as such.

Add a release cue

You won’t want your dog to be the one to decide when the heeling game is over once he understands the cue. Now he needs to learn the cue for “Alright, you can resume your normal doggie life.” Common “release” cues are: all done, you’re free, finished, and “Okay.” I don’t recommend using “okay” because the dog is likely to hear it often. It can be any word you are likely to remember as a cue that tells your dog he is “released” from the behavior. This cue can also be used to release your dog from a “stay” cue. You will be adding the cue you choose just before the dog gets to the reward. Later, you will use it to signal when the dog no longer needs to maintain heel position.

Try it again

Now you need to repeat the exercise because your dog still doesn’t know how to heel. What he does know is that to get from the start line to the finish line, he has to walk by your side. He will not generalize that behavior to other situations yet.

Put it on cue

Once the dog is reliably walking across the game field without having to go back to the start, you can add the verbal cue. You will give the “Heel” cue just before you leave the start line (not AS you leave it). Practice the exercise a few more times to help make the association between the behavior and the cue.

Generalization

The next step in the training is to get your dog to realize that walking by your side is beneficial to him, regardless of the circumstances. Start by setting up the above game again in a new location with a new reward. It's normal to have to do some re-starts. Once the dog is "getting it" again, you can add the verbal cue just before you leave the start.

Now you will need to get the dog to understand that even if you are just walking down a street or trail, heel means heel. When you are walking with your dog, he is in it for the sights and smells and (in most cases) socialization with any other being he meets. If you want to practice heel, just make an imaginary start line and play the game above. Don't forget to use your release cue to let the dog know when he can go back to being a dog that is just out for a walk.

No more leash pulling

You will find that once your dog have a dog that drags you if you practice the "tight leash dog forgets his manners, just stop motion). When the dog pulling that gets him what he



fully understands the "heel" cue, you will no longer around by the leash. This is further reinforced means look at me" exercise. When the (removing the reward of forward remembers that it's a loose leash, not wants (forward motion), you can proceed.

CLASS #2 (Sit, Down, Stay)

Sit Happens

For the Dog Scout certification, your dog will have to demonstrate that he understands and responds to a sit cue (either verbal or hand signal).

Set up: Even if your dog knows the sit command, work through these steps. Get your clicker and treats ready, your dog should be ready to work with you when he sees these, if not, you can clip on a leash and stand on the end of it just to keep him in the general area you want to work.



Just wait: Now, you wait him out. You don't say or do anything, just watch him and wait for him to offer a sit. Ignore all other behavior. If his attention wanders, try increasing the value of the reward you are using (he should know what you have to offer). The dog should want the reward so much, that he is willing to try everything he can think of to get it.

A little help- Most dogs that quit trying or lose interest in their handler are lacking the proper motivator. They a different treat or toy to see if the dog will work for the new item. If the dog just isn't getting it, you can use the reward to "lure" the dog into the sit. Start with the reward in front of the dog's nose, and slowly move it over his head toward his back. If you hold it too high, the dog will jump up, but if it's held where the dog can reach it (but in a closed hand) the dog should sit. Be ready to click as soon as his butt hits the floor and jackpot (see below)! Do away with the lure as soon as you can and go back to just waiting for the dog to offer the behavior.

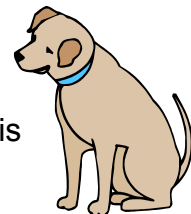


Jackpot! As soon as his butt hits the floor, you are going to click and give him a big reward party for being the smartest dog on the planet. You should have treats that you can break into very tiny pieces and give him several tiny pieces one at a time (not all at once) while telling him how wonderful he is. To a dog, one handful is the same as one small treat. Giving him several treats in rapid succession is more rewarding, regardless of the size of the treat.

Try again. If he hasn't gotten up from the sit, encourage him to do so by taking a small step and then wait him out again. As soon as he sits, click and treat (holding the treat out so that he has to stand up to get it).

Quick repetitions- It should take less and less waiting as the dog figures out what behavior is causing the click/treat. By using this method, you are letting the dog actually learn - which is what makes the behavior "stick" in his brain.

Shh, don't say a word. You should not be saying or doing anything to "help" your dog figure out this puzzle, just let him work it out (the patience and silence is the hardest part for some people).



Alright, now add a cue. Once the dog is sitting rapidly and repeatedly, you can add a verbal cue or hand signal. Right before you think he's going to sit, give the cue... just once, then wait (NOTE: Don't say "Sit down", or you will confuse the dog once he understands that down means to lay down). As soon as he sits, click and give him several tiny pieces of treat.

Generalizations- Since dogs don't generalize, you now need to change things a bit and try this in a different room or location. Go back to not saying anything until the dog will sit rapidly and repeatedly again. Then add the cue just before the behavior again. Each time you practice this in a new location, repeat these steps and each time you are in a new place, the progression will go much faster.

Practicing in many different situations is an important step most people leave out. They think that because the dog knows what the cue "Sit" means at home, that he should know it everywhere. But to a dog, sitting at home on cue and sitting while on a walk on cue, are two different behaviors. You need to teach him that sit means sit regardless of where he is or what you are doing.

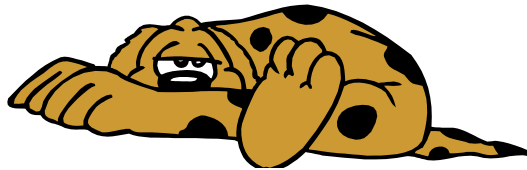


Hand signals- If you would like to add the hand signal to this behavior, it is an upward "scoop" of your hand with the palm up. It starts with your hand by your side and ends with you holding your hand out like you are "asking" for someone to give you something.

Adding new cues- Anytime you add a new cue to a behavior, it needs to be presented a second or two prior to the old cue. If you give two cues at the same time, the dog will only see or hear the one he knows and will disregard the new cue. Example: To teach the dog a hand signal for sit after he has learned the verbal cue; Give the hand signal, wait a second or two, then tell the dog "Sit" -- click/treat when he does. By putting the new cue first, the dog will notice it and start to anticipate the cue he knows. Soon, the new cue will have the same meaning.

Body Language- Dogs are very good at reading our body language and any subtle cues we give with our hands or body. What they have more trouble with is learning verbal cues. When teaching the dog a new behavior, you may actually teach him a hand or body signal without even realizing it. Luring motions often become cues to the dog. How you stand or even how you hold your head can also turn into cues. For this reason, remember to give any new cue prior to any previously used cue.

Distractions- Now you can add distractions and start "proofing." You can make it harder for the dog by changing location, adding distractions, varying your distance from the dog, changing handlers, etc. You use these variations to teach the dog that everything is irrelevant to his getting the reward except the cue and his response to it. He needs to know that no matter where he is or what he's doing, if he hears or sees the signal for "Sit" he needs to do it to get the reward.



The Down:

Lying down is something dogs do naturally, but you now want to be able to get the behavior on cue. This will be similar in progression to the sit command. Start the way you did for sit, except; you are going to wait for the dog to lie down.

Ignore all sits and other behaviors. Some dogs take awhile to offer a down and others try it quickly. If your dog takes awhile to offer it, you can pull up a chair and wait. You could also go to the "lure" method for a few repetitions.

Luring the down- Start with the dog in a sit. Put the reward in front of the dog's nose and slowly move it straight down toward the floor. As the dog crouches, move it along the floor away from the dog. As the dog follows the reward with his nose, the rest of his body will go into the "down" position. As soon as the dog lies down, click and reward him with the item you used as a lure.

Repeat- Get him back into a sit or stand, and wait again. Just as with the sit, each time will take less and less waiting. You are also teaching the dog that you want him to repeat the behavior that you clicked, because this will make the training of new behaviors go much faster in the future.

Add the cue- Once the dog will offer the down rapidly and repeatedly, you can add the verbal cue right before he is going to lie down. Then, just as you did with the sit, vary the location and do some "proofing."

Discrimination- When the dog knows multiple cues, he will need to learn to discriminate between those cues so that he gives the proper response to each different cue. If the dog offers several behaviors before he offers the correct behavior, he doesn't understand what the cue means. You need to go back to the basics and then add the cue just before the behavior is offered. Only reward when the dog tends to have a hard time learning cue discrimination if the cues weren't added at the proper time during the training phase.



They will tune in to the fact that you gave a cue, but will then try all the behaviors they know till they get it “right.” If you usually give the cues in a certain order, such as sit/down/roll over/play dead, that’s the order in which the dog will offer the behaviors to guess which cue you just gave him.

Variation is the key. If they “guess” wrong, you have a few options.

- A) You can mark his choice as wrong (with your No Reward Mark) and give the command again then reward the correct response.
- B) You can mark it wrong with the NRM and pause the training session for a few seconds or walk away before starting again. Only a correct response on the first try gets rewarded.
- C) Mark the incorrect response with the NRM, re-cue, but withhold the reward (only the correct response on the first try gets rewarded).
- D) The fourth option is to just wait. No mark, no reward, no re-command, nothing... then start over after the pause.

Which option should you choose? Try them all. See what works best for your dog. Some need more encouragement than others to keep them from giving up on the effort.

Stay

Stay can be a very useful behavior to teach your dog. Once your dog understands what “Stay” means, you will find that you use it quite often.

Your dog should understand a No Reward Mark (NRM) before beginning this exercise. A NRM can be any sound that lets the dog know he’s chosen a behavior that won’t be rewarded. It is also recommended that you read through the sit and down training to get an idea of the proper training progression. Once your dog is reliable with sit and down, you can work on the stay.

What do you want- Before you can teach the dog a behavior; you have to know exactly what behavior you desire. For this exercise, we will start by trying to get the dog to remain in the chosen position for one or two seconds. Gradually, as the dog learns what is required, that will be increased to a much longer time requirement.

Teaching Stay- Put the dog in a sit or down position. Say “Stay”. Reward the dog with “good dog” (a keep going marker) and a few treats while he maintains the stay position. Then, hold a treat in your hand at the height of his nose only slightly out of reach. If he makes a move for the treat, say your NRM as you pull the treat out of his reach. Get the dog is back into position and repeat the exercise.



Jackpot! The dog will soon figure out that if he stays in place for a few seconds, he gets the reward marker (the click and then a treat).

Release cue- You will need to use your release cue (see the “Heel” section above) to let the dog know when he no longer has to stay in place. By introducing it early, the dog will learn that he has to wait for your cue before he can move.

Repeat- Continue to repeat this exercise while gradually increasing the number of seconds that the dog has to remain in place prior to the click.

Add the cue- Once he is staying in place for 30 seconds, introduce the cue. Tell him to sit (or down), and cue him to stay. Use a conversational tone. Dogs have excellent hearing; yelling won't make this new word any more understandable.

Little Longer- Now all you have to do is to gradually extend the amount of time he has to wait before he gets the treat. Use the treat to tempt him to move, so that if he does, you can let him know it was not correct to move (with the No Reward Mark and no treat).

Make it more difficult- Gradually increase the difficulty by moving a little bit away from the dog while he stays and then go back to him before giving the release.

Only raise one criterion at a time- the stay may seem like a fairly simple set of requirements for the dog. If he stays in place, he gets a reward. If he moves he doesn't get a reward. However, it can be more difficult than that, depending on what is happening around the dog. The three parts to raising the difficulty are:

- First, work on duration- How long the dog has to stay
- Next, add distractions- What is happening around the dog while he stays
- Finally, work on distance-How far you get from the dog

As you work on each of the above three, remember to go back to very easy requirements on the other two. For example, if you are trying to increase the amount of time the dog will stay, don't work on distance at the same time. When you add a difficult distraction (like someone bouncing a ball nearby), don't start with a long duration or with you across the room. Work up to the more difficult situations gradually, taking it one step at a time. Distance is the most difficult requirement for most dogs. Dogs don't like their handlers to leave them, especially when complying with the stay cue may make them feel vulnerable. Work on adding distance after the dog is comfortable with the other two criteria and don't rush it.

Only one cue- It is very important to give commands only ONCE! It is the dog's job to remember what he's doing. If you keep reminding him with, "Stay...Stay...Staaaayy", he never learns to keep his mind on the work at hand. He will also think that he only needs to respond when you keep repeating the command. To a dog, "Stay" and "Stay, Stay, Stay" are two separate things.



CLASS #3 (come when called and friendly with people)

Come! (Recall)

This is another cue that can save your dog's life. All dogs should have an immediate response to a recall cue. Unfortunately, many people use "Come" without expectation of a response from the dog. Or worse, the person calls the dog and then does something the dog doesn't like (bath, nail clip, etc.).

How does your dog feel? Your dog should have feelings of excitement and happiness when he hears the recall cue. It should always be associated with good things. He should get the same feelings for the recall cue that he has for "Want to go for a walk?" and "Want a cookie?"

Many dogs, however, have learned to associate “Come” with negative things. Humans make the same associations. How do you feel when you hear the word “virus”? Anyone that has a computer or has been sick with the flu probably doesn’t get warm and fuzzy feelings from the word. How do you feel about the word “coupon”? Most people like saving money. It’s like getting a little free reward. If your dog thinks your current recall cue is another word for “evil things are about to happen,” you will need to teach your dog a new recall cue.

Yo, Rover- To teach a recall cue that your dog can’t wait to respond to, you need to take it back to the beginning. Starting over with a new cue is the best way to achieve this. Pick a word that you can yell loudly (in case the dog is far away). You should not use the dog’s name as the recall cue. The dog hears his name all the time, but doesn’t have to come to who ever is saying it each time. The word “here” is often used as a new recall cue. You could even use a foreign word as your cue.

Only for recall- Regardless of the word you choose, it should only be used:

- To call the dog when you know the dog will respond
- When you have good things for the dog

Avoid negative associations- your new recall word should never be used to call the dog for anything he doesn’t like. If you need to trim his nails, give him a bath or end his off-lead play session, go and get him; don’t call him to you.

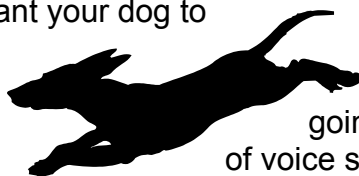
Start at the beginning- If we want to dog to have positive associations with a word, we need to pair it with something the dog likes. What you will do is say the word, then pull out a treat and give it to the dog. You will keep saying the word, followed by a treat that comes from a hidden location. You keep the treat hidden, so that the dog doesn’t associate getting the treat, with seeing the treat. They will hear the word and after about 30-40 repetitions will start to anticipate the treat that it predicts.

Don’t skimp- you should be using the dog’s favorite treats for this (but still use really tiny pieces). You want to be sure to make the associations of the word and positive things as strong as possible. Don’t use kibble; pull out the bits of leftover steak!

Make it mean something- Once your dog is anticipating the treat when he hears the word, it’s time to pair it with an action. With the dog on a regular length lead, say the cue and take a few steps backwards. When the dog comes with you, click and reward. Repeat this several times.

Get Help- Now you are ready to have the dog go a bit farther. For this, you’ll need someone to hold the dog while you go a short distance away. I don’t recommend putting the dog on a stay for this exercise because he may start to anticipate the recall cue during the stay. It sets the dog up for failure. When you have the helper holding the dog, that person also has the job of getting the dog excited. You want your dog to think this is the most fantastically fun game in the world!

Restrained recall- The helper is going to hold the dog by the collar and say things in a very excited tone of voice such as “Where’s she going? Can you get her? Watch her! Ready?” During the pep talk the caller walks a short distance away.



When the caller is ready, he or she will call the dog. By the time the dog gets the recall cue, he should be practically turning himself inside out with excitement. The caller will reward the dog for responding.

Increased distance and difficulty- Gradually, increase the distance the dog has to travel to get to the caller. If played indoors with family or friends, you can have the caller move out of sight to call the dog. Don't make it hard for the dog to find you at first. As the dog learns the game, the caller can get more and more hidden. The caller should always have lots of praise and high value treats ready for the dog. Each member of the family can take turns hiding and calling the dog.



Recall with distractions- with such a strong foundation for the recall cue, it shouldn't be much of a problem for the dog when you add distractions as long as it's done correctly. You will again need the help of an assistant or two. This will be easiest with someone to hold the dog (getting him excited), someone to hold the distraction and someone to call the dog.

Only one helper- A possible solution if you can only get one helper: You will have to find the right location to play this game. What you need is a long rope that is strong enough to hold the dog, but not too heavy for him to drag. The rope will be connected to the dog and then run around a solid object with the other end going to the caller. The rope is simply to keep the dog in place without having to use a stay cue. Please be sure the rope will not snag or get caught on anything after the caller releases it. If the rope gets caught after the dog starts toward the handler, he will get a "leash correction" for going to the caller (definitely something you want to avoid). To use this method, the caller will be the one getting the dog excited prior to giving the recall cue and releasing the end of the rope.

The distraction- Your helper will be holding a toy or treat that the dog needs to run past to get to the caller. The helper is NOT going to let the dog get the distraction item, but will be trying to entice the dog to stop and investigate.

Ready, Set, Go!- When everyone is ready, the caller gives the recall cue. As the dog passes, the holder of the distraction tries to get his attention. If the dog passes right by and goes to the caller, lavish him with praise and rewards. If he gets distracted, the person holding the distraction takes it out of the dog's reach/view and does nothing. The caller also does nothing until the dog makes the choice to leave the distraction. Once the dog starts toward the caller, he should be praised and encouraged, then rewarded for making the right choice.

Try it again- you should continue with the trials until the dog is completely ignoring the distraction, regardless of what the distraction might be.

Calling away from a distraction- now that a strong reward history and good feelings have been established, it's time for the hardest part. It was easy for the dog to fly by the distraction, but now he will be expected to leave one that has his full attention.



The distraction. Start with the helper feeding the dog a low value treat such as his normal dog food. The caller should have the dog's favorite treat.

The recall. When the dog is happily eating, say his name (to hopefully get his attention) and give the recall cue. If the dog responds right away, great! Reward him for being such a smart dog and try it again. But give the helper a little higher value treat.

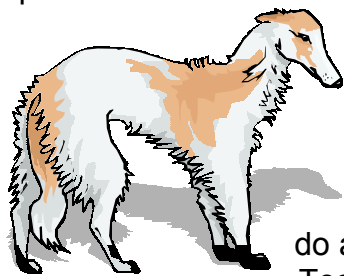
Did you mean me? If the dog does not respond to the recall cue, the caller should go and get the dog, gently lead him by the collar to the place where he was supposed to respond and let him sniff what he missed. Then try the exercise again. If he doesn't respond right away, lessen the value of the distraction item and raise the value of the reward. You want to set him up to succeed, not practice ignoring you.

Practice makes perfect (or at least reliable)- You should practice using the cue anytime you can practice in such a way that the dog has a high likelihood of responding (and you have a high value reward). Even if it's just short recalls from the end of a standard length lead. The stronger you can make the "reward history", the more likely it is that the dog will respond promptly when you really need him to listen.



Friendly with people:

Most dogs don't have a problem with this part of the certification. The ones that do have trouble are likely the shy dogs. The friendly with people is not a test of the dog's manners. They are not required to sit for the greeting (but it's so nice when they do). This part of the certification is to make every attempt to be sure that a dog that has earned the title of Dog Scout has a temperament that welcomes or tolerates human attention, and does not pose a danger to the public.



Shy Dogs- If your dog is shy around people, there are some things you can do to help him come out of his shell.

Control the humans- Most issues arise when people that know nothing about dogs try to greet your shy dog. Those people tend to do all the wrong things and only make matters worse.

Teach them the golden rules of dog greetings:

- Never touch a dog unless it has touched you first
- Respect a dog's space. If the dog backs away, don't follow. Just wait for them to come back to you.
- Avoid direct eye contact. The dog may have learned that eye contact from humans is safe, but when frightened, the dog is not thinking. Frightened dogs revert to instinct and instinct tells them direct eye contact is dangerous.
- Crouch down or sit on the floor. Dogs know you can't move as quickly when you are sitting and it makes them feel safer.

Work on socialization- If you meet someone that is willing to properly help you socialize your shy dog here is what you can do:

- If the dog will take food from the person, use that as a first step. Use treats the dog really likes and have the person help teach the dog that strangers can be treat dispensers too! It helps to have the dog do known behaviors for the treats.

- Any touching of the dog should be done to the less threatening parts of their body. These are the neck , shoulder, and under the chin.
- If the dog is not comfortable taking food from the person; have the person throw treats to the dog. Try to have the treats land so that the dog has to move away from the person to get the food. This makes the dog more comfortable. Between each toss, the stranger waits for the shy dog to look in his or her direction. With repetition, the dog may feel safe enough to get closer to the stranger.
- For really shy dogs, the stranger may need to sit down with his/her back to the dog and toss the treats or hold them in an open palm without looking at the dog.
- Be sure that you talk confidently and in a friendly tone with anyone you want your dog to meet. This lets the dog know that you are comfortable with the person.
- Never force a dog to meet someone. Let all greetings go at the pace the dog feels is safe.
- Control every interaction your dog has with people. If you can't control the actions of the person the dog is meeting, remove the dog from the situation.
- You need to be extra vigilant that your dog does not get into a situation where he feels he needs to defend himself. Once dogs learn that aggressive displays make scary things (people and other dogs) go away, they will use aggression again. The more times that aggression is rewarded (by the scary thing moving away) the stronger the aggression will be. The best remedy is to socialize the dog in such a way that he doesn't feel the need to use aggression.



If you have found this information to be helpful, and would like to send a tax-deductible donation to the Dog Scouts of America Education Fund, please send it to the address below.

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