



Dog Scouts of America Training the Required Behaviors

Dog Scout Certification

This document provides exercises for training the behaviors required for the Dog Scout Certification. It 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](#) and Intro to [Clicker Training and Shaping](#) on our web site.



Sometimes people find that holding the treats, clicker and leash is too much. If this is the case for you try stepping on the leash or using a hands-free leash. You can also use a treat pouch to hold the treats. Treat pouches and clickers are available from [the DSA store](#). Hands-free leashes are readily available from pet supply stores or on Amazon.com. Click [here](#) to see an example of a high-quality hands-free leash.

TRAINING TAKES PATIENCE:

Dogs can learn at an amazing rate when using positive training, but it doesn't happen overnight. This is especially true at the beginning of the training process when the dog is still learning to learn. Training sessions shouldn't be formal, long and tedious. You can practice a behavior a few times throughout the day or as situations for practice present themselves. Training should always be fun for both you and the dog. As you spend time with your dog, make mental notes about what his favorite things are in life. His favorite foods, toys and activities can be used as rewards when training.

Praise is important as well but shouldn't be too heavily relied upon. Dogs do what works for *them*, not what makes *you* happy. If they don't see any benefit to doing something, most will abandon the behavior. Have patience and if the dog doesn't seem to be getting it, a different approach might be what is needed. Also, consider that you may have progressed too quickly. You might just need to back up a few steps in the learning process. Present things clearly to the dog and provide positive motivation to learn. Following this practice dogs learn quickly and retain the knowledge much more easily.

A NOTE ABOUT TREATS: Use real food. Use something your dog really, really loves such as pieces of hot-dog, pieces of cooked chicken, cheese, soft cat treats, 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.



DOG SCOUT CERTIFICATION – GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

Treats are allowed and encouraged for training, but they are not allowed to be used during the testing for each exercise. This includes having treats in a treat bag or pocket or making 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.



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Using a leash correction by jerking the leash is not allowed at any time during training or testing. Harsh verbal corrections, physical threats or the perception of these are also prohibited.

Verbal encouragement and praise are highly suggested and are appropriate during both training and testing. Multiple cues are allowed within reason.

HANDLER REQUIREMENTS:

Though it is the dog who becomes certified, there is a significant commitment the handler must make as well. DSA strives to expand the understanding between dogs and humans, thus increasing their bond. Dog Scout Certification is not just about behaviors the dog must demonstrate. It's also about building the human/canine bond through positive training methods. All of the training you do for the certification serves to strengthen the bond you have with your dog.

DSA requires handlers to be good ambassadors of responsible dog ownership and that takes education. There are a number of things required of any Dog Scout parent. You'll need to have a solid understanding of these as a part of the certification process. You will need to complete the [DSA Handler Written Test](#) and submit it to a Scoutmaster before your dog can be considered a Dog Scout.

Manage the dog's environment and keep him safe:

The handler is responsible for watching the environment around the dog for signs of trouble and taking any steps necessary to keep the dog safe and in a calm state of mind. If the dog is afraid of kids, then it is the handler's job to be sure that kids don't get close enough to make your dog feel he has to react defensively. If the dog can't handle the exuberance of puppies, it is the handler's job to be on the lookout for puppies and to be sure they don't get into the dog's comfort zone. The dog needs to feel that the handler has control of every situation so that he doesn't get into trouble by dealing with things the only way that dogs know (barking, growling, biting, etc.).

It takes practice to continually be aware of what is happening around your dog. People and dogs should not be able to "sneak up" on your dog. You should always see them approach and if necessary, move your dog away or ask them to stop. Reading your dog's body language properly can go a long way towards a better understanding on how he is feeling in a given situation, especially since those feelings can change quickly based on a slight change in the dynamics of the situation. A dog might be fine with a child petting his shoulder but when the child reaches for the dog's ears, he gets frightened. Before the dog reacts any further in an attempt to get himself out of the frightening situation, the handler must react to get the child away from the dog. Understanding a dog's body language is critical to keeping him safe. Please check out [Body Language 101](#) for more details.

Master the phrase "please get your dog back":

These are not fighting words. Handlers must feel comfortable using this phrase when needed and should not take offense if they hear someone else say them. Using this phrase is part of the handler's contract with the dog that says the handler will keep the dog safe. Be aware of where your dog is and what your dog is doing at all times when they are in public with you. Understand how to encourage proper dog greetings and ask permission from other dog owners prior to letting the dogs meet.



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Handlers must never be hesitant to use this phrase if another dog is making their dog uncomfortable. By using these words before the dog's comfort zone is invaded, the dog won't feel pressured to use defensive tactics to move the dog away.

Encourage proper greeting behavior between dogs:

Dogs communicate a tremendous amount by body language before they get close enough to touch or sniff each other. Dogs should be encouraged and allowed to display non-confrontational body language in order to avoid conflicts when two dogs meet.

- Allow dogs to perform an arching approach. Never tighten the leash anytime that two dogs are approaching. Tightening the leash can cause the dog to say things with body language that they probably don't mean. A tight leash can cause stiffness, or a raised posture and both of these body language signals can trigger aggression.
- Dogs should spend very little time nose to nose (a confrontational posture) and should move to the "doggie handshake" (nose to butt) position quickly. It's OK if they circle a bit. Just keep the leads from tangling. Dogs should not stay in this position more than a few seconds or about the time it takes for a human handshake. Tension or stillness in either dog at this point is a pre-aggression signal and the dogs should be immediately moved apart.
- Train your dog to have a strong recall response. Being able to call a dog away from another dog is an extremely useful behavior that can keep the dog safe.

Always ask for permission before your dog meets another dog. This communicates that you are a responsible handler and gives you a moment to assess their competence by observing their reaction and dog handling skills. If the other person significantly shortens his dog's lead, don't let your dog greet. If they let their dog's lead go slack, you do the same and let the dogs communicate. A greeting should only take a few seconds. It's okay if the dogs want to play as long as it is okay with both handlers. Just keep the leashes loose. If either dog decides the meeting is over, both dogs should be called away from each other at the same time. Learn to read your dog's signals and then take the initiative to react to them before situations get out of hand.



Understand aggression as normal dog "language":

Though it is normal dog language, we can help dogs to make choices other than aggression. People are not expected to love every other human being on the planet, but for some reason people expect their dog to love all other dogs. Dogs are individuals and are allowed to dislike another dog's behavior. Most commonly, dogs have little tolerance for pests and punks and will want to leave the situation or get the other dog to leave. Help him to leave the situation before he displays aggression by showing teeth, growling, barking, snapping or biting.

This display is normal dog behavior and should not be punished. If your dog does this to another dog, ask yourself why you were not paying attention to the situations developing around your dog and why



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you didn't take actions to prevent your dog from feeling the need to defend himself. If these warning signals are punished, you are telling the dog that bad things happen to him if he gives warning signals. He will likely associate the punishment with the signals he was giving or with the presence of other dogs. This essentially takes the ticker out of the time bomb. The dog's feelings in those situations and about the other dog won't change and he may get more defensive. He just won't let you know until he "snaps" for "no apparent reason". He would have given you plenty of warnings about his intentions and feelings if he hadn't been punished for showing them. It's a very bad cycle that dogs and owners get into simply because of miscommunication between two very different species.

Instead of punishing the dog for being a dog, take a proactive role in keeping your dog from feeling like he has to defend himself, his space, his toys or you. This is where you can use the phrase "please get your dog back" if the other dog continues to be a pest or punk.

If your dog is on the receiving end of the "please get your dog back" request, call him away from the dog he was pestering so that the signals from the dog he's bothering don't have to escalate to a stronger level. By watching your dog's interaction with other dogs and calling him back BEFORE it gets out of hand, you can teach your dog to recognize signals that mean it is time to move away from another dog.

Understand the use of calming signals:

Calming signals is a reference to the body language that dogs use to tell other dogs that they are not a threat. In a sense, they are saying "calm down, I mean you no harm".

Examples of calming signals are:

- Arching approaches (putting a slight curve in their approach)
- Averting gaze (Looking away)
- Relaxed body posture with the tail in a neutral, mid-level position or wagging normally
- Crouching or rolling on the back



Other calming signals that your dog may exhibit are licking his lips, scratching his neck, yawning, and sniffing the ground. These signals might be given to you if your dog is nervous or feeling confused, especially with dogs that have been punished by a human.

Understand and use indirect access:

Dogs learn self-control through understanding that charging toward or leaping on everything they want is not necessarily the best way to get it. Indirect access means that the dog has to do something that *indirectly* gets the dog what it wants. Self-control can be built over time by using indirect access exercises. With practice dogs will exhibit less "out of control" behavior. The more *self*-control the dog has, the better behaved he will be and the less *you* have to do to control his behavior. For example, dogs that learn that they have to sit to get attention from humans have learned self-control through indirect access. In this example direct access would be jumping up on people. In this way, indirect access teaches the dog to choose more appropriate behaviors that are rewarded by the dog getting what he wants. For more information see [Self-Control & Indirect Access](#) on our web site.



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DOG REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION:

The dog requirements for the Dog Scout title are critical skills that must be worked on and reinforced throughout the dog's life. The Dog Scout title is representative of the relationship between the handler and the dog and NOT just the performance of the dog for the test. Therefore, the handler's knowledge of reward-based training and a clear understanding of the Dog Scout Laws are also required for certification.

For detailed requirements of each required exercise and an understanding of how the exercises are evaluated please see the [Dog Scout Certification CRITERIA](#) document. The exercises below will help you to understand and train the required behaviors.

Training the SIT exercise -

For the Dog Scout certification your dog will need to demonstrate that he understands and responds to a sit cue. This cue may be either verbal or a hand signal.

The set up: Be sure to work through these steps even if your dog already knows how to sit. Get your clicker and treats ready and 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 just you wait him out. Even though you will no doubt be tempted, don't say or do anything. Just watch the dog 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 and make sure he knows what you have to offer. The dog should want the reward and be willing to try everything he can think of to get it.

A little help: 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 give a jackpot (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 the dog's butt hits the floor 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 *in a row* (not all at once) while telling him how wonderful he is.

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 offer a treat, holding it out so that he has to stand up to get it.



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Quick repetitions: It should take less and less waiting as the dog figures out what behavior is causing the click/treat. Using this method, you are letting the dog actually learn by thinking for himself - 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 and recognize that 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 lie down. As soon as he sits, click and give him several tiny pieces of treat.

Generalization: Since dogs don't generalize well, 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. Just because the dog knows what the cue 'sit' means at home doesn't mean he knows that same cue everywhere. To a dog, sitting at home on cue and sitting while on a walk on cue are two different behaviors. He needs to understand that sit means sit regardless of where he is, what's going on around him or what you are doing.



Hand signal: Adding a hand signal to this behavior is highly recommended since you are likely to find this handy in many different situations. The commonly used hand signal for sit 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: Give the hand signal, wait a second or two, then tell the dog 'sit'. Click and treat when he sits. 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.

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. Use these types of variances 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.



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Training the DOWN exercise –

For the Dog Scout certification your dog will need to demonstrate that he understands and responds to a down cue. This cue may be either verbal or a hand signal.

The set up: Lying down is something dogs do naturally but you want to be able to get this behavior on cue. Training for 'down' is similar in progression to training sit cue. Start the way you did for sit, except; you are going to wait for the dog to lie down.

Ignore all sits & other behaviors: Some dogs take a while to offer a down and others try it quickly. If your dog takes some time to offer the behavior you could simply have patience 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 the lure 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 the dog back into a sit or stand and wait once again. Just as with the sit, each repetition will take less time. As you are teaching this you are also teaching the dog that you want him to repeat the behavior that you clicked. 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 should 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'.



Cue discrimination and proofing: 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 really 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 gets it right on the first try. Dogs tend 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.

Proof as you did for sit by changing location, adding distractions, varying your distance from the dog, changing handlers, etc. Use these types of variances to teach the dog that everything is irrelevant to his



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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 the signal for 'down' he needs to do it to get the reward.

Variation is the key to success: If the dog guesses wrong you have a few options.

- A) You can use your No Reward Mark, give the cue again and 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, cue the dog again but withhold the reward. Only the correct response on the first try gets rewarded.
- D) Or you could just wait. No mark, no reward, no additional cue, nothing... then start over after the pause.

Since you don't know which method will work best for your dog, you'll need to try them all. Some dogs need more encouragement than others to keep them from giving up on the effort.

Hand signal: Adding a hand signal to this behavior is highly recommended since you are likely to find this handy in many different situations. The commonly used hand signal for down is to extend your hand in front of you with the palm down and move towards the floor.



Training the STAY exercise –

Stay is a very useful behavior to teach your dog and 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 does not have to be a sound like "ack!" or anything harsh at all. It could be a simple phrase like "uh oh", "whoops", "too bad", "wrong" or "try again" given in a light or neutral tone of voice. 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.

Before you can teach the dog a behavior you have to know exactly what behavior you desire. For this exercise we 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.



The set up: Put the dog in a sit or down position. 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, use your NRM and pull the treat back out of his reach. Get the dog in back into position and repeat the exercise. 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).



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Release cue: You will need to use your release cue (see the Training the HEEL) 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 the dog 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 and yelling won't make this new word any more understandable.

Add time and proof: Now gradually extend the amount of time the dog 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 with the No Reward Mark sound and no treat, it was not correct to move. 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: Stay may seem like a fairly simple cue for the dog. If he stays in place, he gets a reward. If he moves, he doesn't get a reward. But it can be more difficult than that, depending on what is happening around the dog. You can raise the difficulty of the exercise in 3 ways:

- Add distractions – add activity, people, etc., around the dog while he is working
- Add duration – require the dog to stay for longer periods of time
- Add distance – move farther away from the dog



As you work on these variables remember to add them one at a time. Reduce the requirement for the other 2 variables as you work on one. If you are trying to increase the duration of the stay don't work on distance at the same time. When you add a difficult distraction, such as 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.

Only one cue: It is very important to give cues only ONCE! It is the dog's job to remember what he's doing. If you keep reminding him with, "stay...Stay...Staaaay" 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 cue. To a dog, "Stay" and "Stay, stay, stay." are two separate things.



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Training the RECALL exercise –

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 such as giving him a bath or clipping his nails.

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?” or “Want a cookie?” But many dogs have learned to associate ‘Come’ with negative things. 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.



Getting started: To teach a recall cue that your dog can’t wait to respond to you need to go 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 from you. You should not use the dog’s name as any part of the recall cue. The dog hears his name all the time but doesn’t have to come to whoever 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. Regardless of the word you choose, it should only be used to call the dog when you know he will respond or when you have good things for him.

Build positive associations: Your 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 rather than calling him to you.

If we want to dog to have positive associations with a word, we need to pair it with something the dog likes. Say the word then pull out a treat and give it to the dog. Keep saying the word and follow it by a treat that comes from a hidden location. Keep the treat hidden so that the dog doesn’t associate getting the treat with seeing the treat. The dog will hear the word and after about 30-40 repetitions will start to anticipate the treat that it predicts.

You should use the dog’s favorite treats for this exercise but still keep them really tiny pieces. You want to make the association of the word with positive things as strong as possible. Don’t use kibble for this. Instead pull out the bits of leftover steak!

Make it mean something: Once the dog is anticipating the treat when he hears the word, it’s time to pair it with an action. With the dog on a 4-6’ lead, say the cue and take a few steps backwards. When the dog comes with you, click and reward. Repeat this several times.

Now you are ready to make the exercise more difficult for the dog by increasing the distance. For this, you’ll need someone to hold the dog while you go a short distance away. Using a helper is preferable to putting the dog on a stay for this exercise because he may start to anticipate the recall cue during the



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stay, and it sets him up for failure. When the helper is holding the dog, that person also has the job of getting the dog excited. You want the 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 you should walk a short distance away. When you are ready, call the dog. By the time the dog gets the recall cue he should be practically turning himself inside out with excitement. Reward the dog when he responds by coming to you.



Increased distance and proof: Gradually, increase the distance the dog has to travel to get to the you. If played indoors with family or friends, you can 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 you can find increasingly difficult hiding places. Always have lots of praise and high value treats ready for the dog.

Recall with distractions: By building a strong foundation for the recall cue the dog should not find it too difficult 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) and someone to hold the distraction while you call the dog.

If you can only get one helper, then you will have to find the right location to play this game. You’ll need 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 looped around a solid object and back to your hand. The rope is simply to keep the dog in place without having to use a stay cue. If you do the exercise this way you will be the one getting the dog excited prior to giving the recall cue and releasing the handle end of the rope. Your helper provides the distraction.

The distraction: The distraction the helper is holding is a toy or treat that the dog needs to run past to get to you. The helper is NOT going to let the dog get the distraction item but will try to entice the dog to stop and investigate.

Ready, Set, Go: When everyone is in place give the recall cue. As the dog passes, the person with the distraction tries to get his attention. If the dog passes right by and comes directly to you, 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. You should also do nothing until the dog makes the choice to leave the distraction. Once the dog starts toward you, praise and encourage him and then reward him for making the right choice. Continue doing the exercise until the dog is completely ignoring the distraction, regardless of what it 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.



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Start with the helper feeding the dog a low value treat such as his normal dog food. You should have the dog's favorite treat. When the dog is happily eating, say his name to get his attention and give the recall cue. If the dog responds right away, give him lots of praise and reward him for being such a smart dog. Then try it again, this time with the helper using a little higher value treat.

If the dog does not respond to the recall cue, go and get him. Gently lead him by the collar to the place where he was supposed to respond and let him sniff the high value treat 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 rather than allowing him to practice ignoring you.

Proofing the recall: Practice using the cue anytime you can practice in such a way that the dog has a high likelihood of responding. Continue using a high value reward while practicing. Even short recalls from the end of a standard leash help to cement the cue in the dog's mind. 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.



When proofing the recall, you are teaching indirect access. The dog wants the reward, but he can't get the reward by going to the helper with the distraction. Instead, he gets the reward by ignoring the distraction and coming directly to you. Anytime you can incorporate a lesson on indirect access in your training you help the dog to not default to distractions in the environment and strengthen the dog's ability to respond appropriately to the cue.

Training for LEAVE IT exercises -

There are many dangerous situations your dog might face and 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. This skill must be demonstrated with both food and an animal of a different species. Being able to call the dog away from these situations where they could ingest something dangerous or harass people, dogs or wildlife you may encounter on walks 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 in your home, a friend's home or while on walks
- Finding a baited hook on a beach or shoreline
- Going after dropped medication your home, a hospital or nursing home
- Trying to visit someone who is afraid of dogs
- Finding a dead animal carcass or something stinky to roll in
- Seeing an animal like a cat, squirrel, chipmunk or even butterfly cross your path in front of you
- Coming across a skunk or porcupine (they usually don't run, because they don't have to!)



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- Approaching a less than friendly dog
- Locking his eyes onto something he can't have
- 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 like kibble or something the dog will eat but isn't crazy for. These treats will be the "bait". Set the "bait" on the floor on a paper plate so that it will be obvious to the dog. You will also need some of the dog's favorite treats or his favorite toy hidden in a pouch or pocket. This will be the dog's reward when he does what you want.



Be a post: Walk the dog up to where the bait is on the floor and stop close to the bait but not close enough that the dog can get to it. You are simply going to stand like a post, holding the leash still without jerking and not allowing the dog to reach the bait. The dog will be the one that does any pulling or loosening of the leash. Not you. You can use a waist leash for this exercise to ensure that you don't pull on the leash if you find this to help.

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 try 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 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; his favorite treats in your pocket. 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 on you. 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 it farther away 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: Next you'll raise 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, 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 'back up to reward'.

Add more time: Once the dog is looking at you quickly rather than staring at the bait you will gradually add the requirement of a longer and longer 'look at you' before you click and reward.

Now add the cue: Once the dog 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" cue should be said quietly, much like you would say "Hello" to a stranger. Your voice should not have an implied "or else" tone. You



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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. 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!" Since dogs are not preprogrammed to understand English let your dog 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 you can change things a bit. Put the really good stuff as bait. Start just as you did before. Your dog will go through the steps MUCH faster this time. Next try the exercise in a different location. Again, start from the beginning and again, your dog will progress through the steps quickly. Now try to walk by the food. Keep in mind that each time you add a variable (different bait, different day, new location, distractions, etc.) it becomes 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 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 you say "leave it" it means something specific. If you progress through the steps as outlined, your dog will know the cue means to leave alone whatever 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 leave it in a given situation, start giving a treat for only 3 out of 4 correct responses. Since you have the choice of which responses earn a treat, pick the faster responses. You can then progress to only giving a treat for 2 out of 4. Just remember to keep the reward 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, and sometimes he just gets to move on to the next cue.

This variable schedule of reinforcement will cause the greatest amount of drive and speed in the dog's responses. You will not always have to have food with you in order for your dog to respond appropriately. As you continue to build your relationship with your dog, you'll find the dog is happy to perform the behavior for praise, and of course the occasional food reward.

Once the dog reliably responds to the leave it cue you can move on to using the same cue with an animal. You'll go through the same steps as before but using an animal as 'bait'. Take great care to ensure that both your dog and the other animal are safe, and the other animal is not afraid when working on this exercise.



Training for the ON LEASH HEELING exercise –

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 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.

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 sits out of heel position are permissible.

Why dogs pull: Dogs do what works best for them. They do whatever works for them to get what they want. We know that a rewarded behavior is one that will be repeated, and 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. In order to stop the pulling the reward of forward motion must be removed.

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. Put something the dog really wants about 15-20 feet away from the start line. This could be a favorite person, food or a favorite toy or it could be the door to the outside world when the dog wants to go for a walk. Your objective is to get the dog to walk by your side in heel position all the way from the start line to the desired object.

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. It is not anything harsh or punishing in tone.

Hands-free leash: Many people find that a hands-free leash is one of the best ways to teach a dog to heel. By hands-free we mean a leash that attaches at the waist or goes over the shoulder. This type of leash helps the handler to be very stable as the center of gravity where the dog pulls from is removed from the arm and transferred to the stable core of the human body. The leash should be adjusted to ensure the leash can remain loose but tight enough that the dog won't trip on it. The hands-free leash helps the dog to learn on his own because it takes away the tendency of the handler to either pull on the leash or help the dog by giving him more leash to work with. A hands-free leash also gives the dog more information about where his body should be during walking.

Working toward the goal: Start with you and the dog both behind the start line. Be sure that the dog sees what is waiting for him at end. Start with the dog either sitting or standing at your left side and begin by walking toward the object that the dog desires.



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“Oops, try again” – No Reward Mark: As soon as you take a step or two, the dog is likely to pull out ahead of you. Have a clear picture in your mind of exactly where ‘too far in front of you’ is located by knowing where the imaginary line between “heeling’ and ‘not heeling’ is located. As soon as the dog crosses that imaginary 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 relationship between 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 the dog 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), the dog will better understand what behavior caused the NRM and consequence. Just be patient and consistent and you will begin to see results.

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.

The role of the clicker: 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 halfway to the reward 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.

Praise can backfire: If praising your dog for being in the proper position causes him to surge ahead, give a NRM 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 simply helps to clarify what the praise means to the dog. The praise is important to let the dog know that he’s doing it correctly.

Getting quick results: Most dogs are able to quickly figure out what is going on providing 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 when as the dog is just about to get to the other side. The dog just can’t contain himself any longer and makes a quick burst across the finish to get to his reward. This also means they left heel position too early and you have to be sure that he does not get rewarded. Don’t give in too early; it doesn’t help the dog. Anticipate 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 is no longer ‘cheating’ at the end. When the dog finally makes it all the way across the



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game field while maintaining self-control and staying in heel position, pile on the rewards! It's a big accomplishment and should be treated as such.

Add the release cue: Once your dog understands the cue you won't want him to be the one to decide when the heeling game is over. 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". It can be any word you'll remember to use consistently 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' and will be useful going forward for many other behaviors as well. You will be adding the cue 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. Timing is important here and you want to be sure you give the cue BEFORE and not AS you leave the start. Practice the exercise to help the dog 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 since by changing the location you have changed the game from the dog's perspective. 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 heel means heel even if you are just walking down a street or trail. When you are walking with your dog, he is in it for the sights and smells and for socialization with any other dog or human 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 pulling: You will find that once your dog fully understands the heel cue you will no longer have a dog that drags you around by the leash. This is further reinforced if you practice the 'tight leash means look at me' exercise. When the dog forgets his manners just stop. This removes the reward of forward motion. When the dog remembers that it's a loose leash and not pulling that gets him what he wants (forward motion), you can proceed.





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Training the SAFE AROUND PEOPLE exercise –

Most dogs don't have a problem with this exercise. The ones that do have trouble are likely very shy dogs. This exercise is NOT a test of the dog's manners. The dog is not required to sit for the greeting, but it is nice when they do. This exercise is to make every attempt to be sure that dogs with the title of Dog Scout have temperaments that will not make them a danger to the public.

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 people the golden rules of dog greetings:

- Never touch a dog unless he has touched you first.
- Respect a dog's space. If the dog backs away, don't follow. 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 that direct eye contact is dangerous.
- Crouch down or sit on the floor when greeting a dog. Dogs know that you can't move as quickly when sitting and it makes them feel safer.

Work on socialization: You can work on socializing your shy dog by finding someone who is willing to help you.

- 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! Work up to having the dog do known behaviors for the treats.
- Have the person touch only the less threatening parts of dog's body such as the neck and shoulders. Some dogs will enjoy a good butt rub.
- If the dog is not comfortable taking food from the person have the person throw treats to the dog. The treats should land so that the dog has to move away from the person to get the food. 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.
- Make sure 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.



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- Be extra vigilant that the dog does not get into a situation where he feels he needs to defend himself. Once dogs learn the aggressive displays make scary things, like people and other dogs go away, they will use aggression again. Aggression is self-rewarding because it causes the scary things to back away. If the aggression is rewarded over and over again the aggression becomes stronger each time it is used. The best remedy for aggression is to socialize the dog appropriately so he doesn't feel the need to use aggression.



Always proceed slowly when socializing a shy dog. Moving the dog past his comfort zone too quickly can reinforce the dog's perspective that people are scary and may cause regression.



Questions or concerns regarding any aspect of the Dog Scout Test or any Scoutmaster's decision should be addressed to the Merit Badge Program Administrator. Detailed contact information can be found on our [web site](#).