



OVERVIEW: Teaching your dog directional control has many benefits and applies to many of the DSA merit badges. It can also be applied to traditional Search & Rescue work, as in the environment where these skills are used it is important for the safety of the human/canine team that the dog be able to respond essentially instantly to commands to move in a particular direction, stop, lie down, etc.

TARGETING: Directional Control is an extension of targeting, so teaching the dog to target marks and platforms with his body should be a pre-requisite for the badge. An understanding of targeting is something that can be taught using very short training sessions with daily practice. A simple way to train and reinforce this concept is to have the dog go to a target place and wait just before his daily meals. This takes very little time out of the day and is a perfect training opportunity. Be sure to vary the object you use for the target and the location of its placement.

Teaching the Dog to Target –

1. Choose something to use for a target. This can be a lightweight dog bed, towel, bath mat or small platform. Almost anything can be used for a target. You will eventually need 4 targets, but they do not have to be identical. In fact, varying what is used for a target helps the dog to understand the concept more quickly.
2. Place the target on the floor and position yourself so the dog is likely to get on it quickly. Place the target on the floor in front of you if that's where the dog normally sits or stands.
3. When the dog is on the target, feed him about 5 small treats one after the other while using lots of praise. Once the 5 treats are gone, stop and pick up the target, even if you have to pull the target out from under the dog or ask him to move.
4. Repeat steps 2 & 3 multiple times, moving the location of the target each time. Use different targets so that the dog learns that the targets all "work" the same way. Using a variety of targets early in the process will help the transition to different surfaces that the dog may encounter in the future.
5. Once the dog is having success, begin to put the target down and then step away from it before sending the dog to it. Increase the distance as the dog has more and more success but be sure to vary the distance so that some are closer and some are further away.
6. Once the dog is quickly moving to the target when it is moved to different locations in a low-distraction environment you'll move to a more challenging environment, such as outdoors. You can choose to use a fenced area and/or work with a long line.
7. As the dog becomes more confident, start to toss the target to either side of you but without turning your body to face it. This allows you to begin to use your arm and hand to signal the dog to go to the target. This begins the association between the mat placement and hand signal that is needed for directional control.

Note: Until the dog is quite confident with this type of targeting, Directional Control will be out of reach for the dog/handler team. Significant distance is not required, but the dog should be about to go out to a target that is at least 6 feet away before working toward the Directional Control badge.

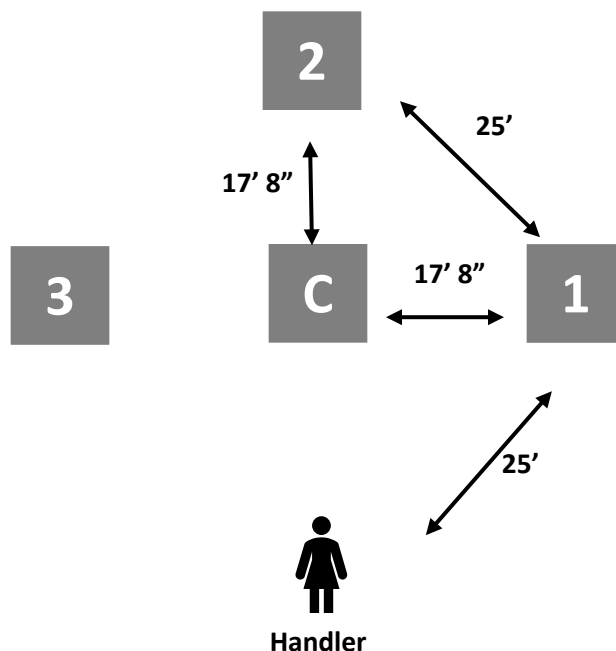
DIRECTIONAL SIGNALS: The key to success with the Directional Control badges is having the dog understand directional arm/hand signals as the dog must be able to successfully navigate moving from one platform to another at a distance, where it may be harder for the dog to hear verbal cues correctly.



Teaching Directional Signals –

1. Place the target away from you to achieve more distance, getting a friend to help you, putting the dog on a leash, or giving the dog a stay command. Start with the dog sitting next to you while you are holding his collar. Point your arm/hand to the target that is placed at a distance that the dog is able to do easily. The dog should look at the target with you point to it. Use a “send” cue to let the dog know that he should move to the target and release his collar so that he can go. Be sure you choose a cue that the dog will not confuse with other cues and don’t duplicate a cue that you already use in a different way. “Target” is a good cue to use for many people. When the dog reaches the target go to him and reward him while he is on the target.
2. Next, start to use 2 targets. Start with the targets closer to you than in the previous step, but still out of reach. Point to the target you want the dog to go to, wait for him to look at the target and then send him to the target using your cue. Go to the dog and reward him. If the dog goes to the wrong mat, just wait. Do nothing and see if the dog figures it out. If he doesn’t, call him back and try again from the sitting position. Don’t worry if the dog makes a mistake as it will help to clarify the exercise for him. If the dog moves to either target before you give the cue, just start over without making a big deal of it. The dog must learn to wait for you cue because later he will need to wait on one target for your direction before moving to another.
3. Once the dog is able to correctly go to any target on cue with the mats just out of reach you can gradually increase the distance. Don’t try and increase the distance too much too soon! Patience is the key to success. You will still move to the dog to reward him with each cue that he gets right for now.

USING FOUR TARGETS: Once the dog has a solid understanding of directional arm/hand signals, set up 4 targets in the pattern used for the exercise, including adding a 5th “target” for the handler to stand on. You do not need to set the targets with the distance specified for the exercise but be sure that the distance between each target is equal, as in the exercise pattern.



Distances shown here are for SAR Directional Control 1. For SAR Directional Control 2, the requirement is 50' between each of the targets on the outer perimeter (rather than 25') and 37.5' between each target and the handler (rather than 17.8').



Dog Scouts of America
Training & Safety Information

SAR Directional Control

Practice having the dog move from the center target to the numbered targets and back to center. Fade the use of a reward with each cue and gradually increase the distance until the dog is able to complete the exercise at the required distance.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS: There are a number of other cues that the dog needs to have a solid understanding of in order to meet the requirements of the SAR Directional Control badges. These are demonstrated during the normal course of the exercise. These include “get up” (or “hup”) to indicate that the dog should get up on the target platform as well as sit, down, stay and come. For SAR Directional Control 2, the dog must demonstrate a drop on recall (down) at some point during the exercise between the targets and/or the handler’s position (with the dog at least 5’ away). Additionally, the dog can heel with the handler for about 10’ at the end of the exercise.