

Down

There are three basic steps when teaching your puppy this cue:

1. **Lure.** Put the puppy into a *sit* position and then place a treat in your hand in front of the puppy's nose. Move the treat slowly down between his front legs to the floor. When most puppies' noses go between their front legs, the back legs slide back and they go down, which is exactly what you want. A slippery surface works best for this training, as it offers little resistance to the puppy sliding down to the floor.
2. **Mark.** The second the puppy's body hits the floor, say a word such as "Yes" or give a click from a clicker to mark the behaviour. This lets him know that was the behaviour you wanted.
3. **Reward.** Give the puppy a different tasty treat in addition to the one you just used to get him into the *down* position. Make sure he receives the treat while his body is still on the floor, or you will be rewarding the wrong behaviour. The correct position is body on floor to receive his reward.

Once the puppy is consistent at downing promptly every time you show him the lure, change the lure into a reward. This can be accomplished by moving your hands the same way, but without any treats. Add the verbal cue "Down" at the same time you are moving your hand to the floor. The second his body hits the floor, mark and reward him quickly. With a little time and practice you can stop using your hands entirely and merely give the cue "Down." The finished behaviour has three basic steps:

- I. **Cue.** Say the cue "Down."
- II. **Mark.** Say "Yes" or a click the moment the puppy's body hits the floor.
- III. **Reward.** Give the puppy a treat.

It is very important to change the lure into a reward only for *completing the behaviour*, or the puppy will listen to you only when he sees a treat. The first time he *downs* without you showing him a treat, **jackpot** him for a good job.

A **jackpot** is many tiny treats given to him in a row. Instead of just one treat, a jackpot will be four or five tiny treats in a row. This is to let him know he did a **great job**.

Helping Your Puppy Generalise the Cue

If you are teaching your puppy to *down* in front of you, start asking for the *down* at your side. This will be a new behaviour you are requesting since dogs do not generalise well. When you teach your puppy to *down* at your side, train the same way you did when asking for the *down* when he was in front of you. Once he is consistent in front of you and at your side, it is time to introduce new environments, such as a different room, then outside, then from across the room, and so on. Each step takes time. This is a progression toward teaching your puppy that when you give the cue "Down," he learns in many different places and from many different positions that "Down" means you want his body on the floor.

Often, a new puppy parent thinks its puppy is stubborn, hard-headed, or has selective hearing because the puppy will not *down* when asked for the cue. In many cases, it is because the puppy parent did not teach the puppy the cue in many places or with distractions. Another reason why some puppies do not *down* on cue is because they were habituated to the cue. This can happen when puppy parents repeated the cue more than once by saying “Down, down, down.” This can confuse the puppy and he will get used to hearing “Down” (one time) with no behaviour required of him, which makes the cue ineffective. If you must repeat the cue, take a step to the right or left first, get your puppy’s attention, and then repeat the cue—once.

Troubleshooting *Down*

Some puppies resist the above method. You can address this resistance in a couple of ways.

The first option is to begin by sitting on the floor with your puppy between your legs. Bend one leg up and slide your hand under your bent knee with the treat in it. Show your puppy the treat. As your puppy puts his head down toward the treat, bring it under your leg so the only way he can get the treat is to lie down and get under your bent knee. This may be a little difficult, but you should have to use this method only a few times before he is willing to *down* on cue. Once your puppy is consistently downing from this position, you can then train the behaviour with him next to you on the floor instead of between your legs. From that point, ask for the behaviour while you are kneeling on the floor and then from a standing position. **Remember to always mark and reward** when he gives you the *desired* behaviour.

Another way to train this behaviour is to pay attention to your puppy. When he goes to lie down on his own, say the cue “Down,” mark the behaviour, and give him a treat to reinforce the *down*. When you repeat this several times over several days, the puppy will learn the cue *down* on his own with a little help from you. Remember, once he is downing consistently, move to **different rooms** and **add distractions** while perfecting this behaviour. This method of training is about catching your puppy doing what you want, giving it a name (cue), then marking and rewarding to establish the new behaviour.

If you find that your puppy seems to be resisting the *down* cue, ***do not push his body down to the floor***. There may be a medical reason for this resistance. Instead, contact our practice and set up an appointment. Many puppies that have resisted the *down* cue were later diagnosed with a physical problem.



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us