

## TEACHING A DOWN STAY

by Terena Thomas



1. The dog must first understand the word down and must be familiar with the clicker. When introducing your pooch to this technique he will want to get immediately up; don't get frustrated or make any negative sounds towards him. Your dog is trying to please you he just doesn't know how yet. When this occurs simply point to the ground and wait 5 seconds. If your pooch doesn't go down DO NOT REPEAT THE WORD DOWN, simply hold the leash to the floor so he can't go anywhere. Repeat the stay command again and wait less time. Click and treat often and progress slowly for maximum success.

2. Ask the dog for a down and wait 2-3 seconds before clicking and treating. Do this exercise several more times waiting 1 more second than the last time. Continue in this manner until you can get 15 seconds between the initial command and the click. This is a difficult step for your dog so progress slowly and reward for desired behavior. NO verbal corrections! Once this is attained practice this 15 second down exercise several times daily for a week.

3. Start adding the command stay to this and the release. First ask for a down and praise him quietly, in a low pitch with flat or descending sounds. Then place the flat of your hand in front of his vision and say the word stay. Wait only 5 seconds before clicking while simultaneously saying his release word following with treats and lots of praise. Use the release every single time! If he doesn't understand the release, he won't understand the stay. Work up to 15 seconds using the stay command. For this exercise it's important to stay by the dog and not move for the duration of the stay. It is also critical to practice this all over your home starting with 5-6 second stays and working up to 15 seconds. Always release. Do this until your dog is firm on what is expected of him when you give him the stay command.

4. If your pooch can stay for 15 seconds in all rooms of your home it is time to ask him to do it longer. Start your stay with 10 seconds and gradually add a couple of seconds each time you practice. He should work up to 3 minutes with you near him at all times. Do this several times a day with minimal distractions until you can get 3 minute down stays for 4 days in a row. If he starts getting up or crawling you've advanced too far too quickly; back up to where you KNOW he can do it. Praise the correct behavior and start progressing much more slowly to give your pup confidence in his work.

5. When your dog is up to a successful three minute down stay he's ready for two things: the 15 minute down stay and the 3 minute down stay with movement and distractions.

6. Do step 6 and 7 simultaneously. The 3 minute down stay with movement is very difficult for dogs to understand so progress very slowly with patience and understanding. We will omit the clicker at this stage in the game. Ask the dog for a down stay. Begin with little movements to each side of him. Release and treat. Over a period of a week you should be able to walk all the way around him if you progress slowly enough. When he can handle that for 3 days in a row start making your movements a little more erratic and noisy. If your pup breaks quickly grab his leash and place him in the same spot he originally started in by standing on the leash so he can't raise his head. Do not verbally correct or repeat the down command. He will quickly give up and lie back down. PRAISE PRAISE PRAISE him for laying down and staying there. Repeat the stay command and tune down the distraction a little. When he handles it release and praise him. Continue doing this until the 3 minute down is pretty much bomb proof and you can do it anywhere anytime.

7. The 15 minute down stay is started sitting at his side with the leash on. Have something to do that isn't too demanding or relaxing such as read a book or watch TV. Place the dog on a down stay at your side. Do not allow the dog to be in your lap or have his head on your lap during this time nor should you pet him during the stay as it will distract him and cause him to forget he's working. You may praise him occasionally using the same calm, quiet, low pitched voice as before. Set the timer for 15 minutes and place the dog on a down stay. He is familiar with this practice so it should be easy in the beginning. As your dog lays there place his leash in your hand with just enough lead to allow the dog comfort where he is. Plant that hand to the floor now for the rest of the 15 minutes. When your dog stands up the leash will not be long enough for him to be comfortable. Keep quiet and allow him to learn from this. He may struggle for a

moment but if you keep your hand steadfast he will soon give up and plop back down on the floor. Praise him calmly and repeat the stay signal and verbal cue. Do not get frustrated during this time as the record for the greatest number of stands in a 15 minute period is over 200 (if you break that record let us know). Your dog will understand what is expected of him if you are consistent and firm while remaining silent during the episodes when he forgets he's working. When the 15 minutes is up quietly release him and give him a treat. Take his leash off. He may choose to stay there for another hour or he may now get up freely and do as he pleases. This should be done daily for at least a week or until he can handle 15 minutes for 4 consecutive days. Up to this point there is little distraction and you are on the floor next to your dog. You and your dog are ready to move to a chair using your foot as the lever (instead of your hand) which is planted to the floor. Do the exercise exactly as before until you obtain a down stay while you sit in a chair next to him for 4 days in a row. Next try standing several times without moving your planted foot during his down stay. When your dog can handle that for another 2 consecutive days it is time to try movement. During the 15 minute stay stand and move 3-4 steps away from your dog. Return and sit down. If your dog follows you gently take him by the leash and place him in the EXACT same spot he was in and repeat the stay command. Move away again but return quickly and sit next to him and praise calmly. ALWAYS RETURN TO HIS SIDE TO RELEASE HIM!! In order to teach your dog a 2 hour down stay he must feel confident that he can fall asleep and not miss it when you release him so by returning to his side you allow him time to wake up and hear the word. Even if he is not sleeping never release from across the room, it causes too much confusion. Gradually increase the amount of movement you can do while always staying in the room with your pup. When you can put him on a 15 minute down stay as you clean your house you are ready to increase the time he stays down. Make sure your pooch isn't thirsty or suffering from a lack of exercise and be certain he doesn't need to eliminate. First increase it by a minute or two at a time. When you get to a 30 minute down stay pause your advancement for a week and let the dog get used to calming himself for that long. When you get 7 days in a row with perfect 30 minute down stays progress by 5 minute intervals until you obtain an hour. Again halt your advancement until you can get 7 consecutive days with a successful down stay. If he breaks the stay during this time DO NOT yell at him. Quickly take him by the leash and place him where he was originally then restate the stay command and release him within the next minute. Note how long your dog stayed before breaking and repeat the stay for the amount of time minus a couple of minutes that he stayed before breaking. Start your training from that point and progress more slowly. Increase the down stay time to 2 hours without any correction and start preparing to add more distractions. Start by doing a 15 minute down stay outside with you in a chair next to him. Progress in the same manner as you did when you both were indoors. Add a little more distraction such as asking for a half hour down stay with you at his side during a ball game. Get him used to doing an hour down stay while you mow your lawn or do other activities. Dinner time is an excellent opportunity to practice down stays. Once your dog can do a 2 hour down stay with you in sight start quickly darting into other rooms of the house (not for very long to begin with) while he's on his stay. Always keep him in mind though so you can check on him and make sure he hasn't gotten up and left when you weren't looking. Practice down stays throughout the week so he will always be strong in them.

## **Canine Country School, LLC**

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**\*\*The Canine Country School is not responsible for any behavior problems you may experience with your dog\*\***