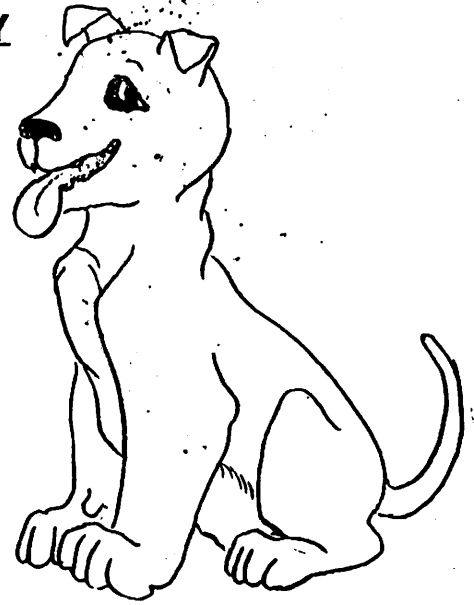


TEACHING A SIT STAY

by Terena Thomas



1. Your dog must already know what sit means to successfully start this exercise. Obtain your pooches food bowl and place the meal in the bowl topped with some tasty treats. Give the command sit to your dog one time and one time only for the entire exercise. Give the dog a treat for the sit and begin lowering the bowl towards the floor. As long as your dogs bottom stays on the floor the bowl will be lowered but as soon as your pup stands or lays down you must quickly and effectively stand upright and lift the bowl back up. Effectively means the sooner you stand up after the dog moves into a stand or down the quicker the dog can make the association between sitting and having the bowl lowered. When he stands say nothing. If he starts to get distracted shake the bowl or make kissing noises to get his attention back but do not repeat the command sit or say come; let him figure it out. When he does sit on his own praise him and treat him then start lowering the bowl again.

Continue lowering the bowl and lifting the bowl according to his body position until you can set it on the floor and stand all the way upright. At this point do not move or talk but be ready to quickly fetch the bowl if he stands or goes for it. If he's securely sitting (not stretching towards the bowl or close to standing) release him now with your release word and encourage him to stand and go to the bowl. Do not bring the bowl to him or force the situation. If he doesn't want to eat right then just repeat the release word and walk away; this teaches him the release word. Do this daily while continually increasing the amount of time he has to be sitting before you release him to his meal. Work up to a half minute of a sit stay before advancing to step 3.

2. If you find that the treat after the sit command is more of a distraction than a positive influence then it may be omitted but be sure to get a lot of reinforcement for what you want in the training session. The rule for reinforcement in this game is try and treat him at least one time every minute as he's learning. That will keep his spirits up and his mind open. If he's not reinforced often enough as he's trying to learn this game he will never learn it and will just learn obstinance and frustration.

* Some rules of thumb* Whenever your dog is sitting continually praise him using a low pitched, flat or slowly descending voice so as not to over stimulate him which would encourage him to move. Keep the bowl at a safe distance from him. You should always be able to get to the bowl faster than he can for the first week or two of training because if he were to ever get a nibble before you release him it defeats the whole purpose and you have to start all over.

3. When you're up to a secure sit stay for at least 30 seconds it is time to add movement. Expect a 10 second sit stay at first and move only one step side to side. The next exercise should be for 15 seconds with two steps side to side. Keep adding time and the amount of movement each time you feed until you can walk all the way around the room for 1 minute with the dog sitting waiting for the release word. Your dog will not be ready for you to leave out of his sight for probably the first 2-3 months of practicing this so don't even try it; it's a setup for failure.

4. Notice that not once yet have you added the word stay. If we were to say stay earlier he might have gotten up and that would have taught him that stay means move sometimes but not other times. If you have used the word stay with him before incorrectly then choose a different word. We want the stay command to be very concrete and nonnegotiable to the dog so don't add the command until you'd bet \$20.00 that your dog would stay for 30 seconds with movements. If you're willing to bet money you're ready to add stay to your command list. Stay is added after you give the command sit and the dog executes the behavior. Block the dogs vision with the palm of your hand and say calmly but firmly, one time 'stay'. Continue everything normally as you did the day before. Lower the bowl and release. Do not move or go more than 10 seconds the first time you add the word stay. Do this until you can move around the room for 1 minute with no mistakes for seven days in a row.

5. When your dog can do a sit stay for 1 minute with movement it is time to remove the bowl. At the same time as you usually feed him, do this exercise and ask him to sit and stay while you pretend to have his bowl. Lower an imaginary bowl and move as you regularly would. Release him after 30 seconds and immediately follow with the normal sit stay for his meal. Do this for 3 days.

6. Move him to a different room in the house for the next 2 meals. repeat step 5 in the new room then move to another room for 2 meals. Do this until he can do an excellent sit stay in every room of your home for every meal.

7. Up until this point he's done 2 sit stays daily throughout your house. We now need to teach him that he needs to stay during other times of day. When you get home ask for a 1 minute sit stay without the bowl or maneuvers associated with it. Ask for a sit stay as you brush your teeth or read at night. Continue practicing sit stays in your house until you know he can stay wherever and whenever you ask.

** If your pooch were to break the sit stay at this level simply pull his leash up and towards his tail until he sits for you again, PRAISE and repeat the hand signal for stay. Ask for the stay for a shorter period of time with less distractions so he gets positively reinforced for staying when asked. Be sure to release.

8. Move the sit stay to your yard. Expect him to mess this up terribly so start all over again with the bowl at his mealtime. Do not say stay until you'd bet money that he'd stay. Gradually increase the amount of time he sits and stays up to 1 minute as you increase the distractions around him. Ask the neighbor to have their dog out when you do this. See if your cat will stay in the yard. Do not bring another dog into the yard; it will create tension in your pooch as he thinks the other may get to his food before he does.

9. When your dog can do a wonderful sit stay outside in your yard with distractions at mealtime it is time to remove the bowl and expect him to do a quick 10 seconds sit stay without distractions. Work up to 30 seconds before adding movement and 1 minute with movement before advancing to tougher distractions.

10. Move to a quiet park and ask for an easy 10 second sit stay. Release and smother him with praise. Continue building the sessions until you can successfully get a 1 minute sit stay with all kinds of distractions anytime or anywhere.

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