



Timpanogos
animal hospital

5 BASIC COMMANDS

A well-behaved dog is welcome everywhere he goes.

See Spot. See Spot run. See Spot slip out of his new collar and run straight toward the busy street.

But wait! Hear Spot's owner shout, "Come!" and see Spot, well-trained dog that he is, immediately turn away from danger and return to his owner's side. Now see Spot's owner resume breathing and give Spot the tightest embrace of his life.

This is but one example of why dogs need to learn reliable responses to a few basic commands. Another is that trained dogs behave better at home and in public, especially around strangers and in new situations.

All dogs stand to benefit from obedience training, although it is most important—if not crucial—for large, strong breeds to learn some valuable lessons about etiquette.

In fact, dogs actually appreciate training because it satisfies their innate desire to please their owner (the pack leader). Be sure to show your dog how happy he makes you every time he responds to one of your commands. You'll be amazed at how training will strengthen your bond.

Every civilized dog should know at least five basic commands: heel, sit, down, stay, and come. These commands are the core exercises required for a Companion Dog (CD) title in an American Kennel Club Novice obedience competition.

Before we proceed with training instructions, a few words about praise and correction are in order. Praise implies more than obvious approval when your dog has done something right. It also means praising him after you have corrected or disciplined him and the dog has responded appropriately. (Praise after correction does not lessen the impact of the correction, but it is very reassuring.) Most dogs need no more than a simple "Good dog!" offered in your most supportive, warm voice. Others appreciate a cheerful pat on the head or neck. Occasionally, a dog will need some sort of food reward. Start with vocal praise and move on to other forms of praise, if necessary. Your dog will let you know when he gets the message.

Corrections should always be mild and nonviolent. Again, the best tool to use is your own voice. Teach yourself to say "No!" in a loud, firm tone. It needn't be deafening to be effective. There should never be a need to strike your dog, unless he's threatening to actually harm someone, and then you'll have to use your best judgement for that moment. Aggressive dogs need special treatment, however, so consult with a veterinarian for advice.

Training periods should take place regularly once or twice a day. Gradually increase the training time from 15 to 30 minutes. Longer sessions will tire both dog and trainer.

HEEL:

Teaching a dog to heel by your side is vital if for no other reason than to be able to walk him properly. To begin heeling, position the dog at your left side and start to walk (left foot first) while calling the dog's name and giving the command to heel: "Fido, heel!" Simultaneously snap the lead lightly to persuade the dog to move along.

Use only as much force as necessary to get the dog moving with you. As you walk along, continue to urge the dog to walk at your left side, with the neck and shoulder approximately opposite and level with your left leg, by snapping the lead. Each time, give the command "Heel!" as you snap. And each time you snap and command, follow it with praise. It

will probably take a good deal of work before your dog understands what he is supposed to do. But if you're patient and consistent, he will learn, especially when he realizes that you are pleased by his response.

The secret of successful heeling training is learning the art of snapping the lead—tightening and releasing the choke collar. Remember that the less the choke is used to achieve the desired effect, and with the least amount of force, the better. Use a series of quick jerks, no steady pressure, to make your message clear. Always offer praise with each jerk to remove the sting without removing the lesson.

Practice heeling in brief but lengthening sessions one or more times daily. Continue until you have to give only one command as you start walking and no longer need to use the lead for correction. Practice moving in circles, around corners and using other maneuvers, while keeping the dog at your side with continual snaps and praise, until you're confident that your dog is walking with you of its own accord. When heeling is well learned, you're ready to move on to teaching the sit. As you go on to each new exercise, incorporate past assignments into your lessons to keep them fresh.

SIT:

Start by walking with your dog heeling by your side. Then stop, give the command "Sit!" and place your left hand on the dog's rear, guiding it into a sitting position while your right hand uses the lead to hold the head up. Keep your hands in place to make the dog remain sitting for a moment; then give the heel command and resume walking. Again stop, give the command to sit, guide the dog into position and have him stay seated a little longer.

Gradually, as your dog catches on, you can quit giving the command and lead and hand correction. The dog will sit automatically when you come to a halt, and wait for you to either start moving again or for his release through an established release command, such as "OK!" Don't forget to praise him.

When your dog has learned the full meaning of sit, and learned to sit when you stop walking, you're ready to teach the sit from any position. Put the training collar and lead on, and give the dog the "Sit!" command, guiding him into position as before. Concentrate on this phase, continuing the pure sit training until your dog will sit on command without the need for corrections. When this is accomplished, you're ready for the stay.

STAY:

To teach the stay, place your dog in a seated position while he is on the lead. Tell him "Stay!" Place the palm of your left hand in front of the muzzle and, starting with your right foot, take one step away from the dog. Repeat the "Stay!" command in a coaxing but firm voice and keep your hands on him, if necessary, to reinforce the command.

During the first few attempts, don't try to make your dog stay for more than 10 or 20 seconds before releasing him. Slowly increase the time and the distance you step away while cutting down on the repeated vocal commands, until your dog will stay on just one command for at least 3 full minutes.

It's important for you to understand that the properly trained dog will do what he is told the first and only time he is told. During training, it's OK to give as many commands as it takes to get the idea across, but you must reach the point where only one "heel," "sit," or "Stay" is necessary. Otherwise, you'll never be able to trust the dog's response in a pinch.

DOWN:

Begin with the dog sitting by your left side. Then kneel and reach over his back with your left arm, taking hold of his upper left front leg. At the same time, you're your right hand to grasp the dog's right front leg. Tell him "Down!" and gently position him on the ground by lifting his front feet with your hands and easing his body downward.

When your dog is down, slowly release your grasp, sliding your left hand around and leaving it on the dog's back. Keep saying "Down, stay!" as you do this. Make sure the dog remains in this position for a few seconds. Then release and command him into a sitting position for a few seconds. Continue until your dog goes down at command without your having to lift the front feet, and will stay quietly until released, without any pressure of your left hand on the back. Then give the command without putting your hands into the ready position. After a few days, you should be able to remain standing and give only one command "Down!" for your dog to lie at your side. Your goal is then to improve until he goes down when his is several feet ahead of you, still on lead.

COME:

Perhaps the most important command a dog must learn is to respond immediately to come. While your dog is heeling at your side, take a sudden step back and say, "Fido, come!" As you give the command, snap the lead to make the dog turn around to his right while walking, and get him headed back toward you. When your dog is facing you, keep walking backward, urging him to come toward you with continued gentle snaps of the lead and repetitions of the "Come!" command.

Now comes the part that may puzzle your dog, so be sure to use praise. When your dog is in full stride toward you, stop, and give the command "Sit!" At first, you may need to guide him into a sitting position directly in front of you. Once that's been accomplished, tell the dog "Stay!" and walk around in a position, then start up at the heel for another try.

Continue working this way until you have only to step backward and give the command, with no lead, urging the dog to turn and walk to you and then sit in front of you without further command. From here, the progression to the recall from a sitting position at a distance should be relatively simple. Get the dog to sit, then step away to the end of the lead. Give the "Come!" command. If your dog hesitates, give a slight snap on the lead to let him know what you want; he should rise, come to you and sit in front.

Notice that there is never a tug of war going on between you and your dog in teaching this command. The dog is already in motion when you tell him to "Come!" so you don't have to struggle with the lead to urge the dog out of a stationary position.

No matter what your prior experience, you can have a well-trained dog. Be consistent; praise often; and persevere. There are plenty of excellent training manuals in bookstores and libraries. Or join an obedience class. But don't give up. Even if obedience training never saves your dog's life, it can make your days together sweeter.

By Terrance Pred