

# Teaching Sit

How many squats can you do in a row? While sit is a natural position for most dogs, repeatedly sitting and standing over a short period of time is not. Sitting involves the bending, contraction and stretching of several joints, tendons, muscles and ligaments and repetitive strain injury can occur just as with any oft-repeated action. *Don't ask for more than four or five repetitions of "sit" at a time, particularly for puppies, unfit dogs, and elderly dogs.* If a dog is reluctant, slow, shuffling, hunched forward, or sitting wide legged, chances are sit is painful – there is no law that says your dog must be able to sit on command, so don't insist!

## Teaching "Sit"

### 1) Teach the Position

Hold a treat close to your dog's nose and get him interested. Then *slowly* move the treat over his head towards his tail. You want his nose to continue to follow the treat, so don't move so fast that he loses contact, and don't hold it so high that it disappears out of range. Too fast will result in a spin or stepping backwards; too high will result in a jump; both will result in a bewildered dog! Adjust speed and height to ensure that your dog lifts his head and drops his rear end down into sit position. As soon as his rear hits the ground, mark this with "yes" and give him the treat. Repeat this over several short sessions, until he is automatically sitting when you move the treat over his head. Don't use any cue ("sit" command) at this stage – it will be easier for him to associate your cue with the correct action if he understands the action first.

NEVER press down on a dog's back or rump, or try to physically force him into position. It is not necessary if you are luring correctly and patiently, and it can result in pain, injury, and fear. If a dog really doesn't want to sit, there is likely to be a very good reason. "Stand still" and "feet on the floor" skills have exactly the same benefits for control and management as "sit", and may be a better option for your dog.

### 2) Remove the Food Lure

Once you have a reliable sit with food, use exactly the same movement to lure your dog into a sit without food in your hand. As soon as he is successful, mark and reward from your other hand. Practice until you feel sit is automatic with a no-food hand.

### 3) Add the Cue

Once you are confident that your dog will sit every time, repeat step two, but this time give your "sit" cue just as his rear touches the ground. Then mark and reward as usual. Practice for a few sessions, then starting giving the cue earlier – before he has assumed the position. If at any stage he stops sitting or seems confused, go back to point where he is succeeding and work your way back up.

### 4) Turn the Lure into a Hand Signal

Start just lifting your hand slightly, rather than moving it over his head, saying "sit" as you do so. Mark and reward if successful. If he is not responding, make your hand signal more obvious for a while, then slowly reduce back down.

### 5) Add Different Options

Once your dog is confidently sitting on cue, start trying to get a sit with the verbal cue alone, and with the hand signal alone. Be prepared to jump in and help if he needs it. Mark and reward all successful efforts. Practice with your dog on either side as well as in front, and at short distances, on different surfaces, and under varying circumstances.