



Down. Good Boy!

What is the picture of Down? Put all 4 elbows and belly on the ground and stay there, until I tell you otherwise.

NOTE: Down does not mean, “Get off me” or “Get off the furniture”. In those situations, use the word OFF, instead of DOWN. Also, don’t say “Sit Down!” Which one do you want me to do, Sit or Down? People are so confusing!

The Down behavior can be a little more challenging to teach as it is an exercise of placing the dog into a more submissive position. Some dogs may resist at first, but persistence is key. Don’t get discouraged if it takes a little longer for your dog to go all the way down.

Teaching the down:

Start by luring or guiding your dog into a sit, but DO NOT say the command “sit”. If you say, “sit” and proceed to lure him into a down, eventually your dog will anticipate the down behavior every time you ask him to “sit” and the two behaviors/commands will become one and the same. In the beginning stages, it is easier to lure your dog into a down by starting in a sit position. Eventually, they will begin going down from a standing position as well.

Once your pooch is in a sit position, hold a piece of food like a magnet to his nose and lure him down by lowering the food to the floor **between** his two front paws. Nose to toes! If you get his nose to the ground and pull towards you, his booty is likely to pop up. It’s more effective to lure him down between his two front paws and then put a little pressure on his nose as a way to gently push his body backwards into the down position. Some dogs may need a little back and forth luring motion to finally realize what it is you want them to do. Remember that saying the word “Down” over and over again will *not* help him understand. Practice calm persistence and let Fido think! Give him time to problem solve.

Remember, getting your dog fluent in the behavior first is more important than the words. Of course, when you begin this exercise, your dog has no idea what the English word “down” means. You might as well be speaking to him in Swahili or Japanese. Consequently, there is no reason to even to begin using the word until your dog is about 80% fluent in the behavior. Once your dog begins to anticipate the behavior, you can assume he is at least 80% fluent in the behavior and you can begin using the word, “down”. With repetition and practice, your dog will eventually learn that the word “down” is associated with the behavior of putting his elbows and belly on the floor.

If your dog is a booty popper upper, meaning his booty keeps coming up as you try to lure him into a down, simply keep luring him back into a sit and praising every time his booty is firmly on the ground again.

Guess what you are going to do as soon as Fido has all four elbows and belly on the ground? Praise, reward and release him! Understand that this exercise can be difficult for your dog so make sure you let him know how much you appreciate his cooperation. Praise like a fool! Throw a party!

Teaching Fido that Down also means Stay:

The next step is to begin working on the “stay.” Begin by asking very little of your dog and slowly build on the 3 D’s: duration, distraction, and distance.

To begin teaching your dog the stay aspect, you must begin to change his picture of down very slowly. Up to this point, you have probably only practiced the down command by standing directly in front of your dog. So, we must now teach him that no matter where your body goes, he is to remain in a down position until told otherwise.

Our first goal is to be able to walk a circle around the dog. Once you have accomplished walking a full circle around Fido, you can then proceed to add distance and distractions.

During the following exercise, never take your eyes off your dog. If he begins to break his down, you must immediately help guide him back into position.

1. Ask Fido to go down and attempt a right pivot. In other words, take a small step with your right foot and turn your body so you are facing the same way as Fido; your right leg next to the left side of his body. Treat the success.
2. Repeat the command (“Down”) and then go back to your original picture of standing directly in front of him. You are repeating the command (once!) as a way of reminding him that even though something is about to change, he is still doing a job. Release (FREE!) and then repeat the right pivot exercise until your dog has succeeded at least 5 times in a row.
3. Do the exact same exercise with a left pivot.
4. Go back to the right side and begin to widen the pivot into a large half circle. Take baby steps!
5. Once your dog is a master with the wide right-side pivot, do the same with the left side.

6. Attempt to walk a full circle around Fido. Do NOT move too fast! If Fido begins failing often, take it back a couple of steps.

Remember the *First Noble Truth of Dog Training: Timing*. Watch constantly so that your guidance will be timely and your dog will know what you're trying to communicate with him.

Just like you must mark the exact moment he does it right, you must also immediately mark the moment when he breaks. Not only must you watch constantly, but you should also communicate constantly with verbal feedback. Tell them when they are doing it right! Unfortunately, too many of us concentrate on the negative feedback and give very little positive feedback. It is SO much easier to teach a dog (or any living, learning being, for that matter) by telling him what it is you DO want, rather than always concentrating on what it is you DON'T want. *Use the 5:1 Magic Ratio!*

In addition, observe the *Second Noble Truth of Dog Training: Consistency*. If you continuously let Fido break the down position without correction, you can never expect him to understand what you want.

Does down really mean down and stay there until told otherwise? How will he know unless you are consistent? Until Fido is performing very well, do not risk compromising your consistency or timing by walking far away or going out of sight during this exercise.

Generalization of the Down:

- *Clap your hands and stomp your feet
- * Drop the leash on the floor and then pick it up again, 3x in a row.
- * Get down on your knees six feet away.
- *Walk further and further away (be careful of making timing and consistency errors). Don't get too cocky too soon.
- * Have your friends walk by Fido (closer and closer).
- * Have a friend pet him while he is in a down (make sure you start by being right next to him).
- *Walk other dogs by him.
- *Throw a ball near him, or set down a piece of food in front of him.
- *Play with your dog. When he starts to get really excited, have him go into a down. Then release him and repeat.
- * Don't forget to keep it fun and build on success.