

Teaching the down



- Once your dog has worked this stage out, just take a treat in your hand (so the dog knows that there is something on offer) and just wait. As soon as the dog works out that it is lying down that you want (and be as patient as you have to be.... however long it takes!), and does it – give him a whole handful of treats and tell him he is a genius. And he is – because now you are communicating – and he is using his brain. This is the partnership you are aiming for. He knows you want something, works out what it is, and then you reward him. Perfect.
- Always remember to say 'down' as he does the action.

- Once he is doing this reliably, you can start to ask him to lie down by just using the cue word ('down'). He should happily oblige. If he doesn't, wait. Give him the chance to use his brain – for some dogs this can take a bit of time. Don't repeat the word – you are teaching your dog to listen the first time! If he really hasn't got it, go back a few steps and give yourself a telling off for trying to move too fast.

- Practise practise practise. Practise everywhere – not just in the one room – you are teaching your dog that 'down' means lie down wherever we are – not just lie down in the front room. It is amazing how many people only teach their dog in the one place – and then seem puzzled when their dog doesn't do it everywhere else!
- Well done – you have just successfully taught your dog what down means. Now you can start to reduce the rewards as you did with the sit. Start by asking for two downs before rewarding (after the first one just move somewhere else and when the dog follows you, ask for another down). Then three, then four (but remember to always vary the number you ask for so the dog never knows when the reward might come).
- Eventually you will only have to reward every 10 or 20 downs – or whenever you want. It is worth while continuing to reward the occasional down even after your dog is an expert just to keep him working with enthusiasm and let him know you still appreciate his efforts.



Teaching the Retrieve

Many people ask what the point is of teaching your dog to retrieve things. Well, there is nothing you can do with your dog that will improve the quality of your walks more than introducing retrieve games. Let's face it, without playing games on your walks they become nothing more than you and your dog indulging in separate activities together. You look at the countryside and think about the meaning of life, while all your dog does is have a good sniff and explores a bit.

Once you introduce games into your walks, they become something you do together. Your dog gets far more exercise, you both have far more fun, and most importantly, you strengthen the bond between you. In addition, you keep your dog totally focussed on you for the whole walk, reducing the chances of him vanishing off into the countryside in pursuit of squirrels, other dogs or indeed anything that is more interesting than boring old you!

Now before you start recall games you need to think about what kind of toy are you going to use? Whatever you decide,

it has to be something your dog is going to be inspired to chase, something that your dog is going to be happy to give back to you, something that is robust enough to stand up to long games and the great outdoors - and it has to be safe.

Never ever throw sticks for your dog when you are on walks. It is really tempting but it is also really dangerous. Sticks can so easily stick in the ground or bounce back at your dog unexpectedly and cause perforations, impalement and injury. Don't think it will never happen to you – because it does!

Once you have found the perfect toy your dog likes and is safe to use you are ready to get started.



- Spend some time in the house playing with your dog with the toy so you can watch his reactions. Get the dog's interest in the toy by playing with it and winding him up a bit!



- Then throw it a few feet away watch what he does. Does he ignore it? Does he chase after it and then run off with it and refuse to give it back? Does he take it off to his special corner to chew it? Or does he bring it back to you to continue the game? If your dog is in the last group, you are fairly close to being able to enjoy retrieve games on your walks – just do a bit of practise in the house putting the retrieve under your control. If he is in the first three groups, you need to do a little bit of work first!

