

DOWN

THE COMMAND: “Down” means to lie down. To avoid confusion, refrain from using “down” when your dog jumps on you (or on furniture). In those situations use the command “off” instead.



HOW TO:

- Put your dog in a sit (see sit-stay handout)
- Put a treat in your right hand and hold it close enough to your dog’s face so that he can smell it, but not eat it.
- Pass the treat straight down from your dog’s nose to the floor in between his front paws, then straight out in front of him. This looks like an ‘L’ motion.
- When your dog lies down mark the behavior with a “yes” and give the treat.
- Once your dog repeatedly succeeds at the behavior, you can add the verbal command “down”, as you pass the treat in front of your dog.

Tips and Troubleshooting:

Avoid practicing this on hard or cold surfaces. Pick a comfortable spot, like a rug or dog bed.

When luring your dog into a down with the ‘L’ motion, make sure the treat is kept very close to your dog as you move it to the floor. He will follow it down with his head and then, as you draw it out slowly in front of him, he should stretch and lie down to follow the treat. If the treat is too far away from your dog as you lower it, or you move it across the floor too quickly, your dog may pop up to follow the food.

Only say the command “down” once. Wait until your dog gives you the behavior (be patient!) and then mark with “yes” and a treat.

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Small dogs may take a little longer to learn the down, but keep trying and use high value treats to keep them interested. You can also try placing them on a table and practice “down” on an elevated surface.

Not having any luck? Try sitting on the floor with your feet flat on the ground, knees raised. Lure your dog under your legs with a treat. They’ll have to lie down under your raised knees to get the treat. Mark the behavior with a “yes” and “down”.

If your dog refuses to lie down, try capturing the desired behavior whenever your dog naturally lies down by marking the behavior with a “yes” and “down”.

ADDING HAND SIGNALS

- There are two hand signals commonly used for down. Choose one and use it every time you ask your dog to down.
- The first mimics the movement you used to teach the down: pass your (empty) hand down to the floor as you say “down” (see photo).
- The other option: extend your arm vertically, at a slight angle, as you say “down”. Imagine you’re reaching for an item on a shelf above your head, with a flat, empty hand.
- As soon as your dog lies down, mark the behavior with a “yes” and reward them with a treat from your other hand.

Tips:

The second hand signal is useful if you need to put your dog in a down from a distance. They might not be able to hear you saying “down”, but they’ll be able to see your arm reaching up from across a field or dog park.

Once they are successful at “down”, you can move on to practicing “down-stay” (see *our down-stay handout for more*).

