

FADING LURES

Why Fade? Lures and prompts are excellent tools for helping dogs to understand what we are attempting to teach them. Luring a dog with food helps them interpret what we are asking them to do. However, the longer you continue to use lures and prompts after your dog has already learned the new behavior, the more dependent upon them your dog becomes and the more difficult it will



be for them to respond to a verbal cue alone. In the case of food lures, you wind up bribing rather than training your dog.

There are different reasons for the necessity of fading food lures and hand signals, but the most practical reasons for doing so are: you won't always have food with you and your hands won't always be free to gesture. Teaching your dog to listen to a verbal cue alone provides more security in a variety of situations.

HOW TO FADE THE FOOD LURE:

- Once you are reliably getting the behavior that you desire (such as sitting) with the food lure and hand gesture, you can begin to fade the visual presence of the food.
- Leave the treat in your pocket or in your other hand, then move your empty hand exactly as you did before.
- When the dog responds with the correct behavior, mark with a “yes” or a click, then deliver the food reward from your other hand.

HOW TO FADE THE HAND SIGNAL:

- Add the verbal cue once the behavior is reliably occurring ninety percent of the time with the hand gesture. The verbal cue should be given just before the hand gesture.
- After using the verbal cue and hand gesture successfully, just use the verbal cue.



- The dog will likely pause. Wait until he does what you have asked. Let him think it out.
- When the dog performs the behavior, mark with a “yes” and reward with a treat.
- Repeat a couple of times and end your training session with the goal of getting rid of hand signals in the next session.

Tips and Troubleshooting:

It's helpful to understand the difference between a reward and a bribe. When you ask your dog to perform a task that they have proven to know and they do it, giving them a treat afterwards is a reward and a reinforcement. If you ask your dog to sit, something they know how to do, and they do not do it until you lure them with food, it is a bribe. Teaching them to work, without luring them into position with food, teaches them that they must complete the task before earning the reward.

If possible, food lures should be removed in the first training session of a new command. If the behavior is more complicated or if the dog is young, try removing the food lures by the second or third training session.

When fading the hand signal, if the dog doesn't do the behavior, help him out by repeating the hand gesture a few more times.

If progress is slow, try these intermediate steps:

Give the verbal cue, then wait a bit longer to give the hand signal. Allow them a few beats to think it out on their own before prompting with the hand signal.

You can also fade the gesture gradually by modifying the amount of movement in your hand signal. For example, if you typically move your whole arm up when signaling your dog to sit, you would gradually decrease the gesture until you are only moving your hand upwards. Once they are reliably providing the behavior, try fading that modified hand signal all together.