

HEEL

THE COMMAND: “Heel”, a formal cue, means to walk next to you at the same pace, with the dog’s shoulders in line with your knee. Heel is different than loose leash walking. Heel provides a clear place for your dog to be, which is helpful for dogs that are reactive or in busy settings in which you need better control of your dog.



THE CORRECT POSITION:

The dog should be on your left. The dog’s body should be straight and heading in the same direction you. The dog’s head may be turned in slightly to look up at your face. When you stop moving the dog should automatically sit on the left side, facing in the same direction as the handler.

HOW TO:

- Start with the dog sitting next to you, on your left side.
- Have a food lure in your left hand, near his nose, so he is aware of the reward.
- Begin walking briskly, moving forward with your left leg, in a straight line.
- Engage your dog while in motion and, with enthusiasm, mark with “yes” and reward with the lure, when they are in the correct position.
- Stop abruptly and lure the dog into a sit, his body straight, facing the same direction as you. When his head is turned towards you, give him the reward.
- Continue walking and stopping at random intervals. Mark and reward the dog for walking and sitting in the correct positions. Practice short intervals of sit, walk, sit in the heel position.
- Once they are reliably walking and sitting in the correct position, add in the verbal command, “Heel” when you begin to walk or when you stop for a sit.
- Next, practice making left and right turns. Turn as if you did not have a dog with you, so that the dog needs to compensate and follow your movements.



Tips and Troubleshooting:

Be careful to deliver reinforcement only when the dog is in the correct position. Do not reinforce, verbally or with treats, when the dog's rib cage is in front of your knee (called "forging") or his head is just even or behind your leg (called "lagging").

Be aware of your own body. While walking, you should be facing ahead, with your shoulders forward and glancing out of the corner of your eye to watch the dog. Do not turn to look at the dog as this will force the dog to lag behind you.

If you walk too slowly, your dog will lose interest and begin to move left or right. Initially, keep your pace brisk, so your dog is engaged and keeping pace.

If the dog is out of place, use a "sit" to help them regain the correct position next to you. Once your dog has regained the correct position, face forward and walk briskly in a straight line for a short distance. Stop and ask your dog to "sit" again.

