



## Heel - Teaching Heel Back to Front

### Introduction

To date you have been working on getting your puppy to follow you around on a loose leash. Now we are going to teach our puppies that their default position is next to us on our left-hand side, both when we are walking with them on leash and at other times.

This position is known as “Heel”, and this is also the verbal cue that we will be using to ask our puppies to move into that position. When we ask our puppies to “Heel” we want them to come to our left side, align themselves straight next to us with their head by our left knee. It is important to remember that “Heel” is a position not a movement. “Heeling” is the movement when we move forwards with our puppy remaining in heel position on a loose leash.

There are a couple of ways we can introduce “Heel” to our puppies. We can either start with a hand cue, or by working on the “Back to Front Exercise.” Whichever one you begin with, we suggest doing both as this will give your puppy a broader foundation of options for future heelwork.

Before you start these exercises, one of the key things for maintaining your puppy in heel position is treat delivery position. Watch this video for some hints and tips:

[Video - Leash Handling & Treat Delivery - Hints & Tips](#)

### Phase 1 - Beginners

When we start this exercise, many puppies will struggle to keep their bodies straight, so it might be a good idea to begin against a wall or the back of the couch, so they have a narrow chute to work in and their rear end doesn't have the opportunity to swing out! This exercise is better done on leash in the first instance and works best if your puppy already knows the cue “Wait.”

- ☐ Stage 1 - Stand with your puppy next to you on your left side. Tell them “Wait” and take a step forward. With a piece of kibble in your left hand, lure them into heel position. You may need to use slight leash pressure to get them to stop in the right place with their head by the seam of your left pant leg. When they are in the correct position, mark with a “Yes!” and reward. Do this a few times with a food lure so they get the idea.
- ☐ Stage 2 - Once your puppy has the general idea, repeat a few more times still using your flat hand as a target, but without food. Continue to mark with a “Yes!” and reward with food. You may still need to apply a little leash pressure at this stage.
- ☐ Stage 3 - Once your puppy is able to move into heel position from behind without a food lure, you can start adding the verbal cue “Heel” as they begin to move towards your hand.
- ☐ Stage 4 - Once your puppy is competently moving from behind to heel position using the verbal cue and no leash pressure, you can start to fade out the hand cue.

## Phase 2 - Improvers

- ☐ Stage 1 - Now that your puppy is starting to move into heel position from behind without a food lure and with minimal physical cues, we can begin moving away from the wall or couch. To begin with, if you have space, you can make the chute wider, so you are gradually giving them more space. If you begin with, they are not coming alongside straight, you can take another step forward to aide them.

Once your puppy is fairly proficient at moving into heel position from behind without the wall or couch, you can move on to practicing this move in different rooms in your house.

## Setting Up For Success

-  In the beginning phases of heel work, our puppies do often struggle with keeping their bodies straight when they come into heel position. Working next to a wall or the back of the couch, or another straight surface, will create a chute that will help them come into position.
-  If at any time later in training your puppy starts to struggle with this again, you can go back a few stages and use the chute again temporarily.

- 🐾 One of the key things for maintaining your puppy in heel position is treat delivery position. Watch this video for some hints and tips:

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- 🐾 When you first start training heel position, reward your puppy for good intentions even if the end result isn't 100% perfect. You can then set your expectations higher as you progress.
- 🐾 Always set realistic expectations for your training based on your puppy's age, emotional state, and the environment you are working in.

## Other Resources

[Video - Heel Back to Front](#)