



Heel - Teaching Heel Position Using a Hand Cue

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

- ☐ Stage 1 - Start with your puppy off leash, in front of you, and with a piece of kibble in your left hand. With the kibble in front of your puppy’s nose, lure your puppy into the heel position by making a counter-clockwise arc with your left hand. To begin with, you might find it easier to anchor your right foot and take a small step back and forward with your left foot as you make the arc. When your puppy is in position, mark with a

“Yes!” and reward them with the kibble. When they have got the general idea of following the hand cue to move into heel position, you can omit the food lure, just use the hand cue and reward afterwards.

- ☐ Stage 2 - Once you are successfully using the hand cue with food to get your puppy into heel position, you can start adding the verbal cue “Heel” as you make the hand gesture.
- ☐ Stage 3 - Practice this in at least three different rooms of your house.

Phase 2 - Improvers

- ☐ Stage 4 - As your puppy becomes more familiar with this exercise you can start to make your hand cue less dramatic and also move to not having food in your hand as you do the hand cue, so your puppy starts to rely more on the verbal cue. Practice in different locations inside your home.

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:
- 🐾 Video - Leash Handling & Treat Delivery - Hints & Tips
- 🐾 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

Article - Teaching Heel Back to Front