



Introduction To “Down”

All puppies are born knowing how to move their body into a lying down position. We are going to add a name, or cue, to the behavior!

You are going to introduce your puppy to the verbal cue “Down” by initially using a food lure to encourage the behavior. When we use a lure to introduce a new behavior, our aim is to fade that lure as quickly as possible.

REWARDING is when we give the treat after it is earned, and **LURING** is when we show the puppy a treat prior to giving the physical or verbal cue for the behavior.

How to Teach Your Puppy “Down”

Stage 1 – It’s easiest to start this on your puppy’s level, so either sitting or kneeling on the ground. Begin with a piece of kibble in your hand. Show your puppy that you have the kibble by presenting it in front of their nose. Do not give them the kibble at this point but do a slow lure (so that the puppy is able to follow the kibble with their nose) over his head. Your puppy should follow the piece of kibble with their nose, and their butt should lower into the sitting position. Then, let your puppy nibble at the kibble as you slowly move the kibble from their nose straight down to the ground. As soon as your puppy’s elbows hit the floor, mark the behavior with an



enthusiastic “Yes!” (our marker word) and then give your puppy the piece of kibble. Follow with “Free” to encourage them to sit or stand up.

Please do not ever apply any pressure to your puppy’s body to force them into lying down.

One of the tasks that our dogs may have to perform for a client later on in life is “Brace” where the dog supports the weight of the client while they stand or transfer. If they learn to associate pressure on their back with lying down, that’s going to be hard to undo in advanced training!

Repeat this about 5 times in a row. You’re doing great if you consistently get a Down in *four out of five repetitions*!

Stage 2 - Once your puppy is reliably following the treat and offering the Down in five out of five repetitions in multiple training sessions you can begin to add the verbal cue “Down” before you start with the lure. Be sure to use a normal tone of voice to give the verbal cue as we don’t want your puppy to feel that it is being punished!

Stage 3 - Once your puppy begins to offer the Down on the verbal cue, we can start to fade the lure. Start this by using the same hand movement, but without a treat in your hand. When your puppy is reliably offering the Down with the hand signal on their level, (five out of five times) you can begin to create a more normal body posture for yourself. This means that instead of sitting on the floor, you may be kneeling or just bent over. Keep standing up little by little as you train until you are eventually standing up straight, giving the verbal cue “Down” and your pup is laying down without the hand signal. Refer to the “Fading Cues” article for more information on how to do this.

Adding Duration

Stage 4 - Once your puppy is reliably offering the Down with just the verbal cue with you in a normal body position (five out of five times) you can begin to add duration to your Downs by waiting a few seconds before giving the treat and releasing with Free. Once they are reliably staying in the Down position for 3 seconds you can add one or two seconds at a time before releasing with Free.

Troubleshooting

- 🐾 Make sure that you are doing a slow lure. If you move too fast your puppy won’t be able to follow the treat and may bite at your hand in frustration to try and snatch the treat.

- 🐾 If your puppy stands up when trying to lure them into laying down, that's okay. Get them back into a seated position and keep trying.
- 🐾 When luring your puppy into the down position, if they are trying to get the treat but aren't laying down, just be patient and continue holding the treat on the ground. It can take some patience when first starting out!
- 🐾 Make sure you are setting appropriate criteria for your puppy's age and the environment you are in. Just because your puppy is stellar and reliable at "Down" at home in your living room where you have practiced many repetitions, doesn't mean that they will be reliable at class or at the grocery store where there are many more distractions. This is an exercise that must be repeated in multiple locations with varying levels of distraction for it to be reliable.
- 🐾 If you are not having success and your puppy is losing interest and starting to disengage, let them. Puppies can get frustrated too, so give them a break and come back to it later. You can always reach out to your Foster Puppy Club Leader if you're feeling stuck!

Other Useful Resources

[Video - Down Introduction](#)