spca cincinnati   **Teaching Your Dog Sit**

Practical Uses

Teaching sit is a great beginner skill to teach your dog. It is a easy incompatible behavior for dogs who may lack manners (for example, your dog can't be jumping and sitting at the same time).

How to Teach

Different dogs will do better with different methods of teaching this behavior. Here are three ways of teaching the behavior. You may want to experiment to find the best methods for you and your dog.

- Capturing: In this method, you simply wait for the dog to sit – something he does naturally multiple times a day. You must be ready with your food reward at all times in order to "capture" this behavior and mark it.
- Shaping: Ask your dog for a few behaviors he knows how to do. If you are using a verbal cue, say "yes" and treat. If you are using a clicker, click and treat. Then wait for him to offer a new behavior – any behavior (if you're lucky, it might be a sit!). Reward any new behavior he offers about three times. Then stop rewarding that behavior and wait for him to again offer a new behavior, but this time, reward him only for a sit. He may offer several behaviors before he gets to sit, but since it is a neutral position, you shouldn't have to wait long. Don't let him get too frustrated though. If he doesn't offer a sit in a minute or so, reward a behavior he is offering a few times and then end the game and try again later.
- Luring: To lure the sit from a stand, use a food reward to draw your dog's nose up and back. As his head goes back, his rear end will naturally go down. If you are using a verbal cue, say "yes" and treat as soon as his rear touches the ground. If you are using a clicker, click and treat as soon as his rear touches the ground. When using the lure method, make sure you fade out the lure quickly; otherwise your dog will only learn to follow your hand.

Adding the Cue

When the dog is offering the behavior (sitting and looking to you in anticipation of the reward), begin saying the cue word "sit" as he is in the process of sitting. This way, your dog will begin to associate the behavior with the word. Do this about 20 times over the course of two different training sessions.

In the next training session, say the cue word before the dog sits. If he sits then he understands the cue. If your dog does not sit, go back to saying the cue word as he sits for a few more repetitions.

Moving On

- Gradually increase the length of time your dog is in the sit position before you say "yes" or click. Work up to about one minute before rewarding. Increase the amount of time gradually, just a couple seconds at a time, over multiple sessions. If your dog gets up before you reward, as him for the "sit" again, but make it shorter so the dog succeeds. Make sure the dog has at leash five successes before you try a longer duration again. This is the beginning of the "sit stay."
- Once your dog is responding to the cue, start giving the cue sometimes when the dog is standing and sometimes when the dog is sitting.
- Variable Schedule of Reinforcement – you have been using a "continuous schedule of reinforcement" which means that the dog gets a treat every time he preforms the behavior.

Now you're ready to move to a variable schedule of reinforcement, meaning he only gets a treat sometimes. Only reward every third, sixth, second, fourth, or tenth time he performs the behavior.

- Once your dog is performing the behavior reliably on cue (i.e., he will do the behavior at least 90% of the time when you give him the verbal cue) on a variable schedule of reinforcement, you don't really need the clicker any more for this behavior. You should still reward your dog often and variably with praise or a food treat, but you don't need the clicker any more for this behavior.

Tips
- If your dog only sits part way the first time, you may shape this behavior by rewarding him for a partial down the first few times, then not rewarding him until he moves successively closer to a full down.
- When you reward, throw the treat so the dog must get up to eat it. That way he can offer the sit again.
- Once you have moved to a variable schedule of reinforcement you may start to use it to shape a "better" behavior. For example, if you want the dog to respond more quickly to your cue, then reward only the quicker and cleaner responses.