



OKLAHOMA 4-H

TEACH YOUR DOG TO DOWN

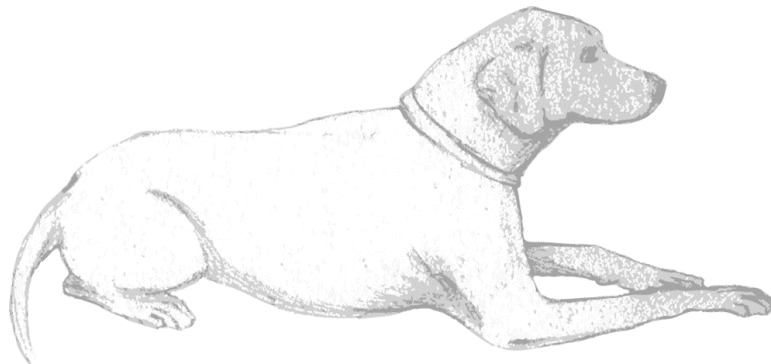


THE DOWN

Down is one of the most basic behaviors that you should teach your dog. It is necessary for the obedience ring, canine good citizen testing and is also a useful tool for an enjoyable life with your dog. You can tell your dog to “down” when you have guests over that are not comfortable with a dog sniffing them, it is also a good command to use when you would like to relax in the evening and want your dog to lie down and relax as well. Down can also be used as a safety command. If your dog, Clover, decides to chase after a squirrel and is about to run out into the street, you can give the cue, “Clover, down” when he lies down you can go over and safely remove him from the danger.

This guide sheet will provide you four different methods of attaining a down, as well as some games for practicing the down command. As with all dog training procedures, you should be consistent, patient, track your results and never behave in a manner that causes your dog to become afraid. Most of all make practice fun for both you and your dog.

Remember there is never a good replacement for an experienced trainer, if you are having difficulties working with your dog find someone with experience to provide you some help along the way.



GREAT TIMES TO USE A DOWN

- Down when you want to relax and watch television.
- Down and away from the table while you have supper.
- Down when introducing Clover to one of your friends.
- Down when grooming Clover.
- Down so you can examine his back paws and clip his nails.
- Down to stop Clover if he is running into the street.

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METHOD #1—LURING THE DOWN

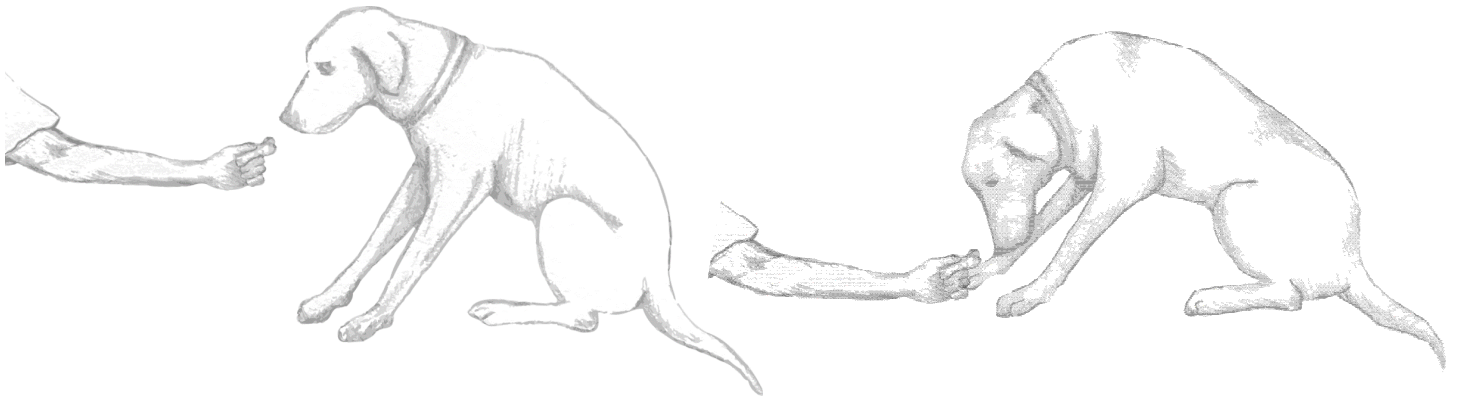
When luring a down use either a clicker or use a marker word like, “Yes!” to mark the correct response from your dog. Get a treat in hand and have Clover sit but don’t feed him his treat. Then put your hand in front of his nose and move the treat straight down between his paws. When his nose follows the treat to the floor slowly drag it away from him. As his front paws move forward, his body will go to the floor. When his belly hits the ground give a click then treat and offer Clover lots of praise.

As Clover catches on and starts to eagerly offer you downs, start using the same hand motion but without a treat in your hand. When he follows your empty hand into a down go ahead and click/treat. This will teach Clover that the hand signal for lying down is you lowering your hand towards the ground.

WHAT IF CLOVER GETS UP INSTEAD OF LYING DOWN?

One of the more common problems that occurs when trying to lure a down is Clover wanting to stand up instead of lying down.

Here is an idea that you may wish to try in order to keep Clover from standing up while luring the down. Have Clover follow the lure under an object such as a table, chair or even your legs so that he will have to lie down to get the lure. Mark and treat before he actually goes underneath so he will recognize that laying down got him the click rather than going under the obstacle.



METHOD #2—CAPTURING THE DOWN, CLICK/TREAT

One very effective way of training the down is to capture it. It is possible to capture a down by waiting for Clover to decide to lie down and clicking/treating just as soon as he does. If Clover is excited, it may take a long time before he is ready to lie down so try capturing the down after his play time when he is tired and ready to relax. Remember to be prepared to click/treat the exact second he lies down or Clover will not understand why you clicked.

After you click and treat, Clover will probably have gotten up to get his treat so you will need to be patient and wait for Clover to lie down again. Just ignore him until he lies down and once again click/treat. Most likely after several rewards he will start to catch on but if he doesn't, don't get frustrated just take a break and try again later.

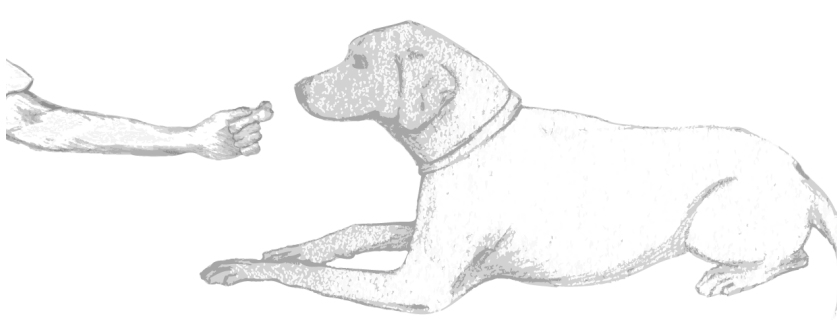
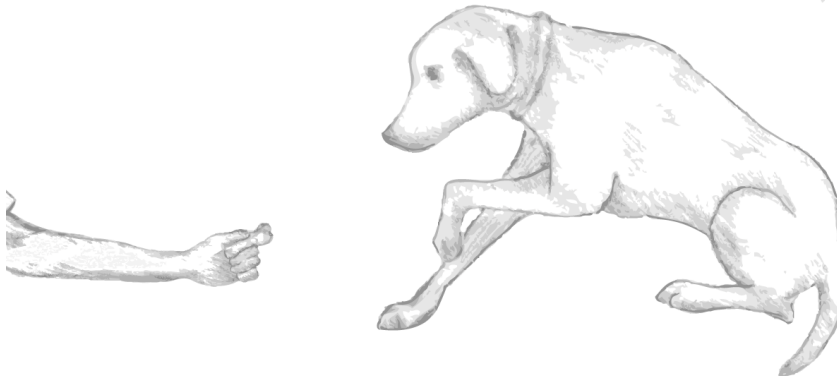
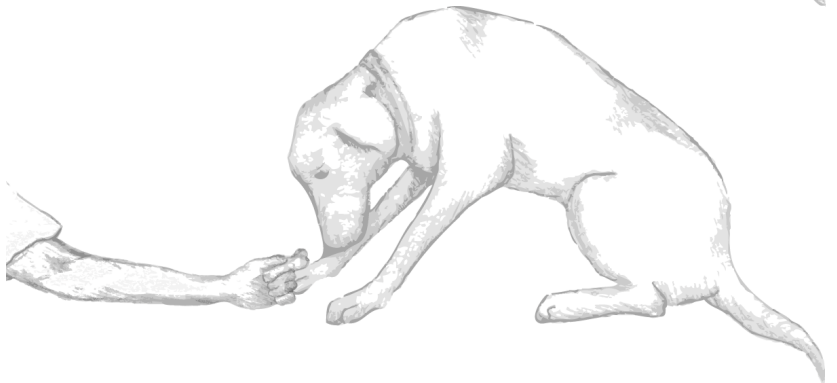
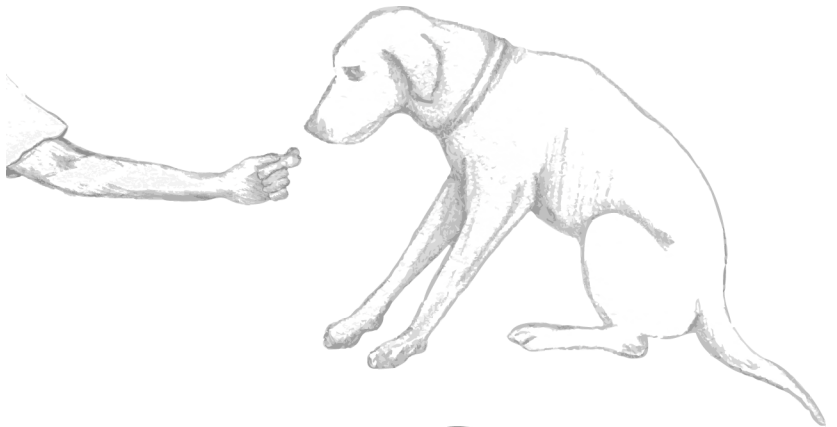
METHOD #3—SHAPING THE DOWN

The next option is to shape the behavior. Shaping a behavior is the process of breaking down the desired behavior into small steps that make up the behavior. To shape the down, start with a lure in your hand while Clover is sitting, just like when luring a down, only this time you will click/treat for anything that is a step towards Clover lying down.

While Clover is sitting, move the treat from in front of his nose to down between his legs. As soon as he lowers his head to follow the treat, click/treat to capture the head drop while his rear is still on the ground. Repeat that several times, then take the treat lower to the ground and click/treat for him lowering his nose all the way to the ground without getting up. If he gets up, don't get upset, just say, "oops" and pull the treat away and wait for him to sit back down to start over, pretty soon he will understand that if he gets up you take the reward away.

Now that you have him easily following the lure with his nose to the ground, you are ready to start dragging the lure out away from Clover. Slowly drag the treat out away from Clover until he moves a paw forward, then click/treat. At first, click/treat for any front paw movement, that way Clover starts to catch on that if he is sitting and moving his paws he will get rewarded. Then up your requirement and make him move his paw further forward or both paws forward before click/treat. Before long you will have him gladly offering downs for his reward.

When shaping a behavior remember that you are asking Clover to try and guess what you want. Be patient and expect mistakes while he figures out the movement you are wanting from him. The more behaviors you shape, the more Clover will excel at this type of training.



SHAPING AND FREE SHAPING NOTE

True shaping or free shaping a behavior is breaking a behavior down into tiny steps as described here, except, the trainer does not lure the dog. In free shaping, the trainer would wait for the dog to freely offer a motion towards the desired behavior. When free-shaping keep your criteria for each step at a level achievable by the dog to prevent him from getting too frustrated and quitting altogether.

GNAW IT OVER

Shaping is the process of breaking down complex behaviors into small steps. The trainer clicks/treats the completion of each step until the dog can perform the desired behavior.

Here is an example of shaping if your parents wanted to train you to turn off the lights.

1. Click/Treat for you even looking in the direction of the light switch.
2. Click/Treat for walking towards the light switch.
3. Click/Treat for touching the wall with the light switch.
4. Click/Treat for touching the light switch.
5. Click/Treat for switching the light off.

At each step your parents would reinforce the behavior before proceeding to the next step. After reinforcing a step, your parents would not offer you reinforcement until you progressed to the next step.

BREAK IT DOWN

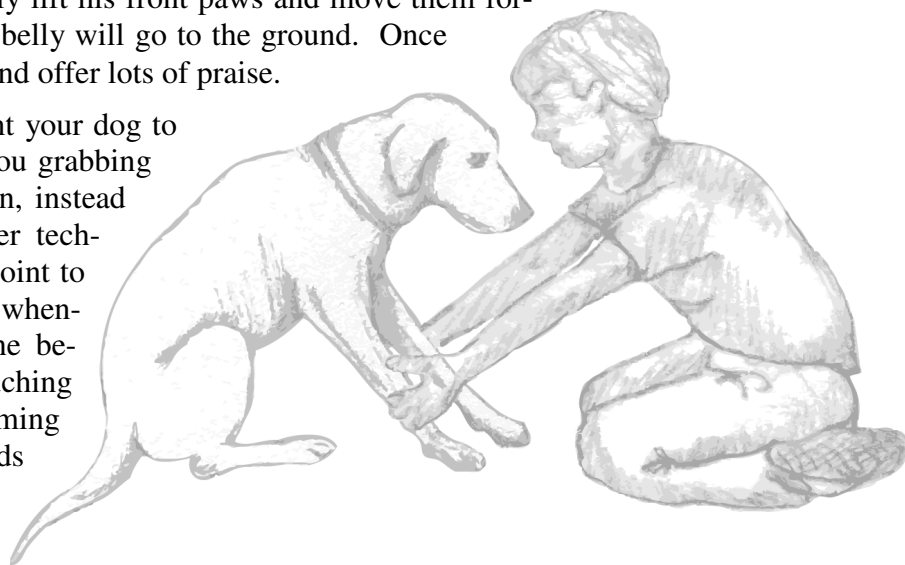
Practice breaking down some of your behaviors into small steps, how many steps are involved in brushing your teeth? What steps are involved in properly throwing a football?

Think through some of the behaviors you would like your dog to learn and the steps your dog must master for completion.

METHOD #4—MODELING THE DOWN

If you are having trouble getting your dog into the down position you can physically place him in a down. Start in the sit position and then gently lift his front paws and move them forward. As his paws slide forward his belly will go to the ground. Once his belly hits the ground reward him and offer lots of praise.

As with any training, you do not want your dog to be fearful. If your dog is afraid of you grabbing his paws don't try to force him down, instead be patient and try some of the other techniques for getting a down. Make a point to touch and feel around on his paws whenever you are playing with him so he becomes comfortable with people touching him. This will make tasks like trimming his nails and the hair between his pads less stressful for both you and your dog.



ADDING THE CUE

Make certain that your dog, Clover, is reliably giving the downs before you add the cue, "down." Clover should be successfully lying down about 8 out of 10 times.

At this point say, "down" before Clover lies down. If you have been using a hand signal, give the cue, "down" before you provide the hand signal. After Clover lies down, reward and praise him, then repeat this step 4 or 5 times.

If Clover continues to provide reliable downs, try saying the command, "down" without offering the hand signal. If he lies down, reward the behavior and offer lots of praise. If he doesn't lie down don't repeat the command but go ahead and offer the hand signal and reward him when he downs. Continue to practice and offer lots of praise and rewards. After several practices your dog should be laying down before you give the hand signal.

Be patient and make practice fun for both you and your dog.

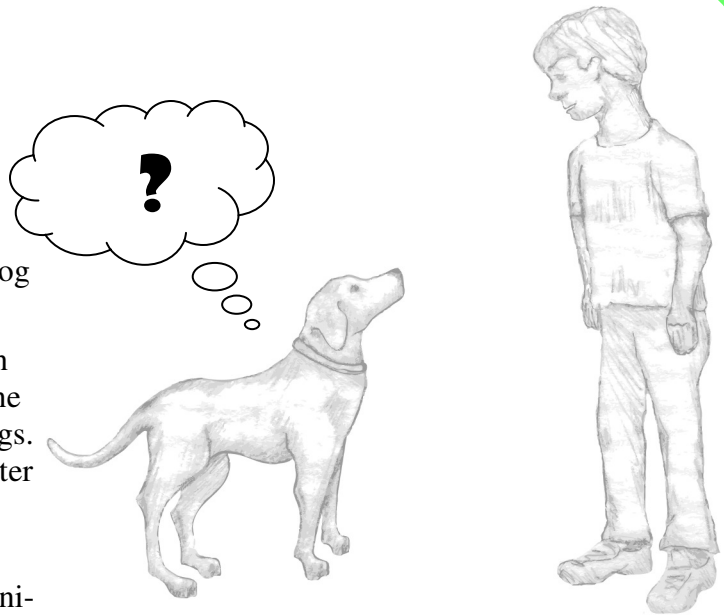
THINK, BEFORE YOU BARK!

It is important to recognize that dogs don't speak English or understand the way we use language. We choose words such as "sit" and "down" because they make sense to us but as far as our dogs are concerned, they are just sounds coming out of our mouths. It is up to you to teach your dog the meaning behind your words.

Dog behaviorist, Patricia McConnell points out in her book, *The Other End of the Leash*, many of the mistakes owners make when speaking to their dogs. Here are several tips she offers to make you a better communicator with your dog.

- Pick one cue word for a behavior and stick to it—as humans we use many words to communicate the same idea such as, "Come," "Come here," "Get over here," "Clover, come on," "Here, Clover," and on and on. These all sound different to your dog so be consistent and make sure that everyone in your family is using the same commands.
- Be clear about the behavior you want from a cue. Many dog owners teach, "down" as a command for their dogs to lie down but misuse it by telling the dog to, "down" or "get down" when they want Clover to get off the couch. From Clover's point of view, he might think you want him to lay down on the couch.
- Don't repeat commands. It is easy to get in the habit of repeating commands in the hopes that somehow Clover will understand "down, down, down" better than "down." Since Clover doesn't understand English, "down, down, down" may sound very different than "down." You may also be teaching your dog that it is okay to ignore you because you don't always mean, "down," when you say it the first time.

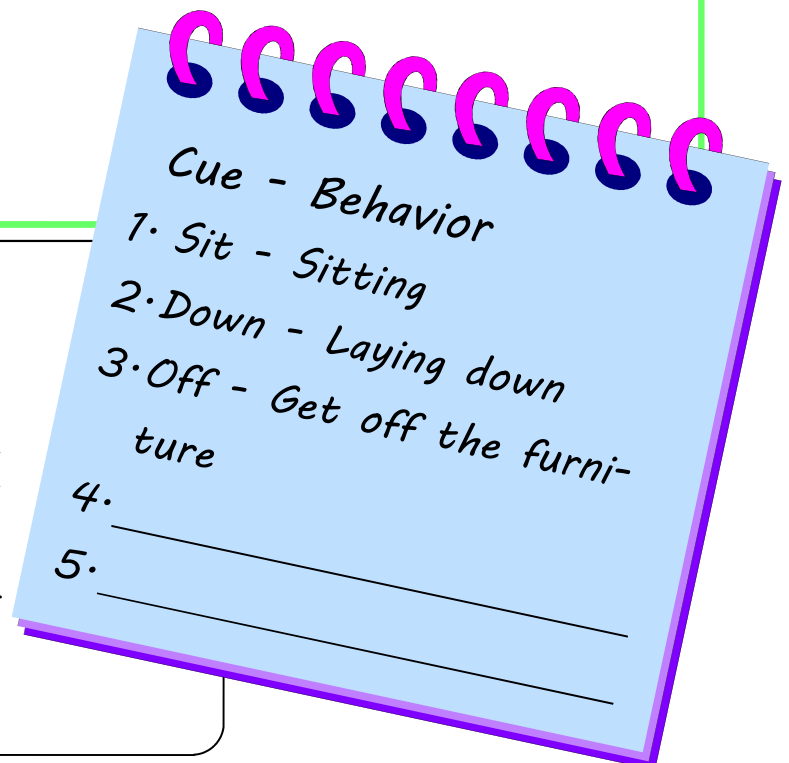
Have a friend video you the next time you train your dog. Play it back and see how consistent you are with your cues. Did you repeat, change or misuse any of your cues? How do you think these mistakes affect your dog?



WRITE IT DOWN

To make sure that everyone in the family is using the same verbal commands with Clover, hold a family meeting. During the meeting discuss the behaviors your family would like to see Clover doing and the cues for those behaviors. Take time to write them down and post the list somewhere everyone can see it, such as the refrigerator.

Tell everyone that being consistent with the use of cues will make training Clover much easier. Agree to help each other out and remind one another, when they are improperly using a cue.



DISTRACTIONS AND DURATION

When your dog is reliably offering downs on cue, it's time to offer him some new challenges. First, start slowing down your response time. Give the cue, "down," after your dog downs, wait for just 1 second before click/treat or mark/treat if not using a clicker. When your dog is successful, increase the time to 2 seconds, then 3 seconds and on until he successfully maintains the duration of his down for up to 15 seconds. If your dog breaks the down, don't reward him, simply try again and back off the requirements if it is becoming too difficult.

You should also have your dog down amongst distractions. At first the distractions should be small and may be just as simple as changing location. It is not unusual for dogs to have trouble realizing that down means the same everywhere, if you always practice in the living room try practicing in your bedroom then move to the backyard.

Then add other distractions such as practicing around other dogs and people. If you are getting really good try maintaining a down while tossing a ball in the air.

It is important to maintain the down while feeding him his treat. If he gets up while you give him his treat, pull it back quickly and say, "oops." When he lays back down give him his treat. However if you are working with a clicker, don't deny your dog a treat if you have already clicked. If he is getting up as soon as you click, try holding the treat down in front of his nose before you click.

Be patient, have fun and provide your dog plenty of opportunities to be successful and confident.

RESOURCES

The Oklahoma 4-H Website <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu>

The National 4-H Dog Project Online www.n4hccs.org/dog

Karen Pryor's Clickertraining.com www.clickertraining.com

Oklahoma 4-H Dog Obedience Rules and Regulations <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu/litol/file/animal/companion/dog/dogobedience/4Hdogobedience.pdf>

PRACTICE FOR YOU AND YOUR DOG

It's easy to incorporate practice for a down into everyday life. Have your dog down before you let him out, or before you feed him. Have him down before you pet him or toss his favorite toy. These are life rewards and should be used often to strengthen desirable behaviors.

4-H DOG CLUB LEADER 'S CORNER

TIC-TAC-DOWN

Use masking tape or sidewalk chalk to mark off a giant tic-tac-toe grid with 9 squares that are large enough for handler and dog to stand in (approx 5' x 5'). Divide the group into two teams one will be X's and the other being O's. One member from the first group walks their dog into the square and has their dog down. Then the next team takes a turn and then repeat the process until one team gets three in a row. If a dog breaks its down then the other team can steal its spot during their turn.

If you don't have enough people to finish the game, the first dog/handler team can mark their square and move to claim another spot.

Here are a few ideas on how to vary the game depending on the participant's skill levels and the dog's space requirements.

- For Beginners - have them down their dog for 5 seconds and if the dog doesn't break it's down then have them mark the square. In this variation the dog/handler team will mark their square and leave the board before the next player takes his or her turn. This is also a good method if crowding the dogs is a safety concern.
- For Intermediate - substitute X's and O's with Sits vs. Downs.
- For Advanced teams - the handler takes the dog to a square and has it down. They then have the dog stay while they leave the board. The dog must stay in the down position while the next player downs their dog or they lose their space.

Remember to focus on safety and fun rather than rules and competition. Each club and group of dogs and handlers is unique so be creative and make up some rules of your own to ensure your 4-Her's success.