Teach Your Pup “Sit!”

Early in career as a Military Working Dog (MWD) trainer the compulsive way of training was still an acceptable way of “making,” the dog learn a command. We didn’t beat or abuse the dogs but the idea was that the trainer imposed his will on the dog and the dog did what was commanded more out of fear of punishment. As the MWD program grew like wild fire due to the demand of dogs in two wars we started training with other nations and as senior trainers we started to take note especially of the British dog trainers. Their way was a more passive way of training and although each dog took a little longer become finished the quality of dogs we were turning out was unrivaled. See, a dog works much better with its handler when it feels it is pleasing him and is much easier to control while off leash. This brings us to a pretty neat way to teach your pup to sit.

At six weeks old my wife has puppies sitting on command and at seven weeks the pup will sit for longer periods of time and allow her to take a few steps away without breaking. Attached is a video of a six week old pup sitting consistently on command.

A dog will sit when it gets frustrated! Find your dog’s favorite toy or use a small handful of kibble. Give the pup a piece of kibble and show him that you have more. As you stand over the puppy put your hand to his nose and let him smell or even lap at the kibble. Next, bring your hand up out of reach and over the pup’s head. Your pup may dance around a bit and may even walk around. Call your pup back and again put the kibble at his nose and bring it up a few feet and directly over the head. I promise you that eventually your pup will become frustrated and sit down and look up at you. Immediately praise the dog with a “gooooood Siiiiiiit,” and give him a treat. Draw those words out soft and sweet but not so exciting that the pup jumps up and gets overly distracted. You are teaching the dog two things….when my butt hits the floor and I hear “sit,” I get rewarded. The same goes for using his favorite toy.

In the beginning your training sessions should be short and fun. A couple good sits and its over and always end on a positive note. If your pup does a really good sit as you bring your hand up and say “siiiiiiitttt,” you end it and rough house with your pup. Your dog is training itself at this point and beginning to put simple things together. “When mom looks at me and says siiiiiiiiiiitttt, I put my butt on the ground and I get rewarded.” You will also be teaching the pup hand commands without it even knowing. Your hand starts at eye level and as you bring it up the pup is sitting and later you’ll be using only hand commands. Imagine yourself as a police directing traffic, your arm is straight down, palm open and only bending your elbow you raise your hand with the treat in it.

Later you can tell the dog to sit before opening the door to go for a walk or before you place the food bowl down.

You’ll come up with your own commands or hand motions and as your pup learns so will you. It’s pretty neat to see my 4 and 7 year old daughters telling a 90lb dog to sit and he immediately obeys!