



Down/Free

The picture of down: belly and elbows on the floor, until I say “free”

NOTE: Down does not mean, “get off of me” or “get off the furniture”. In those situations, use the word “off” instead of “down.”

The down behavior can be a little more challenging to teach as it is an exercise of placing the dog into a more vulnerable position. Some dogs may resist at first, but persistence is key. Don’t get discouraged if it takes a little longer for your dog to go all the way down.

Like all cues, “down” is a word that we must teach your dog. Remember that your dog is an ESL student and has **no idea** what this new word means! We teach a down first by using a lure, then a hand signal, and finally a verbal cue.

We will also be using a **release cue** (“free!”) to tell our dog’s when it’s ok to get up from the down. We introduce a release cue **immediately** to help our dogs develop that for every down, there is also a free. This makes the behavior predictable and is the building block to help your pup develop a stay. See the **Stay** Behavior Blueprint (Basic Obedience) for more on training a stay.

How do we teach this? Follow the steps below to develop a rock-solid down!

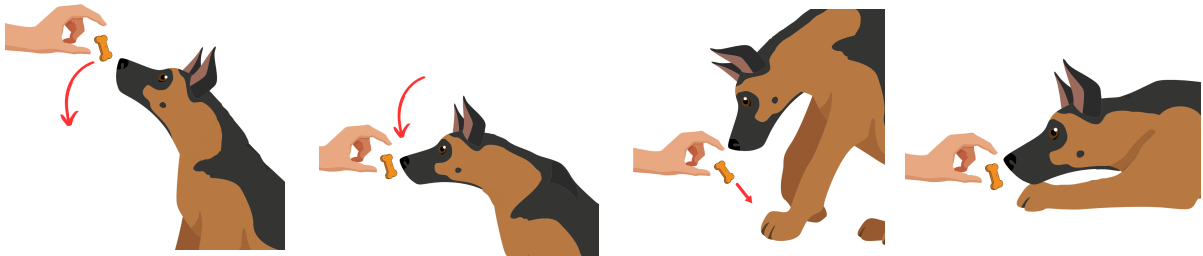
Be sure to read the following Behavior Blueprints before attempting this exercise:

- Marking Mechanics (Must Reads)
- Sit (Basic Obedience)
- Step-by-Step to a Super Sit (Basic Obedience)
- Teaching Your Puppy How to Sit Using a Lure, Hand Signal, and Verbal Cue (Training Videos)

Teach Your Dog to Down with a Lure



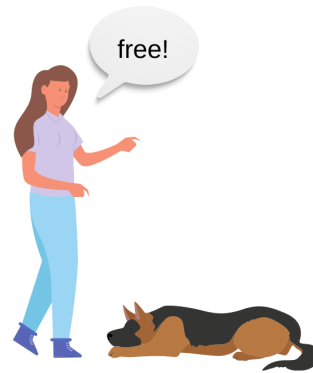
Step 1: With a treat in your hand, position your dog in front of you in a sit. **Do not** say sit, offer a lure or a hand signal to get this position.



Step 2: **Do not say "down."** Put the treat on your dog's nose **like a magnet** and **slowly** move the lure from their nose to their toes.



Step 3: Mark "yes!" the second that your dog's belly and elbows hit the floor. Give your dog a treat after saying yes.

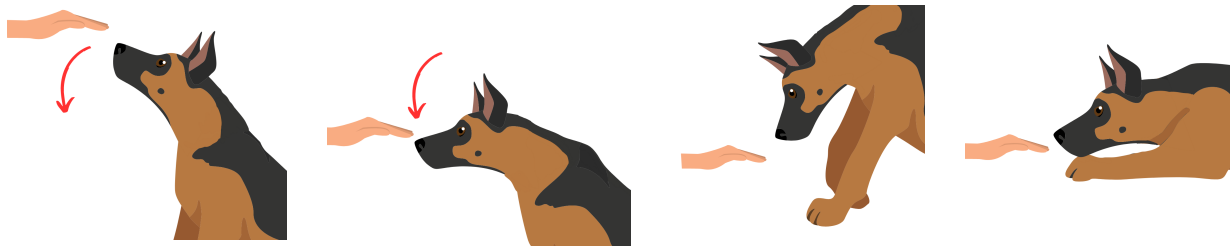


Step 4: Say "free" immediately before your dog gets up! Make sure that you say "free" every time!

Teach Your Dog to Down with a Hand Signal



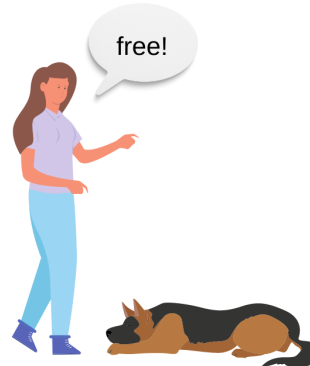
Step 1: Without a treat in your hand, position your dog in front of you in a sit. **Do not** say sit, offer a lure or a hand signal to get this position.



Step 2: Do not say “down.” Hand signals come from lures! Slowly sweep your hand from nose to toes, just like you did with the lure. Their nose should move up to follow the motion of your hand, which will encourage their chest and elbows down. Go slow! We are fading out the visual of the treat in this step.



Step 3: Mark “yes!” the second that your dog’s belly and elbows hit the floor. Give your dog a treat after saying yes.



Step 4: Say “free” immediately before your dog gets up! Make sure that you say “free” every time!

Teach Your Dog a Down with a Verbal Cue

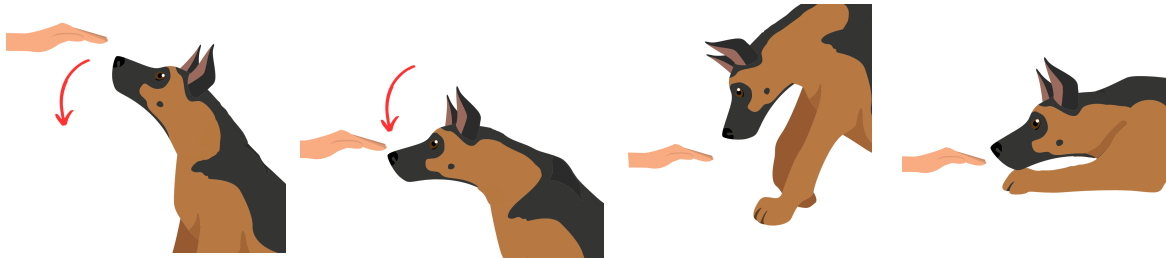


Step 1: With your dog in front of you, introduce the new cue "down." Only say "down" once.

PAUSE 2 SECONDS



Step 2: Pause for 2 seconds to let your dog process. Do not give a hand signal at this time.



Step 2: After you've given your dog at least 2 seconds to process this new word, show your pup the hand signal for down. **Do not repeat "down."**



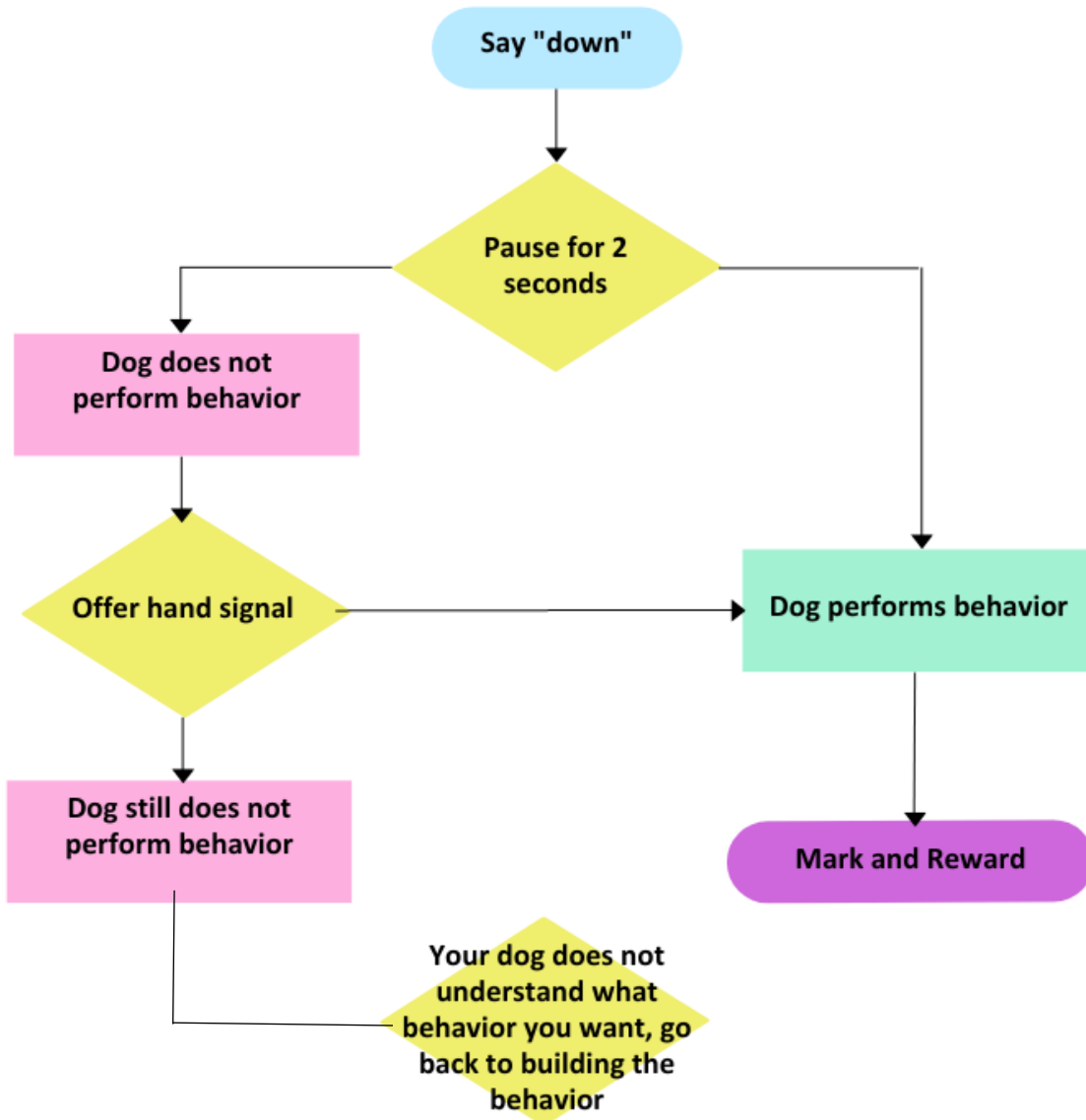
Step 3: Mark "yes!" the second that your dog's belly and elbows hit the floor. Give your dog a treat after saying yes.



Step 4: Say "free" immediately before your dog gets up! Make sure that you say "free" every time!

More on Verbal Cues

Take extra care not to introduce the word “down” too soon. Follow these steps to introduce a verbal cue for “down,” and to help you gauge if your pup is actually understanding the word.



Down/Free FAQ's

My dog won't hold the down for very long:

- Excited dogs and wiggly puppies have ants in their pants and have to be taught how to stay. Be very patient! Make sure that you say "free" for every single sit **before they get up**. Don't expect a 5-minute stays too soon! Initially, your dog may only stay for 1-2 seconds, but will slowly be able to stay longer and longer.
- Start close! You may be able to help your dog learn to hold the down stay if you start with **you** being low to the ground. Try kneeling or sitting in front of your pup, or sit in a chair.
- Read more about this in the Stay (Basic Obedience) Behavior Blueprint on our website.

My dog's booty keeps popping up:

- Slow down your lure! Put the treat directly to their nose like a magnet and **slowly** move the treat from their nose to their toes. If they continue to pop up, use a chair or a low table as a physical aid. Don't push down on their backs! Be sure to check out our training video on teaching your pup this behavior.
- Still having trouble? Be sure to sign up for class or a private lesson! One of our trainers would be happy to help troubleshoot.

My dog only downs with a treat in my hand:

- What is the picture of down? **Belly and elbows on the floor until I tell you otherwise.** When you ask for a down, is there always a treat in your hand? Try not to have a treat in your hand when asking for any behavior. If you do, keep it behind your back or in your pocket. Dogs are excellent observers of our behavior and are very good at picking up context clues. Don't add "treat in hand" to the picture of a behavior!
- Read more about this in the Generalization (Advanced Skills) Behavior Blueprint on our website.

My dog downs fine at home, but not out in public:

- Set your pup up for success! Even if you have a PhD you still had to start in Kindergarten. Your house is Kindergarten, and Herman Park on a holiday is a PhD. Train your dog for all of the steps in-between. Start by teaching every behavior in your house with no distractions, then try in the backyard, and then the front yard.
- Be aware of textures! Some dogs may not like to lay down in grass or on hot pavement. While they're learning, try to carry a blanket for your pup to lay down on when you're training on the road.
- Read more about this in the Generalization (Advanced Skills) Behavior Blueprint.

My dog won't get up when I say "free":

- Dogs and puppies are ESL students and might not understand this new word for some time. Before your dog gets up, tell them "free." Give your pup a moment or two to process, and then swish your hand or clap to encourage them up. Teaching a rock-solid stay starts with teaching "free!"