



Jeff & Laura McCracken, Owners | 3060 Neva Lake RD | Ephrata WA 98823 | (509)754-6171 | [www.desertwindlabradors.com](http://www.desertwindlabradors.com)

## Training Basics for Your Dog

**Who wants to stand in the yard calling a dog that ignores you until he's good and ready to obey?** Who wants a dog that won't lie down and stay where you tell him? We've probably all known dogs like that, and they're no fun to live with. The sad fact is that dogs are trained to ignore their owners—by their owners! Happily, any reasonably healthy dog of any breed can be trained to respond to basic commands.

**Come, Sit, Down, Stay, and Leave It—these five basic commands** can make a huge difference in your relationship with your dog. I'm going to give you a few simple “rules” for training in general, and then a basic method for training your dog to respond to each of the five fundamental commands. You should still take your dog at least to a basic obedience class for socialization, training under the eye of an instructor, and fun, and I suggest you read at least one good training book.

**Before we get to the individual commands, here are some training basics that apply to dog training:**

- **Be consistent.** Always use the same word to mean the same thing. Remember, human language is not natural to your dog—he has to learn that words have specific meanings. He'll learn “Sit,” but he'll have a lot of trouble with “Aww, baby, pweeze sit here by me” or “You better sit right now, dammit!” or “Sit ... sit down! ... sitsitsit ...” So play fair and use one word consistently.
- **Be concise.** Give your command once and once only. If you repeat a command three, four, or five times, your dog learns that he doesn't have to do it until you say “down ... down ... down ... down” or until you yell really loud or until you say the word and wave your arm at him or some other silly thing.
- **Be generous.** Reward your dog for doing what you tell him to do. When you begin teaching a new command, reward him every single time he gets it right. A reward is something your dog likes—that might be a treat, a toy, or a butt scratch, as long as it obviously makes your dog happy. Use a word of praise—“good dog” or “pretty!” or whatever you like—along with the reward, and eventually the word itself will become a reward.
- **Be smart.** If you're not in a position to enforce a command, don't give the command unless you know for certain your dog will obey. If you're in the bathtub, don't tell your dog “Down” unless you're willing to get out of the tub, drip through the house, put your dog where you want him, and have him lie down. If you give a command that you can't enforce, your dog learns that he has to do it if you're standing there holding the leash, but he doesn't have to do it if you're all wet or otherwise unable to make sure he does it. The point of training is to teach the dog that he must do what you say when you say it—and if you're consistent and smart when you're training him, you'll end up with a reliable dog.
- **Be prepared.** If you're going to need a leash to manage your dog while teaching him to sit, then have the leash on him or close at hand. If your dog doesn't yet come reliably when called, then keep a long line near the backdoor and put it on him when he goes out at night to potty. Then if you say “Come” and he doesn't, you can reel him in.
- **Be happy.** Your dog is your friend, and he really does want to please you. Use a happy voice when you give commands, and a very happy voice when you praise him. Put yourself in his place—if two people called you, one in a tone that said, “Oh, I'm so happy to see you; come and be here where I am!” and the other in a growling tone that said, “You get over here right now,” which one would you go see? Use your voice to tell your dog how delighted you'd be to have him do what you tell him.

**I recommend that you use treats for training rewards. Most dogs are motivated by food.** (If your dog truly isn't interested in food, then find a toy, a certain ear scratch, or something that does tickle him.) Remember, you're using treats to reward your dog for a job well done, not to feed him. Once your dog knows the command and does it reliably, you won't need the food reward—although you should still reward him with a praise word most of the time.

**Use small bits of foods that are soft, tasty, and easily chewed.** You want your dog to gobble the treat and get back to training, not stop to munch. Treats are more interesting if you make a sort of “training trail mix” of goodies your dog likes—then he’s never sure just which taste sensation he’s about to encounter. Ideas for treats include plain unsweetened cereal, string cheese, plain air-popped popcorn, thinly sliced hot dogs (you can cook the slices in the microwave to reduce the greasiness—usually three to five minutes will do), tiny or soft dog treats, a little dry cat food, tiny bits of apple—whatever turns your dog on. My dog Rowdy will do anything for a bit of carrot! Many trainers use a small pouch on a belt to hold their training treats to avoid messy pockets.

**You also need two special training words. First, you need a *praise word*.** This is something you say when your dog does something right. At first, you need to say the word as you give your dog a treat. He’ll learn that your praise word is a good thing, and you’ll be able to phase out the treats and reward him with the word by itself most of the time. Try to find a word that you don’t use all the time with your dog. If you’re in the habit (like I am) of telling your dog he’s a “good boy” even when he hasn’t done anything except be your wonderful dog, then don’t use “good boy” for praise in training. I use “pretty!” or “very nice” for praise.

**Second, you need a *release word*.** When you give a command, such as Sit, you should expect your dog to sit and remain sitting until you tell him he doesn’t have to anymore. Your release word tells him he’s finished with that command for now. Many people use “Okay” for a release word, but I don’t recommend it. Most of us say okay a lot, and you don’t want to release your dog by accident just because you say okay to someone. I use “free!” for my release word. The word itself doesn’t matter, but it should be one you can remember but that you don’t use frequently in other circumstances.

For more information read this additional report found on the Resource Page:

**Five Essential Commands for Your Dog**