



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department

Introducing Foundation Position “Sit”

See video “Introducing the Foundation Position Sit with Luring and Physical Prompt”
<https://youtu.be/iDsaxLtoTGO>

Goal Behavior

The puppy responds to a lure/hand signal to sit.

Note: The correct way to introduce the *verbal* cue to sit is explained in the document “Paw Pad Game #3”. If the raiser adds the verbal cue sooner, that is OK, but the puppy probably will not focus on the verbal cue due to the lure/signal “blocking” the verbal cue. Dogs respond much more easily to visual cues (signals) than verbal cues. How to teach the puppy to respond to a verbal cue alone, dispensing with the signal, will be addressed later.

Prerequisites

The puppy should be familiar with Paw Pad Game #2 and have a solid stand on the pad with at least ten seconds of duration. The pup must stay still, standing on the pad comfortably, while the handler moves in and out of position. One to three weeks of stand practice on the Paw Pad is recommended before introducing the sit. The sit will become a default behavior if the puppy does not have a strong reinforcement history for standing on the pad. This tendency to have a “hard sit” would make changing positions more difficult to teach the puppy. The sit will happen easily, but a solid stand position is the foundation for so many later exercises – including guide work.

Session Set Up

The puppy should be hungry so practicing before meals is a good plan. A Paw Pad will not be required in these initial lessons. The training should take place in a quiet area with no distractions.

To Mark or Not to Mark?

When training GDB puppies the handler should mark desirable behaviors that the puppy initiates. If the raiser makes a behavior happen, the puppy is not marked. So when luring and physically helping a puppy into a position, the puppy is not marked. However, the puppy can, and should be, verbally praised before, and during, the reward.

Steps

Luring the Sit with Physical Prompt

The Paw Pad is not utilized in the initial introduction of the sit signal; it is easier for the puppy to learn to sit correctly (bringing its rear legs toward its front legs and not backing up into a sit) off the Paw Pad. Also, it will be much easier for the handler to maneuver the puppy into a sit position if the pup is out in front of the handler, rather than at the handler’s side, when first introducing the sit.

- The handler stands so that the puppy is positioned in front of the handler, wherever is comfortable, and its attention drawn to food in the handler’s right hand. Multiple pieces of kibble should be held in the hand and the pup fed pieces as it is lured into a sit position (“pezzing”).
- The handler should slowly raise the luring hand upwards so that the puppy’s nose is pointing up as it follows the hand. The food should be kept right on the puppy’s nose like a magnet and the kibble fed into the pup’s mouth as it begins any movement toward a sit position.

- The left hand, with a flat palm, should slide down the puppy's back, over its rump, with the edge of the hand being placed behind the upper part of the pup's thighs.
- The hand/arm should gently tuck the puppy's bottom and fold it into a sit position.
- If the puppy takes a step forward before sitting, that's OK. The hand on the rear should prevent the puppy from rocking back into the sit.
- The puppy should be pezzed continuously to keep its interest and especially as it lowers its rear toward the ground and begins to bring its hind legs underneath its body.
- As soon as the puppy sits it should be given several pieces of kibble in succession.
- After the pup is fed several pieces of kibble while seated, it should be encouraged to get up and move around and the procedure repeated several times. To get the puppy up the raiser can lure the pup forward a few steps.



Within a few sessions the puppy will need less physical help. Sliding the hand over the rump and tucking will become successively lighter until just a touch on the rump will help cue the puppy. Very quickly the pup can be weaned off the physical prompt altogether.

Troubleshooting

If the puppy paws a lot to get the food, the hand should be quickly lifted away and returned as soon as the pup's paws are on the floor. Usually it only takes a few repetitions for the pup to learn that pawing results in the food disappearing!

The sit position is very natural for puppies and most puppies respond to the lured sit after just a few repetitions.

Introducing the Sit Signal

Once the puppy is readily going into a sit position with pezzing, the shape of the sit signal may be introduced. The difference between a lure and a signal is simple: a lure is hand-held food and a true signal is given with a hand motion that contains no food. The mark "Nice" is not given when a behavior is lured. Once there is no hand-held food being used as a lure, and the signal is pure, the puppy will be marked and rewarded. The sit signal is an upward motion with the right hand.



Here is a link to a video of the signals for sit, stand and down. Focus on the sit signal for now:
<https://youtu.be/z2l-vhHG0Gw>

- A single piece of kibble should be placed in the handler's right hand under the thumb, held across the palm.



- The signal should be given close to the puppy's nose at first, as when pezzing. The puppy will probably sit immediately and the kibble should be released from under the thumb and given to the puppy as soon as its bottom touches the floor.
- If the puppy doesn't follow the signal it may be allowed to smell the kibble in the hand before trying again. Moving the hand too quickly or too far away from the puppy will confuse it – for now the signal should be close to the puppy.
- Within a few successful repetitions, the lure/signal can be held a little further away from the puppy up above its head.
- Once the puppy is sitting promptly with the lure/signal, Paw Pad Game #3 may be introduced. It is not necessary for the puppy to be fully weaned off the hand-held food before moving onto Paw Pad Game #3.

Reminders - steps on fading the lure:



1. Lure the pup into position by pezzing
2. Signal hand has a piece of kibble in it but not visible to the puppy (lure/signal)
3. Signal hand has no food in it and pup is rewarded from other hand as soon as it does the desired behavior. (Now the pup can be marked with "Nice!")

Some puppies will not be ready for a pure signal (no food in hand) for many sessions after introduction of the lure.