



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department Ruff Notes – March 2019

Fading the Lure

This document is written as a reminder to raisers on the process of “fading lures” such that puppies are able to respond to verbal-only cues (e.g. stand, sit, down, etc.).

As per the Final Goal Behaviors, we are striving for a puppy that performs behaviors upon the verbal cues alone. Puppies that fail to respond to a verbal cue but will subsequently perform the behavior with a hand-signal, or minimal leash cue reminder (for foundation positions), are also acceptable. Puppies that still require luring or physical manipulation to complete the behaviors are not ready for recall.

What is luring?

Luring is the act of holding something desirable (such as kibble) in a way that elicits a particular response. For example, we often teach the foundation positions (stand, sit, down) by using a food lure held right up to the puppy’s nose such that the puppy’s body follows the lure into the desired position.

The transition from luring to verbal-only cues is generally as follows. Depending on the exercise (and puppy), raisers may spend more time on certain steps or skip one altogether.

- 1) Pezzing continuously while the puppy moves into position, and continuing to feed the puppy once it is in position.
- 2) Holding a single piece of kibble at the puppy’s nose to coax it into position, and then feeding the kibble to the puppy once it is in position. (Making the shape of the hand the same shape as the appropriate signal.)
- 3) Having an empty hand perform the same motions as the initial lure, then mark and reward with food from the other hand.
- 4) Taking the hand motion a little further from the puppy’s nose end, so that it becomes a proper hand signal, then mark and reward.
- 5) Saying the verbal cue, immediately followed by the hand signal, then mark and reward.
- 6) Saying the verbal cue, then mark and reward.

The hand signals used for Foundation Positions in the Puppy Raising program are specifically designed to be a natural transition from the movement we use to lure the puppies. When first teaching the positions, raisers should try to make the luring motion as similar to the hand signal as possible.

What if the puppy isn’t progressing?

Often raisers will get “stuck” between steps 2 and 3, unable to fade out the lure. This can certainly feel frustrating! And there are a couple of possible culprits:

- 1) The handler may be trying to progress too quickly.
We expect that younger puppies (under 6 months of age) will likely still need at least a hand signal, if not a food lure to perform behaviors – especially in novel or distracting environments. Remember that our criteria needs to be appropriate given the level of distractions!

- 2) The puppy may be “holding out” for help.
The raiser may have accidentally taught the puppy to passively wait to be lured into position. To remedy this, the puppy should be lured into position (with a lure that as similar to the hand signal as possible), but the handler should NOT feed the puppy the piece of kibble in the hand. Instead, the pup should be marked and rewarded using the opposite hand. This teaches the pup that regardless of whether there is food in the signaling hand, their reward will come from somewhere else. After a few repetitions like this then the signal may be repeated without holding a piece of kibble.

The other place raisers can get “stuck” is fading out the hand signal. Here (as long as the puppies know the hand signal well and aren’t still struggling without the lure) the likely culprit is delivery of the verbal cue.

- 1) The raiser should be sure that the verbal cue is given before they start to move their body and give the hand signal.
Since the puppy already knows the hand signal, it is hard for it to acknowledge the new verbal cue if it happens at the same time as the signal. Instead, the verbal cue should be said (once!), a brief pause given, then the hand signal performed. We are teaching the puppy that the verbal cue predicts the hand signal, and soon they will pre-emptively perform the behavior that goes with the hand signal.
- 2) The verbal cue may be getting lost amongst a sea of words.
As humans, we love to use words. But when teaching puppies the meaning of very special words (verbal cues), we must make it easy for them. The raiser should not add words surrounding the verbal cue (i.e. “Alright Juno, can you lie down for me please?”). If a raiser suspects that they may have this tendency, they should find a training buddy who can keep them accountable or video tape themselves!

When fading the signal, it often helps to make the signal gradually smaller. Taking the down as an example and going to the next step only when the puppy is doing well with each ‘fade’ of the signal:

- 1) The handler might start not bending so far and not bringing the hand signal so low. Perhaps just finishing the signal half way down the pup’s front legs instead of going all the way to the floor.
- 2) Then, finishing the signal just below the puppy’s head without the handler bending over.
- 3) Then, keeping the signal above the puppy’s head and eventually progressing to just a brief hand motion.

It may take several weeks to fade the hand signal totally but many handlers may find the pup gets the idea better using this method.

Fading lures becomes harder and harder the longer the puppy practices only being lured into position. It is important for raisers to keep the goal of “verbal-only” in mind throughout the training process and to seek help from their leader/CFR if they are having any trouble.