

# Chapter 1

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## Sit and Watch

By simply asking your dog to “sit” and “watch,” you can preempt nuisance behaviors, such as jumping on people, or pulling on the leash toward people, dogs, or other distractions.

### SIT

Some dogs, because of the way they’re built or because of prior training, will sit early on. It might also be that you’re a mechanical marvel as a trainer! Anyway, if your dog performs five out of five sits at any point, skip ahead to *Sit VII* and resume training from there.

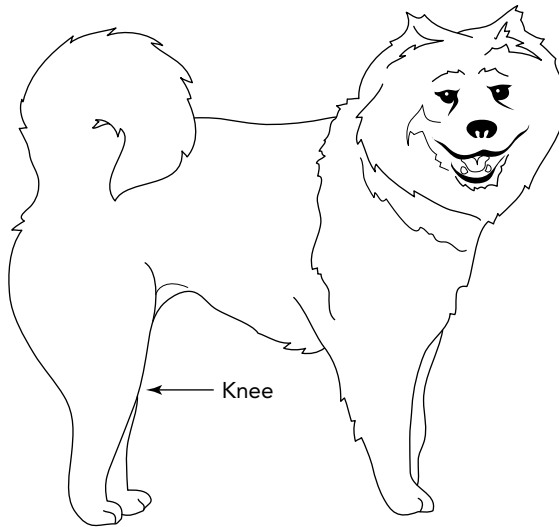
### Sit I

1. Hold a food reward over your dog’s head so that she has to crane her neck straight up to sniff it or nibble at it. Make her stretch on tippy-toes, but don’t hold it so high that she jumps. Keep it still—don’t back her up with it.
2. Count to two seconds and then give it to her while she’s still craning. If she drops her head, cancel the reward (snatch it back) and start over.
3. She doesn’t need to sit yet (although she might—bonus!)—right now we’re paying neck craning.

**Push on five for five.**

### Sit II

1. Do the same neck-crane game but for four seconds this time. Remember to keep the reward still over your dog’s head—don’t back her up or dance her around with the food lure.



2. If you see her back end go down into a partial (or full!) Sit at any point, pay early—right when her knees bend (when the rear goes down into a partial Sit).

### *Push-Drop-Stick Review*

It's extremely important not to go on to the next step until your dog does a set of five in a row correctly. Follow the progression and the Push-Drop-Stick rules faithfully to avoid a flimsy foundation. Now is the time to set up a habit of training systematically, like a pro. Stick with the system however fabulous you think your judgment is. Only a five out of five means that you've built a strong enough response to push to the next level. Until the response is this strong, stick to the current level or drop, depending on the numbers.

In the case of *Sit I*, complete five two-second neck cranes, rewarding after each one before pushing to *Sit II*. If your dog does three or four out of five, do another set. That's a stick. If she does it only once or twice or not at all, that's a drop. In this case, as it's the first exercise, drop back to a one-second neck crane, get five in a row of those, and then push to the two-second version in *Sit I*. And don't worry about it. Just keep building.

**Remember, we push on five out of five correct; stick on three or four out of five; and drop on zero, one, or two out of five.**

### *Can't I Just Squish Her into a Sit?*

Getting the dog to sit bit by bit using a food prompt may seem like a lot of effort. This short-term pain will yield massive long-term gain, however, because the food-prompt method teaches the dog to use *her own muscles* to do the action. Another reason that pushing and pulling your dog into a Sit slows down learning is that all animals have an immediate emotional reaction to being shoved or restrained in any way. Gary Wilkes, a well-known trainer, uses the human analogy of having a pro help you with your golf swing by standing behind you, wrapping his arms around you, and clasping your wrists in order to guide your swing. If you can imagine this vividly enough, your mind won't be on your swing; instead, you'll be thinking, "Eek, too close, too close, get off me." Your dog will have a similar reaction to being manipulated in this fashion. It slows down learning by stressing her out.

3. If you don't see any partial Sit, pay fair and square at the end of four seconds. Either an early pay for a knee-bend or a four-second crane counts as a correct response in your Push-Drop-Stick decisions.

**Push on five for five.**

### Sit III

1. Repeat the neck-crane game for eight seconds.
2. Look for any knee bending and pay early if you get any.
3. If eight seconds is too long—you'll know this is the case if your dog quits trying to sniff and nibble the food prompt over her head—and if she keeps getting four seconds perfectly, do a *split*. Split the difference between four and eight, and make her neck crane for six seconds. When she does it five for five successfully, push to eight again.

**Push on five for five.**

**Sit IV**

1. Do another round of the neck-crane game until your dog bends her knees, however long it takes.
2. Look for any small increases in the amount of bend—try to reward at the moment of deepest knee bend. Pay close attention because timing really counts—reward exactly when she does the knee bend. If she quits, drop to *Sit II* or *III*.

**Push on five for five.**

**Sit V**

1. Hold out for deeper knee bends.
2. Choose your moment of reward carefully—timing is critical in dog training. Catch that bend.



**Push on five for five.**

**Sit VI**

1. Hold out for a full sit.
2. Remember to cancel the reward if your dog jumps or backs up.

**Push on five for five.**

**Sit VII**

1. Now put the reward in your other hand and keep it behind your back.
2. Do the motion as in *Sit VI* but without the reward in your hand.
3. Praise your dog and pay immediately from your other hand as soon as she sits.

### *Verbal Commands: No Rush*

One of the biggest errors of novice trainers is the tendency to *chant* commands (“Sit, sit, sit, SIT!”). Expert trainers do not even introduce verbal commands until a behavior is far along—in the case of *Sit IX*. So, once your dog performs reliably for a hand signal, start placing the verbal command *before*—always before, never during, never after—the hand signal. This way, the verbal *predicts* the learned signal and results in a Pavlov’s Dog effect over time—the dog starts responding to the verbal cue as she did to the hand signal. You’ll notice that when you train more advanced behaviors later on, a great deal of training takes place before you give it a name—that is, start using a verbal command.

4. Pay while she is still sitting so that she eats in a sit—this is called *feeding for position*.
5. Ignore her (stand still) if she goes sniffing at the hand behind your back.

**Push on five for five.**

### Sit VIII

1. The reward is still in your other hand behind your back.
2. Do a faster motion with your command hand, like a scoop upward—this is the hand signal for *Sit*.
3. Praise and pay, feeding for position when your dog sits.

**Push on five for five.**

### Sit IX

1. *Before* you do the motion, say “Sit.”
2. Wait a *full second* or two.
3. Now do the motion.
4. Praise and feed for position when your dog sits.

**Push on five for five.**

## Sit X

1. Say "Sit."
2. If your dog sits, pay, feeding for position.
3. If she doesn't sit within three seconds, give her the motion, and when she sits, praise but don't feed. When you need to give her the hand signal, it doesn't count as a correct response. Pay only when she responds after the verbal cue.

**Push on five for five.**

## WATCH

*Watch* is defined as the dog making and maintaining eye contact with the trainer. It has the great virtue of delivering high bang for the buck in terms of skill acquisition in the trainer along with practical benefit.

### Watch I

Load your hand with two treats.

1. Ask your dog to sit using your verbal cue, and pay when she does.
2. Draw the second treat from her nose smoothly up to your eyes. As soon as her eyes meet yours, smile, praise, and pay her with that treat.
3. If she pops out of her sit, such as to jump up toward the lure, cancel the reward and start over. She needs to both watch and collect her payment in the sit position.

**Push on five for five.**



### Watch II

1. This time, load your nonsignal hand with two treats. Keep it behind your back except to pay.
2. Ask your dog to sit and pay when she does.

3. Draw your signal hand up to your eyes as you did in *Watch I* but without the treat in it. As soon as your dog's eyes meet yours, smile, praise, and pay her with the treat from your other hand. Feed for position: she must collect in a sit with her head tilted up.
4. If she breaks her sit, such as to go looking behind your back, cancel the reward and start over.
5. Repeat this process in every room of your house. Be sure not to be greedy with the duration—pay her *as soon as* she makes eye contact.

**Push when your dog is five for five in every room of your house.**

### *What Should I Do in a Training Session?*

Regardless of your dog's level of proficiency, every training session should start with a quick warm-up consisting of a bit of review. Before starting any new steps, do a few repetitions at the level your dog was last at. Let's say, for example, that you do a ten-minute session consisting of:

*Sit VII, VIII, and IX*  
*Down I, II, III, and IV*  
*Watch I*

At the beginning of your next session, before attempting *Sit X*, do a few repetitions of *Sit IX*. Likewise, before trying *Down V* or *Watch II*, warm up your dog with a bit of *Down IV* and *Watch I*, respectively.

Short sessions—from five to thirty minutes—with rest time in between them are best. Always try to quit before either you or the dog are fed up.

There's some difference of opinion among professional trainers about whether it's necessary to end sessions "on a good note"—that is, after a particularly fine repetition. Some trainers have put forward the notion that ending on a good note helps the dog remember the session better. Others point out that dogs get very hooked on training and the end of a session is usually a bit of a disappointment to them, so ending on a good repetition would punish this better-than-average performance. Therefore, they say, you should end on a poor effort so the dog will try harder next time in order to be trained longer. Still other trainers go in with a set itinerary of how many steps they want to do of various behaviors and simply end when they reach their goals.

My recommendation to you is to keep sessions short, don't agonize about which exact repetition you end on, and work on what you want to work on as long as you are faithful to the Push-Drop-Stick rule and you do the steps in order.

### *Checking In: Are You Getting Hooked or Not?*

After a few sessions, you'll have some idea of whether or not the process of training is inherently rewarding for you. Signs that you're a trainer-to-be are:

- You don't find yourself procrastinating—you look forward to training.
- You do two or more sessions a day.
- Your sessions often go on for longer than the time you budgeted to practice—the time seems to just fly by.
- You find yourself talking to anyone who will listen about how animals learn or how neat it is watching your dog catch on.
- You find yourself scouring supermarkets or high-end pet stores to find new rewards so you can do extra training.
- You do extra reading on training.

If this sounds like you, it is likely you won't need external motivators to get you to do sessions. The only pitfall for you is the slightly lowered efficiency of training more than necessary to get robust and snappy obedience.

### **Watch III—Two for One**

1. Load your nonsignal hand with one treat.
2. Ask your dog to sit. As soon as she does, go right into *watch*—don't pay the sit.
3. Give her the signal as you did in *Watch II*. As soon as her eyes meet yours, smile, praise, and pay her, feeding for position: in a sit with her head upward facing toward you.

### *Rewards for You if You're Avoiding Training or Finding It a Chore*

It might turn out that you're avoiding training, "never have time," or feel frustrated or bored by the whole thing. First things first: *no guilt*. You're not morally inferior or some sort of failure if we need to incentivize you to train your dog. Training is a practical endeavor, not a moral purity contest, and there are no better or higher reasons for doing it than others.

Let's set up some extrinsic reward system to get you training a bit more. As soon as your dog is five for five at the following milestones, check the



box so you can collect the corresponding prize. For some prizes, you have to complete more than one level. Needless to say, it's important that the rewards be meaningful to you, so substitute alternatives if my suggestions aren't motivating. You'll probably find that these things are more fun earned than if you had allowed yourself to have them for free.

<b>Reward Yourself!</b>					
	<b>Sit I, II, &amp; III</b>	<b>Sit IV &amp; V</b>	<b>Sit VI</b>	<b>Sit VII–X</b>	<b>Watch I–III</b>
Check Once Completed					
What You Win	Call or e-mail a friend to complain about having to train—be very specific	Goodly dose of favorite chocolate bar or salty snack	Surf a new website	Ten-minute stretch or neck rub by significant other	Read a guilty-pleasure magazine on sofa

It is vital to keep going in these early stages, where you're practicing new tasks that you feel unsure of.