

The basics of Basic Obedience: Part 2

by Jeff Martin

This is Part 2 of Jeff's article. Part 1 was in the DKGNA April Newsletter. These notes are an extension of a previous article titled Training for Success.



I always expect my dogs to come in and sit in front not just vaguely somewhere nearby. This is usually so as adults they get leashed up, but it becomes an ingrained habit for delivering game to hand.

Once your dog is mastering sit, come and sit in front at 6ft onlead extend it by dropping the lead and call it from 20 ft and longer. If your dog is coming so fast and running past you call him with you backed up against a fence etc. the goal is for pup to always come to sit directly in front. At close quarters on lead you can always stick your leg out to correct a dog trying to go by you or sit to your side, it must be established the

only safe place is sitting directly in front facing you.

Another drill extension is called “inching” which you will use a lot in retrieving training, sit your dog move just a foot further away and command come again with the hand signal to sit in front. This becomes a series of sits with your dog super close looking up at you, so hold his head up making eye contact while stroking his nose in praise, make a game of it. If your dog ever returns with game and sits too far away (even in a test) give him the quiet hand signal for come closer and he will know to inch right in close to you for perfection.

Now its very hard to force a dog to come to you especially at a distance and most people have great difficulty. If you've taught your dog to come on command correctly back to you in the yard under controlled conditions, he has learnt what the command actually means and what you expect. Never, ever, ever call the dog to you and punish it for something it did 10 minutes ago. In the yard come has always meant praise and patting for coming to you, now your teaching come means a beating, a big mistake!!

Here is the **magic of long distance control**, if your dog ever disobeys at a distance, run immediately screaming like a madman until you catch up with it, he knows your coming and also associates the disobeyed command that caused it because you came screaming the moment he committed it. As you get near the dog, he will likely fold knowing he's in trouble because you are now in his field of influence. You may even throw the lead to connect with him to show you can always get at him. Show your displeasure verbally in no uncertain manner BUT stop immediately and command COME again and this time

he will comply. Go back a longer distance as you did when you initially gave the command and repeat the command that he ignored, to demand he do it correctly. Do this religiously every single time it occurs, and he will learn quickly you will always enforce obedience at any distance. This rationale applies to any command given at distance keeping in mind Golden Rule #1 at all times. I would avoid extending come commands to a long distance until most of the obedience is completed and you then firmly have his respect.

HEEL: heeling like all training is easiest if broken down into its components. With the dog onlead and sitting move to the end of the lead and facing away from the dog. Give the new command heel as you move away and slap your thigh. You may have to encourage the pup with the lead to move to the correct position on your left. The choke lead is gently used to pull him back if too far forward or pull forward if he's lolly gagging behind. This initial step is very gentle for the pup to learn to walk in a straight line close to the trainer's left leg. Once this is learnt over a few lessons start to extend it with stops and starts that the pup has to learn to comply with independently, this is all done traveling in a single direction. The next extension is to introduce left and right hand turns while still gently correcting the pup into position using the lead. Up to this point it has been to show pup that heel means stay close to the trainer's left leg no matter what. Your dog now understands where he should be when commanded to heel so you can now have him sitting front but wave your hand to the left as you give the command heel. You may have to position him at your side with the lead but it's a pretty quick transition to coming to your side. Once you believe heeling is well understood start doing heeling with a faster speed, turning left and right plus stopping and starting. You should make a correction by now snapping the choke chain then release it for a less than speedy response. Don't use excessive force, apply it according to the nature of your dog. You don't want to panic a mild dog, and have it shut down, but it should be unpleasant enough that he should learn to want to avoid it by responding quickly. You can take this to extreme speed with an experienced older dog and still make a fun game out of it that he will love to do, it is not about punishment. This is the exact test you will use in a VGP heeling on or off lead through the saplings.

DROP: This is considered the big anchor of versatile dog training as you never ever call a dog at a distance from the down stay, you always return to collect it. The dog then has the mindset to wait as you will always come back to him. This is used repeatedly in the VGP test.

With dog in the sitting position command drop or down (your choice) as you point to the ground. You may have to move both front legs out in front as you lower the dog to the ground. Praise and pat him in this position repeating the drop command. It may take two lessons a day for a couple of days for the dog to realise what position you want him. Drop always extends from the sit command. The moment he shows any inclination to

go down on his stomach praise profusely he is getting it. If he doesn't pull his head down until his body is lying on its stomach. This is unpleasant for the dog so use as a last resort. Once mastered you extend it by walking frontwards over the dogs back or even stepping across the dogs back the whole time expecting it to remain lying down, make corrections as they occur. This command really is to lie down, its time out for likely quite a while, so I practise this if I'm working in my garage, so I put the dog on his matt in the down position and expect him to stay there or correct him immediately if he doesn't (BTW dogs cant stand stationary for long times). This is the exact exercise you use in the 10-minute weisen test at a SOLM or firing out of sight at a VGP.

I actually use a variation of this but as some VGP rules have gotten far easier its now really overkill. I use the command "down there" meaning its lie down and wait but use the added command of pointing to the ground to tell the dog to keep its head on the ground between its paws, when and if I need that.

HALT: this is to stand motionless; it comes in very handy if your dog is on point but moving slightly to maintain contact with a moving covey. You can stop it with a quiet halt and then release it to keep moving as you catch up.

Have the dog on lead and command halt with the accompanying hand signal, he will wonder what you want and be a little confused. You can stop him by gently holding the lead to stop him. As he stands stationary praise him with good boy, so he knows he's doing it correctly. He may move a leg or even try to sit because of his confusion, so you pick him up to stand or place the foot that moved back to where it was as you repeat the command. After a few days and he is understanding what is required proof it just as you did with sitting by walking around the dog and later by applying pressure ion the lead. In both extensions correct him with an agh-agh as you move him back into position. You can extend it even further by running him at speed beside you on lead and then spring the halt command and expect him to stop immediately as you did. This exercise is absolutely priceless for communicating with a dog on point and I use it extensively when training a dog to stop to flush and totally steadiness to wing and shot (see a previous article titled Total Steadiness, start at the Finish for details) without the need for a single command as is expected at VGP standard. No electrical punishment needed, just a step by step approach that the dog understands.

I hope I've relayed in this article that you remain calm and patient with each exercise being achieved with lots of showing, so you avoid lots of corrections. You as the trainer has to decide when your dog has mastered a step before moving onto the next. Too slow you risk having the dog bored but moving too fast with lessons half learnt creates a lot of doubt and confusion in the dog. Keep in mind when training "that nothing succeeds like success" with your dog feeling pretty successful and confident.

If you have time to feed the dog, you really have time to train it!! So, every mealtime you should put the dog through the whole obedience routine or at least what its learnt to date. Release the dog as you prepare its food and give it to him with pats and praise for the work. You can practise some of the extensions such as sitting the dog out of site or sitting at a distance while you prepare his food but be prepared to make corrections immediately as they occur but this time make him wait longer for his mistake. You can practise sitting him while you prep his food then move to a position to release him to go with a wave of your left or right arm as you would in the field. The classic is to sit him out of sight but on lead, prepare his food then call him but spring the HALT command on him as he comes into sight and expect him to obey immediately, you must be between him and the food to enforce this !! . Take him back to where you used the command and repeat it if he took a few steps too many, before releasing him to go eat. At mealtimes he is ramped up and attentive so primed to take to training so he can get fed. The things you can devise, really shows “ if you have time to feed the dog , you have the time to train it.”

Good training and Waidmansheil Jeff Martin