

Wait vs. Stay

Does your dog know how to stay? Traditionally, this word is used to tell the dog not to move unless told to do so. If dogs are really and truly trained to stay, they will remain in that position for hours. Is that really what you want to say to your dog in all situations when you say “stay?” Probably not. I get this vision of someone going to work for the day and telling the dog to “stay” as the door is closed. Nine hours later, the door opens and the dog is still in the same place! Ridiculous, huh? Instead, how about trying the “wait” command?

When would you use “wait?” I can think of at least four situations.

- 1) Is your dog the type who needs to fly through the door to go outside? You open the door and out he goes, rushing past you?
- 2) And speaking of rushing, does your dog plow you down when descending the stairs? Or nearly knocks you over in a race to the top of the steps?
- 3) Do you like to take your dog for rides in the car? Even if you only take your dog for car rides when absolutely necessary, is she quick to jump out of the car?
- 4) Is your dog always out in front during your walks?

All of these activities can be dangerous for your dog or for you and can usurp your leadership, sending clear signals to the dog that he or she is in charge! A little lesson in “wait”-ing may help.

First, you need to train your dog to understand what “wait” means. The easiest way is to work at your back door, or whatever door you use to let the dog outside. Plan your training session for after your dog has been outside for exercise, not when he is waiting to go outside! This kind of training takes LOTS of patience because most dogs are like they are on springs when they think they are going outside. Grab some high quality treats and ask your dog to sit by the door. As your dog is sitting quietly, say “wait” as you s-l-o-w-l-y open the door just a crack. If the dog does not move, give her lots of praise and a treat. If the dog moves, simply ignore her and ask her to sit again. Most dogs get the idea rather quickly that they will not be let outside if they continue to pop up out of the sit. Gradually work on opening the door wider as your dog holds the position, and you are praising and treating. When your dog begins to understand what “wait” means, give him a release command such as “okay” to tell him that he doesn’t have to wait anymore. Make it bright and happy, and praise your dog for doing a great job. You can transfer this lesson to the car, using the car door the same way as you did the house door.

As for working with steps, position your dog at the top of the stairs in a sitting position. Tell your dog to “wait” and take one step down. If the dog does not move, praise and treat and continue gradually moving down the stairs.

Once your dog reliably responds to your “wait” command, you can use it easily during walks. If your dog likes to get way ahead of you, simply tell her to “wait” then stop walking so she gets the idea.

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