

## Dog Training — the Basic Steps!

### Part IV

When you train your dog to walk at heel and sit, it will quite often happen to sit in a crooked position and face towards you. In addition to that, it may also sit a little bit beyond and a little wide of you. How and why does this happen? There are various reasons. You may have used its name, like, "Millie, sit" instead of just, "Sit". Hearing her name, she would have turned slightly towards you and consequently sat crooked. Instead of holding the clip part of the leash at 90 degrees above her head, you may have held it at some other angle which caused her to twist around, or you haven't used your left hand soon enough or accurately in guiding her hindquarters down and slightly forwards into the correct sitting position. She may have been distracted and turned slightly just at the point you commanded, "Sit!" Whatever the cause, it must be corrected before a bad habit develops.

#### The correction of a crooked sit

Let us suppose your dog has sat crooked. Place your left hand on the leash near the clip with your thumb on the top, and ensure that your left hand is at the same height as the dog's neck height is from the ground. Keeping your right foot where it is facing the direction you have been going, cast your left foot back one good stride and in a slight arc behind your right foot, and bend at your knees as you do so. As you do this, command in a very inviting tone, "Millie, heel" and entice your dog to follow your left hand (which holds the leash near the clip), turning in towards you, then slightly away as it comes back, and then in towards you again, (see accompanying diagrams). As it does the last curve, bring your left foot forward to your right foot. Your dog, thinking you are going forward, will come in beside you, and you make it sit. Make quite sure that, as it comes forward and close to your side, you have both hands ready in the correct position in order to make it sit straight. During this correction, praise your dog as it responds, so that it associates the correction with pleasure. Remember, you are showing your dog exactly what you want.

This corrective exercise is invaluable because it can be used in so many different ways, e.g. when your dog has been walking freely out in front, and you wish to bring it to heel. In more advanced stages of the recall, it can be used to bring your dog to heel from the sit position in front of you. It can be used to correct crooked drops, also crooked stands which will be a great help to handlers training their dogs for the show ring; also for left-about turns, where both handler and dog turn to the left. I will write about that exercise another time.

#### The sit stay

When you feel that your dog is doing sufficiently well in heelwork and that it sits quite still every time you come to a halt, now it is time to start the first stage of the sit stay exercise. In teaching your dog this exercise, there are two major things you have to do: (1) Make a mental note of where you have told your dog to stay, the actual spot on the

ground and the direction in which you have faced it. If it moves, you must take it back to the same spot and start again. If you don't take this necessary step, but allow it to sit in a new position, let's say half a metre beyond the original spot, then your dog would have soon found out that it has gained that piece of ground and creep forward again. You must be consistent. (2) Teach the exercise.

With your dog in the sit position beside you, hold the leash in your left hand, about half a metre vertically above the dog's head, not tight, but just slack. Then command, "Stay" *without* the dog's name. (Only use its name with movement exercises, like heel and come, not with stationary exercises). Step around with your right foot first to face your dog, so that you are one straight arm's length away. Hold your right index finger up near your mouth. This helps to keep your dog's attention on you. Keep your eyes constantly on your dog. After several seconds, return slowly back to your original position beside your dog. Wait a few more seconds, place the clip part of the leash also into your left hand, while you quietly praise, "Good dog, very good". At the same time slowly and gently stroke the dog on the side of its face with your right hand. That is where you will get the maximum attention from your dog. Then either dismiss your dog or heel it forward for a few paces, then sit, praise and dismiss it. During the stay, if your dog attempts to move, say, "Sit" and give a quick, short jerk upwards and immediately slacken the leash. You will, of course, have to be very quick and that is why you must have your leash vertically above the dog's head. If it were at a more forward angle, you would pull the dog towards you. If your dog moves completely away, quickly return to your original position, at which you commanded, "Stay", and bring your dog to heel and sit by using the crooked sit correction method. So once again, you can see the value of this corrective method. That is why I would teach handlers this before showing the sit stay exercise.

When you have taught this initial stage, you can take the sit stay one stage further. From the position you adopt in front of and facing your dog, you can then move slowly around in a semi-circle, first to the right, then round to the far left and return to the centre facing your dog. The whole time you are doing this, keep your left hand holding the leash vertically above the dog's head. By moving around in a frontal semi-circle, it helps to keep the dog concentrating on you. Keep your body upright. Don't bend downwards, as that will convey a wrong body signal, and your dog is highly likely to interpret it as a recall! If distracted, say, "Watch" or stamp with one foot. Don't attempt to walk around the back of your dog in these early stages; otherwise it is likely to move. Keep the exercise simple. Don't make the stays long. When doing your heelwork, which would include several sits, make two of those into sit-stays. They add variety and help to hold your dog's interest.

### [The stand stay](#)

It is fairly easy to train dogs to sit stay and drop stay, because they are sort of anchored to the ground! But there is a much greater chance of dogs moving in the stand position. However, there is one very good method to prevent such unwanted movements and that is to stand your dog at a kerb or deep step, so that its front paws are about one inch from the edge. Then, having given the command, "Stay", step down and around to face your dog. The chances are it won't move forwards, because, if it did, it would have to step

down the kerb or deep step. The actual step has a meaning to your dog that it must not come over that line, whereas on totally flat ground, where there is no line, your dog is very likely to move. In other words, the temptation to creep forward is too great for the dog! Over the years many clients have brought their show dogs to me for training. Common problems included dogs not standing on command nor remaining quite still. These were soon overcome by walking the dogs up the street, doing the required turns to the kerb and training them to stand on the edge. Each time a stay was carried out the handler, upon returning to the dog, praised it, then heeled it across the road, and turned on the footpath to proceed further up the street to carry out more stands and stand stays at the kerbs. This procedure had the desired effect and later the dogs were doing stands and stand stays anywhere along a flat footpath. They obeyed the commands; stood straight and kept quite still. Everything was done on slack leads as required in the show ring.

I trust that the topics I have covered here will be of help not only to handlers who attend dog training clubs and exhibitors in the show rings, but also to instructors who devote much time in assisting others and wish to extend their own knowledge in dog training.

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