



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

## Puppy Raising Department

### Modeling (Hand-Placed) Foundation Positions

#### Sit, Down and Stand

Video link: <https://youtu.be/7xFyllyWOyK>

#### Goal Behavior

The puppy responds promptly and reliably to verbal cues to sit, down and stand. With the “stand” cue continued use of a collar prompt (guidance) is acceptable. If the puppy is cued to change position while at heel on the handler’s left side, the puppy maintains a straight body orientation without wrapping in front of the handler, backing up or veering too far away from the handler.



#### Training Session Objectives

Raisers will find that as the puppy progresses it will need less physical help (prompting) for each change of position. Raisers should focus on one position at a time and only move on to the next position when the puppy is responding to the verbal cue with only slight physical prompting. The order to teach would be sit, then down, and then stand. (See below regarding Paw Pad Games 1 and 2). Most puppies

will be fluent on the sit cue within a week or so and the down within a month with daily practice. However, when the younger puppy is distracted or in a new situation, returning to physical prompts may be necessary.

### **Prerequisites**

- The pup should know how to take food from the hand politely
- The puppy should be hungry so practicing before meals is a good plan
- The puppy should be familiar with Paw Pad Games 1 and 2 and raiser should keep practicing these games separately from teaching sit and down.

Paw Pad Games 1 and 2 are valuable for many reasons, one being to balance the puppy's natural tendency to want to sit as the preferred behavior. This tendency to sit as a default makes it difficult to teach the puppy collar cues and to teach maintaining a stand position. As a working guide, standing at heel is a valuable behavior and one that should have a long reinforcement history. Continuing to work on Paw Pad Games 1 and 2 will help the puppy gain impulse-control and will reinforce the important stand position.

### **Session Set Up**

First sessions should be in a quiet, familiar area. Later, the puppy will be expected to respond in public settings; fluency in less distracting situations should be attained first.

When first working on the "down" position, doing so on a comfortable surface will make lying down more appealing to the puppy. Cold, hard floors are not conducive to teaching a puppy to lie down! Of course later in the puppy's training, it will be required to lie down in different settings.

The handler should wear a bait bag for easy and frequent access. The puppy's regular kibble should be used for rewards. If the puppy is not food motivated, the leader/CFR should be consulted regarding the use of high value food rewards.

### **Handling Tips**

The food reward should only be reached for once the puppy is placed into the position. With molding/hand-placing positions, the food should not be visible - we are not luring.

During the introduction phases, when the puppy may be positioned anywhere in relation to the handler, including in front of the handler, it is fine to reach into the bait bag and feed with the right hand if necessary. Once focus is on the puppy maintaining position in "heel" on the handler's left side, great care must be taken that the food reward is brought right to the pup's mouth. To prevent wrapping around to

the front of the handler it is best if the reward is given with the left hand as soon as is practical.

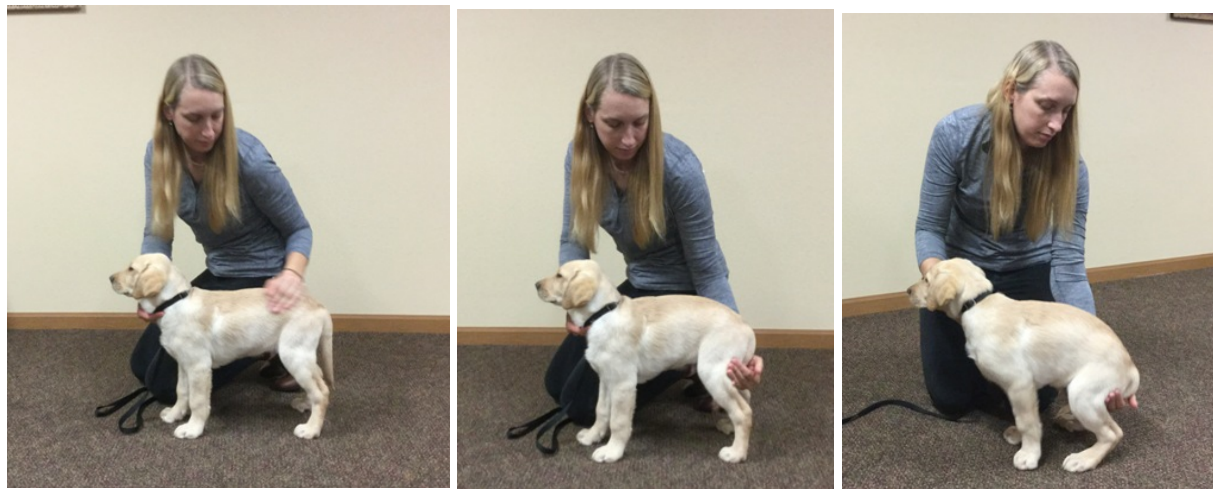
### To Mark or Not to Mark?

When training GDB puppies the handler should mark desirable behaviors that the puppy initiates. Offering to step up onto the Paw Pad would be an example of a puppy initiating a behavior and being marked for it. If the raiser makes a behavior happen, the puppy is not marked. An example would be when a puppy is lured onto the Paw Pad. So when physically helping a puppy into a position, the puppy is not marked. However, the puppy can, and should be, verbally praised before, and during, the reward.

### The Sit

#### Steps

The raiser may find it easier to practice with the puppy in front of the handler at first. As soon as possible, the puppy should be placed at the “heel” position to accustom it to sitting straight next to the handler.



- The right hand should hold the puppy’s collar with light pressure underneath the head to prevent the puppy moving backwards.
- The left hand, with a flat palm, should slide down the puppy’s back, over its rump with the edge of the hand being placed behind the upper part of the pup’s thighs.
- A larger puppy may require the wrist/arm area to come into contact with the rear legs, not just the hand.



- The hand/arm should gently scoop the puppy's rear legs and fold it into a sit position.
- The cue "sit" is given as the puppy sits followed by verbal praise.
- The right hand should keep hold of the collar while the left hand reaches into the bait bag for a reward.



- The puppy may be rewarded several times if it continues to sit. If the puppy immediately gets up that's OK too; it will quickly learn that the food only comes when it remains seated.

With practice, the puppy will need less and less physical help. Holding the collar will gradually be phased into light leash pressure forward, from under the throat area, then no pressure at all. Sliding the hand over the rump and tucking will become successively lighter until just a touch on the rump will help cue the puppy. Eventually the verbal cue to sit will be the only prompt needed. At that time food rewards may become random (sometimes rewarding immediately upon a sit, sometimes waiting for a few seconds of duration before rewarding).

To increase duration of the position (“stay”) food rewards will be given quickly and frequently at first (a high rate of reinforcement) then the time between the rewards gradually lengthened. The raiser should remain right next to the puppy for now. (See section on “Stay” in this document.)

*Tip: Once the raiser starts working on “down” the puppy may assume that every time it sits it is going to be asked to lie down too. To prevent this anticipation, the pup must be practiced and rewarded frequently for duration on the sit. If the puppy is particularly prone to lying down, more practice at the sit and less practice at the down will be needed to balance the pup’s desire to lie down. If the pup does lie down without being cued, it should just be encouraged to get up by the raiser moving and coaxing with no food rewards.*

## The Down

### Steps

- The puppy should be placed in a sit position next to the handler’s left leg facing forward (“heel” position)
- The handler will need to bend or may kneel/crouch next to the puppy
- The handler’s left hand, fingers pointing down, should be placed on the puppy’s left (outside) shoulder with the thumb hooked through the puppy’s collar (*Note: The hand is on the pup’s shoulder blade, not on top of the withers.*)
- The handler’s right hand gently grasps the puppy’s right (nearest) foreleg





- As pressure is applied to the pup's shoulder with the left hand, pulling gently toward the handler, the right leg is slowly pulled forward and the pup will fold into a down position. Essentially the pup is being made to lean its weight into the supporting leg then that leg is gently repositioned.
- The handler should say "down" as the puppy folds into position then give calm, verbal praise.
- The right hand may rest lightly on top of the shoulder to encourage the pup to stay down while the left hand reaches for a reward.
- Multiple rewards in quick succession may be brought right to the puppy's mouth if the puppy stays down. If the puppy gets up immediately, that's OK; it will quickly learn that the food only comes when it remains down.



Note: Some puppies are more comfortable folding outwards, onto their left hip, rather than folding toward the handler onto their right hip. If that is the case, the handler should reverse hand positions to place the puppy.

With practice, the puppy will need less and less physical help. The puppy will understand what is required and the hand on the shoulder will become a touch on the shoulder then a gentle touch on top of the withers. The right hand will no longer need to pull the leg out but will fade to a light touch on the back of the leg. Eventually all the prompts will be faded out and the puppy will respond to the verbal cue alone. At that time food rewards may become random (sometimes rewarding immediately upon a down, sometimes waiting for a few seconds of duration before rewarding.)

To increase duration of the position (“stay”) food rewards will be given quickly and frequently at first (a high rate of reinforcement) and the time between the rewards gradually lengthened. The raiser should remain right next to the puppy for now. (See section on teaching “Stay” in this document.)

## The Stand

### Steps

- With the puppy in a sit position, the handler should grasp the collar with the right hand
- The puppy should be cued forward with collar pressure encouraging it to stand up
- As the puppy stands the verbal cue “stand” should be given
- Some puppies may try to sit again immediately; it helps to keep the puppy standing if the handler places the left hand on the front of the puppy’s stifle (knee) with light pressure. Sometimes rubbing the puppy’s tummy helps keep it in a stand. The puppy should not be held up with a hand under the tummy – this can be uncomfortable and lead to even more reluctance to stand
- A food reward should be given once the puppy is securely standing
- Puppies well practiced in Paw Pad Games 1 and 2 will learn to stand much more easily than those pups less familiar with those games



### Teaching “Wait” or “Stay” Positively

Once the puppy is placed into a position - sit, down or stand, the puppy should be rewarded quickly and frequently (a high rate of reinforcement) to prevent it from changing position or losing interest. The raiser should give multiple rewards while the puppy maintains the position then released with an “OK” and the pup encouraged to move. If the puppy moves before it is released, it should just be gently replaced into position without a food reward. If the puppy breaks position frequently it usually means too much is being asked of the puppy and the situation should be made easier with more food rewards for holding position.

The rate of reinforcement (timing of rewards) is crucial - waiting too long between rewards when the pup is not ready for it, will result in unwanted movement. However, a continuous rate of reinforcement will not teach the puppy to wait for rewards; the time between rewards for maintaining the position must be gradually and thoughtfully increased.

The verbal cue “stay” may be given simultaneously with a signal in front of the puppy’s nose. The signal is the hand flat, fingers pointing down, with the palm toward the puppy; either hand may be used. The cue/signal is not introduced until the puppy has good duration and will hold the position, without moving, until encouraged to move. For some puppies this may mean several weeks of practice in holding the positions for increasingly longer periods before introducing the cue “stay”.

Some puppies will be better at holding one position over another and rewards can be offered for that position less frequently. Puppies should be more heavily reinforced and practiced in the positions that are the most challenging for them. It is a balance to keep the puppy motivated to hold all positions!



Three elements need to be considered when teaching a pup to stay; only one element should be added at a time. When one element is increased in difficulty the other elements should be made easier:

Duration - the amount of *time* that the puppy is asked to hold the position. This should be built up gradually. A few seconds is a long time for a baby puppy to hold a position!

Distraction - this could mean handler movement or outside distractions. Handler movement should be worked on first. Initially this may mean just standing up from a crouch or a step to one side then quickly back to the pup to reward. Then perhaps a little jiggle in place ... If the pup moves the handler should start again and make it easier for the puppy. Other distractions (such as people, dogs, blowing leaves) should be very minor and a long way from the puppy to begin with. Distractions should be introduced carefully and slowly to allow the pup to be successful.

Distance - When adding *distance* away from the puppy, the *time* the puppy is expected to maintain the position should be decreased. Distance between the pup and handler should be increased a half step at a time. If the puppy moves the handler needs to stay closer.

Adding too much difficulty at once would be unfair to the puppy, undermining its success and chance to earn positive reinforcement. Building up the stays slowly with lots of rewards will result in a happy, reliable puppy!