

Say Please



Say Please gives your dog rules to live by. It teaches dogs to listen even in exciting situations, making it great for adolescent dogs. It can also help shy or anxious dogs feel more comfortable because they know what to expect.

How it Works

Say Please is simple, but not always easy. It takes advantage of the dozens of times a day you reward your dog without even thinking about it and makes those rewards a little more deliberate. Simply put, your dog must perform a behavior before he gets anything he wants. In this way, you are rewarding good behavior throughout the day, rather than only during training sessions.

Getting Started

The first step is to teach your dog at least three behaviors. They can be obedience cues like sit or down, or silly tricks like high five or spin. (See our handouts on sit, down, hand target, and attention to get you started.) Once your dog can reliably perform at least three behaviors on cue, you're ready for the next step.

Make a list of all the things your dog likes. This includes things like food, treats, or toys, as well as activities like car rides, walks, or going outside. The sky's the limit here, so take some time to really think about it and be thorough.

Now, every time you are going to do or give your dog something on the list, ask him to do one of the behaviors you've taught him first. For example, before you open the door to go outside, you may ask your dog to sit. Or before you put his leash on to go for a walk, you may ask your dog to shake. The specific behavior is not important - it just needs to be something your dog knows how to do.

If your dog does what you ask, then give him what he wants. If not, tell him "oops, too bad" and wait a few seconds before trying again. Repeat this until your dog does the behavior you've asked for.

Keep your dog guessing (and listening) by mixing things up. Ask for a different behavior each time and ask for more than one behavior sometimes. If you always ask your dog to sit before opening the door, he'll soon learn the routine and do it automatically without thinking. This may seem helpful, but for Say Please to work, it is important that your dog is thinking about what he is doing.

Say Please with Multiple Dogs

If you have more than one dog, you can practice Say Please with all of them, or just with the dogs who really need it. It's okay to have different rules for each dog, as long as you are consistent with each dog. For example, you may not ask a more mature dog to do anything before you feed her (or you can ask her to do something as simple as "look cute"), while you may ask a younger dog to sit and down before being fed.