6-Week Intermediate Class

Week 1: Welcome to week one of Intermediate class! This class will reinforce the basic commands learned in Beginner class and help make them more consistent and reliable in increasingly distracting and challenging environments. Additionally, your dog will learn to perform the formal heel, go to place, touch, stand, and more. Ready? Let's go!

Before we learn some new behaviors, let's go over some very important techniques and best practices for increasing reliability in challenging situations.

Treats: The best way for your dog to learn that responding to you in distracting environments is important, is by providing **high value** treats **only** in challenging situations. Find a couple treats that your dog will go crazy over (for example: freeze dried liver or chicken, leftovers, cheese, lunchmeat, etc.), then **only** offer them as a reward in very difficult or distracting environments. If your dog knows that their only access to these special treats is during certain situations, you can bet that they will be much more likely to respond to you then.

Fading the Lure: Once your dog is proficient at following your hand signs and commands, you should begin to become less dependent on having to prove there's a treat involved, before asking for a behavior. Fading the lure teaches your dog to do the behavior first, and then find out if a treat will be given.

Step 1: Keep a treat in both hands before asking for a watch me, sit, down, etc.

Step 2: Ask for the behavior in the usual way, with the usual hand sign.

Step 3: As soon as your dog performs the behavior, give the reward from the **off** hand (the hand you didn't use to give the hand sign). Repeat steps 1-3 several times.

Step 4: Start to use an empty hand to give the hand signs and only bring out the reward after your dog complies. Once successful, always use an empty hand to give hand signs.

Randomizing the Reward: Studies have shown that the best way to keep your dog performing behaviors, for the longest time without being rewarded, is by first randomizing the reward. It's similar to how people who play the slot machines will keep performing a behavior that doesn't pay off, over and over and over again. They know that eventually, if they stick with it long enough, they will be rewarded.

Use this knowledge to your advantage. Randomizing the treats works in your favor for all the commands you've taught your dog so far. Also, it lessens their dependence or expectation of always getting a treat for each completed command. Start by offering a high ratio of treats per completed command, but gradually reduce the ratio to whatever you're comfortable with. But make sure the reward frequency is random, or your dog will figure out your pattern 😊

Note: Randomizing the reward **works against you** for things like leash pulling, jumping up and barking at you for attention. If you sometimes give your dog what they're after for doing these behaviors, they will keep them up for longer once you try to extinguish them. If your dog is still pulling you or jumping on you for attention, it is because sometimes those behaviors are giving them what they want.

Touch: Touch simply means for your dog to touch your palm (or object) with their nose. It's very useful for getting your dog to move into a place they are not used to going; like onto a scale, into the car, up or down stairs, etc.

Step 1: Most dogs will instinctively use their nose to investigate any object presented to them. Say: "touch" and immediately present the object (your palm, a stick, etc.) that you want your dog to learn to touch. Place it a few inches from their nose. *

Step 2: As soon as your dog touches the object with their nose, mark the behavior with your reward sound and deliver a treat. Repeat steps 1 and 2 several times.

Step 3: Begin to hold the object slightly further away from your dog's nose each time you practice the exercise, until you can get your dog to move several steps toward it before making contact.

* If using your palm as the "touch object", you can start by palming a treat as an enticement for touching your hand. After several successes, begin to "fade the lure".

Watch me* with Distractions: The whole point of the watch me is to get your dog to stop paying attention to a distraction and focus on you. Here's how to make that happen.

Step1: Near a distraction, ask for a watch me **one time**. If your dog performs a perfect watch me (with their back to the distraction), reward and move to step 2. If your dog fails, immediately take them further from the distraction and repeat step 1.

Step 2: Take a step closer to the distraction. Repeat step 1.

Note: Continue until you can be right next to the distraction. (This may take more than one session, depending on how distracting your dog finds the object/person/animal).

*This is actually the technique you'll use for getting your dog to perform **any** command near distractions. Ask for the behavior **one time**. If your dog does it, reward and move closer. If not, immediately take them further away and ask again.

Heel Part One: Heel is a highly focused way of walking with your dog. Unlike with loose leash walking, when performing the heel your dog will always stay in the same spot (right at your heel) and will be giving you 100% attention. It's great for when you need to navigate a busy sidewalk, or any time you need your dog to stay close and focused on you.

The first step to teaching heel it to train your dog how to get in the heel position (glued to your side facing forward).

Step 1: Pick a side that you want your dog to learn to heel on. Traditionally, it's done on the left.

Step 2: With your dog facing you, say: "heel"

Step 3: Immediately engage your dog with a treat using the hand on the side you want your dog to heel. Without moving your feet, lure your dog slightly behind you with the treat, then with a circular motion of your treat hand, get them facing forward in the heel position.

Step 4: Get your dog to sit in the heel position and treat. Face your dog and repeat steps 2-4.

Homework: Practice touch around the house. Work on getting your dog on and off furniture and in and out of the car using the touch command. See how far you can get your dog to move in order to touch your hand/object.

Start to conquer those tough distractions. Use the **high value** treats, and work on the watch me until you can be right next to what used to set your dog off, while he keeps his back to it and gives you his undivided attention.

After you've mastered the first part of the heel in the house and yard, start to randomly ask for it out on the walks. Maybe get in the habit of putting your dog in the heel position each time you're about to cross the street.

Work on fading the lure for all the commands your dog knows, and begin randomizing the treats for all the behaviors she's mastered.

***Next week bring a dog bed, blanket, towel or mat to class. We are going to start working on "go to bed/place"

If you have any questions or concerns, contact your trainer right away. Happy training!

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Week 2: Welcome back! Let's get warmed up with some loose leash walking practice. Remind your dog that when on the leash, he is with you… not the other way around! Practice some watch mes and leave its.

Better Reliability: At this point, we want to be fine tuning our commands. This means quicker and more consistent responses. It is accomplished by only asking for behaviors one time. Whether you are practicing "nothing in life is free" or your dog is working for a treat, if he doesn't respond right away, say "oops" and walk away. Regroup after a bit, then try again.

Remember, if your dog didn't respond because he was focused on a distraction, just immediately take him further from the distraction before trying again. Once he realizes that he only gets one chance to win the life reward or treat, and that ignoring you does not get him closer to what he wants, you will start seeing much better compliance.

Better Accuracy: In addition to good reliability, accurately performing the behavior we ask for is also important. This is accomplished by giving bigger/more rewards for the most accurate behaviors. If your dog gets the same treat for doing a sloppy heel as she does for doing a perfect one, then she has no motivation to do a great job every time. Pick the behaviors that are the most perfect and make it worth her while to excel. Soon she will be doing a great job every time.

Come with Distractions: Coming in the living room is one thing, but it's much more important that your dog learns to come when distractions are involved… it could save his life.

Step 1: Let your dog smell a high value treat.

Step 2: Walk away, past the distraction (toy), and call your dog. If your dog goes after the distraction, say: "leave it!"

Step 3: If your dog comes, have him sit and grab his collar/harness. Give praise and a treat, then immediately release him and allow him to go back to the distraction. If he doesn't come, immediately take him away from the distraction and repeat step one, but don't get as far away before calling.

Note: When practicing out in the yard/park, use a long 20-40ft training leash/rope. If your dog comes, reward and let him immediately return to whatever he was up to. If he doesn't come, reel him in and don't reward. Then keep him on a short leash for a minute or so before letting him back out to the end of the leash. As always, make listening to you rewarding for your dog, and never let ignoring you pay off.

Go to Bed/Place Part One: Go to bed, or Place, means for your dog to go stay on a predetermined rug or bed. It's useful when eating dinner or when the doorbell rings, etc.

Step 1: Put your rug/bed out on the floor, but don't let your dog step on it yet.

Step 2: Walk your dog away, then walk him back towards the rug.

Step 3: As soon as your dog steps on the rug, say your reward marker and give the treat. Repeat steps 2 and 3 several times.

Step 4: Once your dog starts wanting to go back to the rug on his own, start motioning toward the rug with your hand while saying: "go to bed" or "place", each time you head toward the rug.

Step 5: Start asking for a sit each time your dog gets on his rug, before treating.

Note: Sometimes it is helpful to toss a treat onto the rug to get your dog to step on it.

Heel Part Two: Now that you've taught your dog how to get in the heel position, it's time to teach her how to follow.

Step 1: Say: "heel" and guide your dog into position.

Step 2: Once in position, take one step with the foot on the side your dog is on, while encouraging her to follow the treat.

Step 3: Once she follows you for one step, have her sit in the heel position again and reward.

Step 4: Use the treat to keep your dog at your side and her focus on you, as you slowly increase the number of steps your dog follows you, before stopping and having her sit for the reward.

Step 5: Once your dog can consistently heel for at least 10-15 steps, introduce the pace changes of "quickly" and "slowly".

Note: Heel is about quality over quantity. Make sure your dog is glued to your side and is giving you 100% focus, before trying to add distance. You can dole out treats as you walk to maintain position and focus. As soon as your dog breaks position or focus, immediately say oops and withdraw the treats. Wait a bit before reengaging.

Homework: Continue to add distractions to your watch me and come. For now, practice go to bed and heel without any distractions. Once you can successfully heel for at least 15 steps, you can start practicing it here and there in a straight line while out on a walk. Don't try to heel as far outside, as you do in the house. Next week we'll learn the turns.

Also, practice stay without distractions or distance (the way you learned in Beginner class). Try to get up to at least 30 seconds. Next week we'll work on stay with distractions. Remember to bring your bed/rug back to class next week for go to bed/place part two.

Contact your trainer right away with any questions or concerns. Happy Training!

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Week 3: Before we get started on this week's lessons, let's warm up with some heeling. Remember to practice your pace changes.

Stay with Distractions: In Beginner class, we learned to stay for longer and longer duration, without distractions. Now it's time to start taking our stay to the next level.

Step 1: Have your dog sit, then say "stay" and give the hand sign.

Step 2: Try to walk around your dog in a close circle, without stepping away. You will likely need to start by taking just one on or two steps before rewarding (or even just shifting your weight). If your dog breaks the stay, say "oops", turn your back, then return to step 1.

Step 3: Once you can walk around your dog in a complete circle, grab a toy/ball.

Step 4: Have your dog stay, then slightly wiggle or squeak the toy/ball. If your dog stays, reward and go to step 5. If your dog breaks the stay, say "oops", turn your back and repeat step 4.

Step 5: Gradually increase the wiggling/squeaking until you can bounce the ball several times or throw the toy without your dog breaking the stay.

Note: Practice with your dog on a drag leash. If your dog breaks stay and runs after the toy/ball you throw, step on the leash to keep your dog from getting the toy and achieving a reward for breaking stay.

Heel Part Three: Since you've already taught your dog how to get in the heel position and follow you with pace changes, you're now ready to teach the last part… the turns.

Step 1: Say heel, then give the hand sign and put your dog in position.

Step 2: Begin heeling in a straight line, then say "quickly" and turn 90 degrees away from your dog, while holding your treat in a location that keeps your dog from cutting behind you (slightly in front and away from your body). Take one or two more steps before stopping and rewarding. Repeat until consistently successful.

Step 3: Begin heeling in a straight line, then say "slowly" and turn 90 degrees toward your dog while holding the treat in a location that gets your dog out of your way (slightly behind you). Take one or two more steps before stopping and rewarding. Repeat until consistently successful.

Step 4: Begin practicing combination turns during your heeling (right-left, left-right, right-left-right, etc).

Note: Remember that your dog must remain in the correct position and be looking at you the entire time when heeling. If not, say "oops" and start over. You can dole out treats as you walk to help maintain focus and position during longer, more complex heels.

Go to Bed/Place Part Two: Now that your dog knows that "go to bed/place" means to sit on their mat/bed, it's time to start sending them to it from a distance and teaching them to stay on it.

Step 1: Just like with part one, walk your dog toward the bed/mat and say "go to bed/place" while motioning toward the bed/mat.

Step 2: With each repetition, gradually increase the distance you send your dog to their bed/mat. When successful, walk over to your dog and reward, then release.
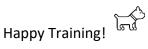
Step 3: When you can send your dog to their bed from across the room, practice sending them from different angles.

Step 4: Once you can send your dog to their bed/mat from across the room and from different angles, start to wait a moment before walking over to reward and release.

Step 5: Gradually increase how long you wait before walking over to reward and release.

Homework: Practice your stays in different areas of the house and yard, and when out on the walks. Practice heeling every time you cross the street, as well as randomly during the walks. Build up the duration your dog spends on their bed/mat before rewarding and releasing. Try to get to over 30 seconds by next week. Longer is better.

As always, contact your trainer right away if any questions or concerns arise.

Happy Training!

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Week 4: Let's start by practicing our loose leash walking and heeling techniques. Randomly switch between the two, but remember to release your dog each time from the heel, the way you would with a stay or go to bed/place.

Stay with Distance: Once you can get your dog to stay with all sorts of distractions going on while you're standing next to him, it's time to start working on the final piece of stay… Distance.

Step 1: Have your dog sit and say: "Stay", while flashing the hand sign.

Step 2: Pivot on one foot to turn your back to your dog.

Step 3: Immediately pivot back to treat and release your dog.

Step 4: Once successful, begin to take one step away from your dog after pivoting, before returning to treat and release.

Step 5: With each success, gradually increase the distance you walk away before returning to treat and release.

Note: While teaching stay, always return to your dog to treat and release. For stay, you want him to understand that he's getting rewarded for remaining still, **not** for jumping up and running to you.

Go to Bed/Place Part Three: Once you can send your dog to her bed/place from across the room, and get her to stay on it for a good amount of time, it's time to start making sure she will do it with distractions.

Step 1: Send your dog to her bed from about a foot away.

Step 2: When she's on her bed, introduce a distraction. If she stays, reward and release. If she breaks stay, say: "oops" while keeping her from reaching the distraction.

Step 3: Once successful with a low level of distraction, repeat with gradually higher levels of distraction.

Step 4: Once successful with high levels of distraction, gradually increase the distance you send your dog to her bed, before distracting. The goal is a large distractions at great distances.

Note: When increasing the challenge of one element of the exercise, it helps to lessen the difficulty of the other(s) (i.e. Duration, Distractions, and Distance)

Heel Step Four: After your dog is proficient at heeling with turns and pace changes, it's time to start working on doing it without food at his nose (fade the lure).

Step 1: Put your dog in the heel position, and start heeling in the normal way.

Step 2: When it's time to reward, give the treat with the other hand (the hand on the opposite side of your dog).

Step 3: After several repetitions, start holding your dog side hand at your hip (with a treat still in it)

Step 4: Once your dog is heeling nicely with your hand on your hip, begin to heel without a treat in your dog side hand.

Note: If at any time while heeling your dog takes his focus off of you, or breaks the heel position (even for a moment), immediately say: "oops" and restart.

Homework: Work on getting your dog to stay while you are out of sight. To be successful, put your dog in a stay, walk toward the door, then return to treat and release. Once your dog is warmed up, put him in a stay and and walk toward the door, the same as before. But this time, step out of his sight for a split second, before returning to treat and release. With each success, gradually increase the amount of time you are out of sight, before returning to treat and release.

Practice sending your dog to her bed/place from where you're likely to be when you eventually use the command. Remember, if you break the distance from where you are now to the final goal down to small enough steps, your dog will quickly succeed.

For now, focus more on getting your dog to look at you and stay in position during heel, than on walking further and fading the lure. Once you've aced the heel for short distances, then you can go for longer and start taking the treat off your dog's nose.

Keep up the good work, and contact your trainer with any questions or concerns,

Happy Training!