

talking to your dog

What we say to our dogs is important. How we say it is crucial. Different tones of voice are used to distinguish between commands, corrections, and praise. Commands are given in a firm, strong tone of voice. No chanting please. Corrections get a little lower, sharper and growlier. Praise is more exuberant and excited — pleasant, but not so exuberant as to incite him to wiggle out of control.

All commands should be preceded by the dog's name. How else will Rover know you're talking to him? But even before that, you're going to teach Rover to look at you. Trace a line with your index finger from Rover's eyes to yours. As soon as he makes eye contact, talk to him and encourage him to sustain the eye contact for a few seconds with a "Good watch!" in a pleasant, upbeat tone of voice. You can also get Rover's attention by taking a little tidbit of food after letting Rover sniff it, moving the food up to your eye level. When Rover looks up, praise him and give him the food treat. Now that you have his attention, he is ready to listen.

Your dog's mother did not repeat herself over and over again. Neither should you. Once the dog understands what the command means, it should only be said once, "Rover, sit!" If he continues to sniff the air, or otherwise ignore you, it's "NO, sit!" (an instructive reprimand) and then if you must, place the dog in the sit position.

When teaching a command for the first time, it is important to help the dog to be successful by luring him into the position. Dogs are not born with an innate understanding of words. They learn by associating words with actions.

Be consistent! You should only ask the dog to do one thing at a time. If you ask your dog to "Sit down," how is he to know which to do? "Sit" and "Down" are two different commands. Be specific with your commands. When you want him off the couch, don't interchange commands like "down" and "off." Make sure all family members are using the same commands; otherwise the confusion will delay training success.

Above all, keep it positive. You're communicating and building a relationship. You work for rewards (salary, bonuses, commissions), so will your dog!

dog vocabulary

WATCH ME or LOOK AT ME! Get your dog to focus on you and make eye contact. You can also simply use their name for this command.

PHEWY/ECH/NO/WRONG! Wrong choice, the dog blew it. Should be said in a low, firm tone of voice.

OUCH or IEEEE! Stop that mouthing, it hurts. When your dog bit down too hard on his littermates, they yelped at him and stopped playing.

GOOD DOG/WHAT A GOOD KID! Right choice. Should be said in an upbeat, happy tone of voice. You want the dog to know that what he did was wonderful and he should keep doing it.

SIT! The most basic of all commands. Can be practiced before eating, at street corners, in elevators, whenever you need to get active control of your dog.

DOWN! This means to lie down. Down is a very subordinate position so some bossy dogs may not readily comply. To be used when you want your dog to be comfortable or when you need control of a dog throwing a tantrum. Do not confuse this with "Off!"

STAND! Use this when you want the dog to go from a sit or down and stand with all four feet on the ground. This is very useful at the vet's office or at the curb on a rainy day.

STAY! This means do not move from whatever position you are in. You may ask your dog to "sit stay," "down stay," etc.

OKAY! Dog is released from whatever position you asked him to assume. He is done working until the next command is given.

LET'S GO! This is the command for controlled walking, what you do on a regular basis with your dog. The dog may go out to the end of his six-foot leash and sniff around and do his thing but he may not drag you down the street or trip you by crisscrossing in front of or behind you.

HEEL! This is a very precise position at your left side. The dog walks along beside you. If you stop, the dog stops. Heel is a good command to use on very crowded streets or when you want your dog very close, such as when there's broken glass in your path.

COME! When your dog hears this command, he should leave whatever he is doing and come to sit in front of you. Because this can be a lifesaving command, you should always give it in the most cheerful, inviting tones. Reserve a very special treat for teaching it and never use it to call your dog to you to do something he does not like.

OFF! Use this for jumping up on either people, furniture, or counter tops. Don't confuse this command with "down."

TAKE IT! Teach your dog to take food or toys using this command. The dog should wait until you give the "take it" command before putting the offered object in his mouth.

DROP IT or OUT or GIVE! This means that the dog should spit out whatever is in his mouth. It is important to teach this command using a reward system or you can create an overly possessive dog.

LEAVE IT! This tells your dog not to even think about picking up the object, to avert your eyes from the object, other dogs, rollerbladers, etc. Very useful on city streets.