



Training Plan: Teaching ‘Wait at the Door’

Why this cue is useful for your dog to know: This training plan will teach your dog not to bolt out of a door when it’s opened. It will help keep your dog safe and allow him to be more polite, and almost every dog can benefit from learning some self-control.

End behavior: The dog will not move through a door until the handler gives a release cue. The “wait” cue tells a dog not to move forward. The dog can change positions during a wait (e.g., going from a sit to a stand or a down into a sit) but should not move forward toward the door until you give a release cue. You can choose your own release cue. At Best Friends, our release cue is “free.” Other possibilities are “OK” and “go ahead.”

Step 1: At a door, with the dog on leash, say “wait.” Open the door briefly and only a small amount (just one or two inches, not wide enough for the dog to stick his nose in). If the dog immediately tries to move forward through the door, close it quickly. Be careful not to close the door on the dog’s nose. You’ll probably have to do this step a few times before the dog does not move forward when the door opens.

Step 2: When the door opens and the dog does not move forward for even a very brief time (less than a second), use your release word, open the door wider and let the dog through the door. When the dog is waiting for one second without moving forward through the open door at least four out of five times, proceed to Step 3.

Tips:

- If the dog continues to try to move through the door, reduce even more the width of the door opening and the time it is open.
- Every time you tell the dog “wait,” use your release word (e.g., “free,” “OK”) afterward to let the dog know when it’s OK to stop waiting and move through the door.
- It is not necessary for you to move through the door before your dog.
- “Wait” uses a functional reward. Instead of marking the behavior and then providing a treat to reinforce the behavior, the dog’s reward for waiting at the door is that he gets to go through it.

Step 3: Repeat Step 2, but open the door slightly wider. Repeat the exercise until you can open the door all the way and your dog won’t move until you give the release cue.

Tip: You can also use a crate to train a dog to wait. With the dog inside the crate, use the same technique described above: Open the crate door a small amount very briefly. If the dog immediately starts to move toward the door, close it quickly.

Proofing

Proofing means practicing a behavior in different situations, with various distractions. Start proofing once your dog has completed the training plan above (at a door or in a crate).

Duration: In small steps, increase the amount of time your dog will wait at the open door without moving through, until he can wait for 10 seconds.

Distraction: Start small. For example, hold up a toy, raise your arms or knock softly on a wall while practicing “wait at the door.” Then slowly increase the intensity of each distraction.

Location: Practice in different locations, at different types of doors.

Handler: Have other people practice “wait” with your dog.

Introduce only one of the above proofing parameters at a time, and reduce the width of the door opening and the time that it’s open. Then, in small steps, work back up to opening the door all the way while incorporating the distraction, longer duration, new location or new handler.

If you get stuck on any step, stop and take a break. When you try again, go back to the previous step in the plan. If necessary, create intermediate steps with intensity and duration that your dog is comfortable with. Don’t rush: Take it at the dog’s speed.