



# VSA List of Teaching Behaviors

## Introduction

Throughout VSA's Dog Trainer Course, students will learn how to teach and train the behaviors in this document. Many of the behaviors described here are also included in the VSA Basic Manners group class curriculum which will be provided to students upon graduation.

During the first Intensives, students will have opportunities to practice teaching these behaviors to dogs. During the second intensive, students will practice teaching these behaviors in simulated group training classes where the "clients" will be VSA classmates.

The instructions provided in this document are based on the following instructional format, which graduates will also use when introducing a new behavior to human clients:

1. **Introduce the behavior** – This is what you say about the behavior... what it is, why it's important.
2. **Demonstrate the behavior** – Follow the steps below to demonstrate the behavior with a dog (at the Intensive, you'll initially demonstrate with a stuffed dog).
3. **Practice the behavior** – This is when you circulate among the handler/dog teams in your class to help as they practice the behavior with their dog.
4. **Apply the behavior** – discuss next steps and applications for this behavior. Discuss adding a cue, and/or working to fluency. How can clients use this in their everyday lives right now and in the future?

## Introducing Cues to Behaviors

As students practice and demonstrate the behaviors, it is important to remember that once the dog is showing some understanding of the behavior is the point at which they can introduce a cue. When thinking about their training plans for each behavior, students should determine the type of cue that will be used, e.g., a verbal cue or a hand signal. The actual point at which the cue is added to a behavior will vary depending on the behavior, but as a general rule, once the dog is offering the behavior regularly, students can insert the cue right before the behavior happens.

With some behaviors, students will also want to teach a Release Cue, such as "Okay" or "Free," to indicate to the dog that he's free stop doing what you previously cued him to do and proceed (e.g., to move across a boundary, to get up from a mat, etc.).

## VSA's Philosophy on Teaching Behaviors

One important thing to remember is that there is no singular 'VSA Way' of teaching these behaviors. We will provide students with the information, tools, and live demonstration examples of some different ways of achieving the desired result.

VSA is not a 'clicker' school, or a 'lure' school, or a school where we teach students just to 'capture' a behavior. We teach our trainers to use all available and appropriate tools, methods and ideologies, provided they fall under the umbrella of Victoria's definition of 'positive training.'



## VSA Basic Manners Behaviors List

Behavior	Description
<b>Attention</b>	Getting your dog's attention is a foundation skill for all future training.
<b>Sit</b>	Teaching bottom on floor, and practicing these variations of sit help to develop fluency
<b>Touch</b>	Learning to touch a hand target is the foundation of a recall and many other behaviors.
<b>Down</b>	Teaching your dog to lie down on cue is a foundation for impulse control and relaxation.
<b>Recall</b>	Teaching your dog to come on cue can be a lifesaver in an emergency situation.
<b>Leave it</b>	Learning patience and impulse control is necessary in order to leave items alone.
<b>Wait</b>	Useful for teaching your dog impulse control in a variety of everyday situations.
<b>Leash Walking</b>	Teaching polite leash walking is an essential skill for impulse control and teamwork.
<b>Go to Mat</b>	Teaching your dog to relax on a mat encourages relaxation and impulse control, and provides a "home-base" during class and other situations.
<b>Stay</b>	Different from 'wait', stay helps provide clarity to this idle behavior.
<b>Drop</b>	Useful for teaching dropping items through play and for preventing resource guarding.
<b>Stand</b>	Teaching your dog to stand both on cue and as a default behavior is valuable in a variety of situations especially for husbandry and greetings.

# Behaviors and Exercises

## Attention

**Introduce the behavior:** This exercise uses capturing to reinforce your dog's attention and to encourage cued or automatic check-ins. Being able to get your dog's attention is useful in virtually every situation with your dog, whether it's at home, on a walk, at class, or at some other location.

**Demonstrate the behavior:**

- Observe the dog, and the instant the dog orients toward you, mark and treat.
- Verbally praise the dog and take your attention off the dog (giving them permission to visually explore the environment). Repeat.
- Ideally, the dog should be making eye contact with you. If not, lure or shape this behavior.
- When the dog is ready to add the cue (performing the behavior ~90% of the time) say the dog's name or the attention cue. As soon as the dog orients toward you, mark and treat.
- Continue to practice until the dog is reliably responding to the cue.
- If certain aspects of fluency are desired, continue practicing in a variety of situations until each aspect is achieved individually before putting them together.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:** Attention can be applied and used for many things

- Getting attention for another cue
- Getting attention from a stimulus
- Adding distractions, distance, and duration
  - Ex: Attention on owner instead of triggering stimuli at park
  - Ex: Attention at home to direct dog into another room

## Sit

**Introduce the behavior:** Sit is a behavior that most dog owners wish for, and it's a nice impulse control exercise. It's a behavior that you can capture or you can jump start it with a lure.

**Demonstrate the behavior:**

Sit - From a Stand

- To capture: Wait for the dog to sit, then mark and treat.
- To lure: Hold a treat in front of the dog's nose and slowly move it up and back over his head. The moment the dog's rear end touches the ground, mark and treat.
- When the dog is starting to reliably sit, introduce a cue.

Sit – From a Down

- With the dog in a down position, place the lure above the dog's head to encourage them to sit as they reach for the treat. When the dog sits, mark and treat.
- If the dog doesn't move into the sit position, note whether the dog is in a relaxed down (rolled over onto their hip). If yes, try luring the dog into a straighter down, and then repeat the first step above.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:** Sit can be applied and used for many things

- Inhibition control exercise/building skills
- Teaching a release cue
- Alternative behavior to jumping, lying down, standing, chewing, chasing, etc.
- Adding distractions, distance, and duration
  - Ex: Teaching sit with duration to prevent counter surfing
  - Ex: Teaching sit with distractions to prevent roaming on a restaurant patio
  - Ex: Teaching sit with distance for the purpose of independence training

## Touch

**Introduce the behavior:** Teaching your dog to touch your hand with his nose has a variety of uses. It's an easy way to move your dog into a different position, it can help an exuberant dog stay focused on you, and can also help a timid dog gain confidence. It's also a wonderful foundation behavior to begin teaching other more advanced behaviors.

### **Demonstrate the behavior:**

- Place your hand within one inch of the dog's nose. As soon as the dog moves his nose toward your hand, mark and treat.
- Present your hand again. The instant your dog's nose touches your hand, mark and treat. Repeat.
- If the dog does not touch your hand, try offering it again, but slightly closer to the dog's nose.
- If the dog tries to paw at your hand rather than touch with his nose, try offering your fist versus your flat hand.
- Next, begin to offer your hand a few inches from the dog's nose so that he has to move a short distance to touch it.
- Continue to practice until the dog will move a short distance in order to touch your hand.
- If the dog stands still or sits, try tossing a treat behind him, then as soon as he turns back toward you offer your hand.
- Alternate hands, practicing with both your right and left hands.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:** Touch can be applied and used for many things

- Building confidence/trust in humans, teaching operant conditioning
- Moving a dog about a space, and/or recall
- Redirecting a dog's attention
- Targeting other objects
  - Ex: Calling a dog in from the yard, or moving a dog into another space (car, room, crate, etc.)
  - Ex: Teaching a dog to touch other object for assistance work
  - Ex: Redirecting your dog's attention from a stimulus (i.e. barking dog)

## Down

**Introduce the behavior:** Teaching your dog to lie down on cue is a foundation for teaching impulse control and relaxation. You can capture the behavior or jump start it with a lure. You can also teach down both from a sitting position and from a standing position, and we'll work on both techniques.

### **Demonstrate the behavior:**

Down – From a Sit

- To lure: Hold a treat in front of the dog's nose, move it slowly down, from his nose to his paws and then very slightly forward along the ground.
- When the dog lies down (when elbows touch the ground), mark and treat.

#### Down – From a Stand

- To capture: Wait for the dog to lie down, then mark and treat.
- To lure: There are two options for luring the dog to “fold back into a down.”
  - Move the treat back between the dog's front legs. The dog will likely lower his head and attempt to nibble the treat and fold back into the down position.
  - If the dog doesn't lie down, try luring using a slightly different angle. If the dog still will not lie down, try Option 2.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:** Down can be applied and used for many things

- Foundation for mat work
- Alternative behavior to begging, jumping, climbing on humans, moving around car, etc.
- Relaxation protocols & distance/independence work
  - Ex: Teaching down with duration to prevent begging
  - Ex: Teaching down with distractions on restaurant patios
  - Ex: Teaching down with distance for independence work

## Recall

**Introduce the behavior:** Having a reliable recall is the dream of all dog owners, and when we break it down and keep practice sessions fun, dogs develop a deep history of reinforcement with the behavior.

**Demonstrate the behavior:**

- Say “Here,” and treat. Repeat at least 10 times (you're helping the dog learn through association that the word “here” has value).
- Next, cue “here” and look for any small movements from the dog (an ear flick, a head turn, a head lift), mark and treat.
- Continue to practice, alternating positions from which you cue in order to slowly build distance.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:** Recall can be applied and used for many things

- Getting the dog closer when off leash (yard, house, hiking, etc.)
- Getting the dog closer when on leash
- Emergency recall
- Adding distance, distraction, or duration
  - Ex: Calling the dog from a distraction when on leash (from 6 feet to 1 foot)
  - Ex: Calling the dog to leave the park (and attaching the leash)
  - Ex: Calling the dog to come into the house from the yard
  - Ex: Calling the dog to come closer on hikes

## Leave it

**Introduce the behavior:** This is a great exercise to teach impulse control; the art of giving up what you want in order to get it! Your dog will learn that patience is very reinforcing. This exercise teaches your dog to ignore or leave alone things you do not wish them to have.

### **Demonstrate the behavior:**

#### Option #1

- Select an item that the dog will likely find uninteresting, show it to the dog.
- Place the item on a chair or bench, and cover it with your hand. If the dog ignores the item, mark and treat.
- Next try placing the item on the chair without covering it with your hand. If the dog ignores the item, mark and treat. If not, go back to the previous step and practice.
- When the dog is successfully ignoring the uncovered item, place it on the ground and repeat the earlier steps.
- Once the dog understands the concept, begin cueing “Not Yours” as you place the object.
- Finally, repeat all of the steps with low-value food. When you mark and treat, feed a higher-value treat from your bait bag, not the food you’ve just cued the dog to ignore.

#### Option #2

##### Step 1: Capture the initial back-off from food

- Start with a treat in your hand and let the dog sniff it. Then make a fist around the treat. The dog will likely sniff, paw, and/or mouth at the treat.
- Wait until the dog stops trying to get the treat (e.g., looking away, taking a step back) then mark and treat.
- Repeat a few times, marking and treating when the dog is not trying to get the treat.
- Continue to practice until the dog will ignore the treat in your closed hand.

##### Step 2: Build duration

- Once the dog is reliably backing off from the offered food, begin to build duration (the length of time the dog will ignore the food).
- Offer the food as you did in Step 1, but wait a second or two longer before marking and treating.
- Continue to practice, building duration in small increments of time to avoid frustrating the dog.

##### Step 3: Capture eye contact/check in

- Once the dog can ignore food for a short duration, raise the food hand out to your side.
- The dog will likely look at your hand first. Observe and be ready to mark the moment the dog looks at your eyes instead of your hand, and deliver a treat.
- Practice with food in the opposite hand, then try it with food in both hands.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

### **Apply the behavior:**

- Removing attention from a stimulus (eye contact/nose removal)
- Moving away from a stimulus
- Directing attention to the handler from a stimulus (eye contact)

## Wait

**Introduce the behavior:** Teaching your dog to wait – to simply pause in place – is useful in a variety of circumstances, including waiting at door thresholds, waiting as you deliver food, waiting to get out of the car, the bathtub, etc. We'll work on two versions of wait; food bowl and doorways.

### **Demonstrate the behavior:**

Wait – Food Bowl Politeness

Note: You can provide students with disposable bowls, use bowls you have on hand, or have students bring a bowl from home.

- Put a few treats into the bowl and stand still. Watch for the dog to either sit or offer some other still body position, then lower the bowl toward the ground.
- If the dog waits politely, say your release cue and let him eat the treats from the bowl.
- If the dog gets up before you can lower the bowl to the ground, stand back up, and raise the bowl back to the starting position.
- If the dog can't initially wait patiently until the bowl is all the way to the ground, you can help him to be successful by saying your release cue when the bowl is close to the ground. Continue to practice until the dog can wait politely until the bowl is placed on the ground.

Wait - Doorway Politeness

Note: Clients should always use a leash for safety while teaching this behavior.

- Cue the dog to sit, stand, or lie down near the door, and when the dog is still, mark and treat.
- Reach for the doorknob, if the dog remains still, treat. If he gets up, wait for him to be still and try again. Continue to practice until the dog can remain still while you reach for and touch the doorknob.
- Next, open the door a crack, if the dog remains still, mark and treat. If he gets up, close the door. Practice a few more times until the dog remains still while you open the door a crack.
- Now begin to open the door a little wider. When the dog remains still, say your release cue and let the dog go out the door.
- Continue to practice, alternating between sometimes releasing the dog to go through door, other times closing the door without releasing the dog (but still treating).

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

### **Apply the behavior:**

- Inhibition control exercise/building skills
- Wait for stimuli (cars, doors, food, etc.)
- Wait for human movement (kitchen, leash closet, toy bin)
  - Ex: Asking for a wait when exiting the car while handler secures leash
  - Ex: Asking to wait when filling bowl
  - Ex: Asking to wait when organizing toys for play (fetch, tug, etc.)

## Polite Leash Walking

**Introduce the behavior:** Polite leash walking is a goal of every dog owner everywhere! Being able to walk with a loose leash, but still letting the dog enjoy the walk, is the aim of this exercise. We're going to start with Box Step, which is the precursor for teaching Polite Walking. It's designed to help teach your dog to stay near you (without pulling) and move with your every step while maintaining a loose leash,

which means the leash clasp is hanging down and there is a “J” shape in the leash running from your hands to the dog’s leash clasp. Then we’ll move on to forward walking.

Note: Deliver treats at your pant seam throughout this exercise as this is the preferred position for your dog.

### **Demonstrate the behavior:**

- Stand with your elbows close to your torso, hands in a neutral position, with the dog on your left side (or right, if you prefer) and the leash loose, mark and treat several times.
- Take one step forward, and as the dog moves with you, mark and treat.
- Repeat, taking one step forward and as the dog moves with you, mark and treat.
- Continue to practice, marking and treating the dog (at a high rate of reinforcement) for each successive step you take while the leash remains loose. Speak to the dog in a happy, encouraging tone of voice. The leash is just for safety, so do not tug, drag, or pull your dog on the leash.
- If the dog lunges and pulls on the leash, stop, and stand still while keeping gentle pressure on the leash. Do not attempt to pull the dog back to you. The moment the dog stops and looks back toward you, mark and treat, and continue.
- As the dog makes progress and is eagerly walking at or near your side, you can begin to mark and treat every few steps.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

### **Apply the behavior:**

- Practice indoors first (limited distractions), move to the yard/driveway
- In the meantime, use management outdoors (no-pull harness)
- Add distance, distraction, and duration carefully
- Think of other cues that will help on walks (‘go sniff’, ‘ready?’, ‘let’s go’, ‘u-turn!’)
  - Ex: Teaching loose leash walking in a quiet neighborhood
  - Ex: Teaching a more focused walk on city blocks
  - Ex: Teaching a change of direction cue to avoid running into each other

## **Go to Mat**

**Introduce the behavior:** Settle teaches your dog to go to a specific place, a mat, and relax, which is a valuable behavior with many uses. Through the training process dogs develop a positive association with their mat, as well as impulse control. Once this happens, you can ask your dog to relax on the mat at class, at home (during dinner or when you have company), or anywhere you go with your dog.

### **Demonstrate the behavior:**

Luring ‘Go to Mat’

- Lure the dog onto the mat, when his feet are on the mat, mark and treat. Toss a treat away from the mat to reset the dog for another try. Repeat a few times.
- Introduce a cue, such as “place” or “go to bed.” Say the cue just as the dog is steps on the mat.
- Next, lure the dog onto the mat and cue “down,” mark and treat if the dog lies down.
- Continue to practice until the dog is starting to go the mat and lie down.

Shaping ‘Go to Mat’

- Place a mat on the floor and wait for the dog to orient to the mat, mark and treat. Toss a treat away from the mat to reset the dog for another try. Repeat a few times.



- Increase criteria to walking closer and closer to the mat, eventually sniffing the mat, walking on the mat, standing on the mat, sitting on the mat, and ultimately lying down on the mat.
- Continue to practice until the dog is walking over to and lying down on the mat.
- Add a cue when ready and work to fluency.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:**

- Settling, relaxation protocols, vet handling procedures
- Alternative behavior to begging, following underfoot, counter surfing, jumping, chasing, etc.
- Independence training, distance work, station/platform training
  - Ex: Teaching go to mat to help calm dogs with reactivity issues
  - Ex: Teaching go to mat as an alternative behavior to sniffing the open oven or grill
  - Ex: Teaching go to mat to focus on a behavior we do want when sitting at a coffee shop

## Stay

**Introduce the behavior:** Different from ‘wait’, stay helps provide clarity to this idle behavior. Teaching your dog to stay put until released can be a helpful emergency behavior as well as a useful behavior around the house/neighborhood.

**Demonstrate the behavior:**

- Observe the dog, choose a position (stand, sit, or down), mark and reward for this position.
- Increase criteria of duration for this specific behavior, mark and reward.
- Once you’ve achieved some duration, shape your movement away from and then back to the dog. (Remember, you always want to come back and release the dog from the stay).
- Continue to practice until the dog is reliably staying, or maintaining his position, until release.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:**

- Inhibition control exercise/building skills
- Teaching a release cue
- Alternative behavior to jumping, chewing, chasing, etc.
- Adding distractions, distance, and duration
  - Ex: Teaching stay with duration to prevent counter surfing
  - Ex: Teaching stay with distractions to promote appropriate play
  - Ex: Teaching stay with distance for the purpose of independence training

## Drop

**Introduce the behavior:** Resource guarding (protecting things of value) is a very normal, natural behavior in dogs. This exercise teaches your dog that giving up a valued item is reinforcing. Drop is a useful behavior both for play (bring me the toy, drop it, and I’ll throw it again), and in the event your dog has an item he shouldn’t have.

Note: Some dogs will not be focused enough to play in a class setting, but you can still introduce this exercise in class and then encourage practice at home.

**Demonstrate the behavior:**

- Start with two matching toys (e.g., tug or squeaky toys). Engage the dog in one of the toys.
- When the dog is holding the toy, cue “Trade Ya,” and excitedly entice the dog to play with the second toy.
- The instant the dog releases the first toy to play with the second toy, mark and continue play with the new toy.
- Repeat a few times until you see the dog willingly dropping one toy to play with another.

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:**

- Dropping dangerous items
- Dropping items you do not want your dog to possess
- Dropping items during play for fun and for safety
  - Ex: Dropping one of the kid’s toys
  - Ex: Dropping a sock
  - Ex: Dropping another dog’s toy

## Stand

**Introduce the behavior:** Being able to ask your dog to “stand” in response to a cue is useful for clipping on a leash or harness, wiping muddy paws, even for veterinary exams and grooming. Stand is a great default behavior. A default behavior is a behavior that your dog offers automatically – by default – because the behavior has been heavily reinforced. Default behaviors are beneficial in that if your dog doesn’t know what “to do” in a situation, he can decide to offer a default behavior without you giving him instructions. Note: you’ll capture this behavior when your dog offers it spontaneously – the default stand is not a cued behavior.

**Demonstrate the behavior:**

- To capture: Observe the dog, capture the moment he stands with a mark and treat.
- To lure: from a sit or a down, place a treat in front of the dog’s nose and lure up and away until the dog stands, mark and treat.
- Feed so that the dog’s head is parallel with the ground. If you feed too high the dog will likely sit, if you feed too low the dog will likely lie down.
- At first, mark and treat any brief stands. Then begin to mark and treat for a few seconds of “stillness” in the standing position.
- Continue to practice, slowly building the duration (length of time the dog stands still).

**Practice the behavior:** help the client practice the behavior with their dog

**Apply the behavior:**

- Inhibition control exercise/building skills
- Alternative behavior to jumping, other positions, chasing, etc.
- For quick cleaning, grooming, husbandry, and veterinary visit
  - Ex: Teaching stand for canine conditioning
  - Ex: Teaching stand as an alternative to jumping for greeting
  - Ex: Teaching stand for a veterinary exam