

Training Tip Tuesday: Food Bowl Manners

Many people make their dogs sit before they put their food down. More often than not it is some sort of sit-stay exercise. This is a mistake – and here's why.

First off - You shouldn't have to *make* your dog do anything! If you are forcing a behavior; something is wrong. Focus on education.

If your dog is waiting for a command to follow –what happens in the absence of that command? Are they free to jump around, and knock the food to the floor? You didn't tell them to sit – so are they still wrong?

What if you tell your dog to sit-stay, you successfully put the food on the ground, then you step away and your dog gets up to take his food. He was polite about the food – but he technically broke his stay. You never released him.

Both of these situations can cause problems down the road. It is much better to help your dog understand your expectations; and to allow you to place their food on the ground because they have developed a real sense of impulse control and respect for you!

So – that being said – this is NOT a stay exercise. Or a Sit exercise. You are not going to be cuing your dog at all. Your job is to simply control access. It's up to your dog to offer behaviors. If your dog doesn't already know sit – start there. Teach sit as a separate exercise.

Next – start with an empty food bowl. If your dog is totally nuts around his bowl – start with something else.. a Tupperware, a pot – anything he doesn't already have association with. Stand with your dog and wait! The moment he offers a sit – reward him. Let him know that's exactly what you want!

The next step is to put the bowl on the ground. Here's the trick. The dog controls what happens. As you start to put the bowl down; if the dog gets up – pick the bowl back up. If the dog stays sitting, the bowl goes to the ground. Butt on the ground = bowl on the ground. Butt comes up = bowl comes up.

As soon as you get the bowl on the ground – release him to it. The first few times we are just introducing the concept; we will build duration later.

Once you can easily put the bowl on the ground; repeat the exercise with food in the bowl. Once that is going well, start building a little duration. You should be able to put the bowl down, stand up, take a breath – then release the dog. Regardless of what step you are working on – the concept is the same. . Butt on the ground = bowl on the ground. Butt comes up = bowl comes up.

Tips for Success:

- *Start with an empty bowl, then move to low value rewards in the bowl and build up.
- *Work on this after a meal – when your dog isn't hungry!
- *Work on this when you have plenty of time and patience!
- *Practice using sit to mean please in other contexts... anytime the dog wants something – whether it's a pat on the head, a treat, some play time, a snuggle in the couch – wait for a sit

first!

*If your dog has physical issues that make sitting difficult – you can substitute another behavior; like taking a step back. Teach it first, then use it to mean please as listed above. 😊:)

*You can do this with dogs of any age and any background (although, if you are following my puppy advice – you won't be using a bowl! 😊:)) Don't be afraid to break it into as many baby steps as you need to to accommodate the dog in front of you.

*Don't be a bully! Don't ask your dog to sit and wait for unreasonable amounts of time. Its not fair to tease them.

Remember: Don't ask for a sit. Don't ask for a stay. Don't hold your dog back with a leash, or restrain movement. Let your dog make a choice; right or wrong. Its great for your relationship and wonderful for their psyche! Work through this together and make sure you reward the right efforts!

<https://youtu.be/IHiV4gz8MHY>