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The Learn to Earn Program: Implementing the Program

13 | Posted 2/15/12

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By Dr. Sophia Yin

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In the last blog, I presented an overview and the reasons behind my version of the *Learn to Earn Program*. In this blog I will cover the basic steps.

#1 First Teach Your Dog to Automatically Say Please By Sitting for Treats

(Read *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*, section 5.2 and watch [Training Dogs to Sit: Say Please by Sitting](#) and [Training Dogs to Sit: Say Please by Sitting Part 2](#)).

Just hold a treat when you have a hungry dog (on leash) and quietly wait for her to sit. Once she sits, immediately give her a treat (kibble or treats) followed by a few more sequentially for remaining seated. Then take a few steps backwards, far enough so she has to get up and follow, and repeat the exercise. Repeat the exercise 5-10 times and stop while she still wants to play more.

Randomly play this repeat sit game during the day. The goal is that she thinks sitting is fun and trotting after you and sitting fast becomes a game. Even try to get 10 repeat sits in a minute. When she can do this easily, start rewarding her on a variable ratio where she may get rewarded every 1-3 times she performs the behavior correctly. For ways to make sit even more fun and compelling, read section 5.2.2 in *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*.

#2 During the Day Keep Her Tethered to You When You're At Home (or to furniture close by when you're at home) and Reward Her For Saying Please Until the Behavior Becomes a Habit

For many dogs, once they know the sit-for-treats exercise well, which usually takes just 5-15 minutes, they are ready to be tethered to you when you are at home in situations where they would have access to interacting with you. Tethering allows you to reward Fido with treats (kibble) for sitting

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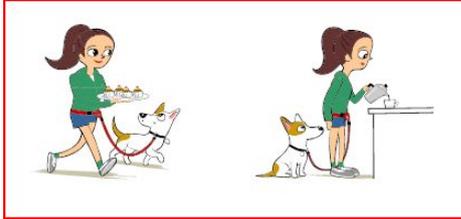
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repeatedly so that she learns sitting and focusing on you is fun. If she tries to nudge, paw or jump on you to get the treats, stand still like a tree and ignore her until she sits. For instance, if you're working at your desk and she puts her paw on your lap, immediately stand up so it's clear that doesn't work. Then, when she sits and looks at you, give her a series of treats. Or if you walk to the kitchen and clean the counters and she sits, reward her with a series of treats. As she improves, use fewer treats and space them further apart.

When your dog's attached to you on leash, she should sit and remain seated when you are stationary and then walk by your side on a loose leash (not ahead of you) when you move from place to place. Choose the same walking side you use when you take her on walks.



If your dog tends to dash ahead, remember to always stop in your tracks immediately as her front feet get ahead of yours, even before she has a chance to get to the end of the leash. That way by the time she does get ahead, it will be clear to her that you have become firmly planted like a pole and are going nowhere until she comes back and sits in front of you.

Your dog's response after a couple of days to a week will provide clues as to how consistent you've been. If when she hits the end of the leash she comes back to sit and look at you, you've done a great job. If, when she hits the end, her first reaction is to pull harder, you know you've accidentally trained her that pulling gets her where she wants to go. NOTE: Many owners will need to practice the leave-it version 2 below as well as one or two heeling games (such as repeat sits on the left side and rewarding walking at attention) before their dogs are ready to be tethered to their owners while the owners are walking around the house.

NOTE: When the dog is tethered to furniture near the owner, the dog can have a toy for entertainment.

#3 Apply the Say Please by Sitting Exercise to the Game of Leave-it Version 1

(For a more complete version of this exercise read *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days* section 5.4) and watch [Dog Training Demo: Leave It](#)).

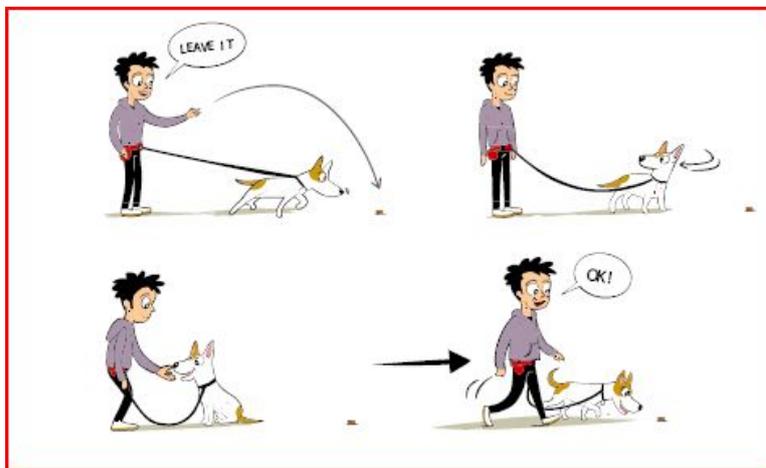
This exercise teaches the dog to 1) look to you for guidance in new situations, 2) that she can't get what she wants unless she asks you for permission anyway, 3) that blocking means she can't get by, and 4) that a release word such as "ok" means she can have what she wanted.



Toss a treat on the ground and then block her from getting it. If she tries to make a dash, quickly sidestep (like a basketball player on defense) to make your block. Avoid grasping her leash with your hands (in basketball you're not allowed to grab!). Each time she makes a move, thwart her by positioning yourself in her path fast enough so that she knows you mean business. Because you're not confusing her with distracting chatter (e.g. **you are completely silent**), she'll figure out that she can't get to what she wants and then sit and look at you. Immediately give her a treat while she's still sitting and then give a few more for remaining seated. When she's stably looking at you instead of the treat on the floor, move aside so she has a clear path to the treat but be ready to block her again if she starts to get up. Give her a series of treats for looking at you and when she's stably looking at you then release her with an "ok" and point to the treat to indicate she can get up and get it. Repeat this exercise until she immediately sits and remains focused on you until you give the release (generally at least 5-20 practice trials). At that point you can add a cue word "leave-it" right before you drop treats so that she learns leave-it means sit patiently and look to me for permission and you might get the opportunity to have it.. You can also start practicing in more realistic settings, such as by randomly dropping food in the kitchen or a toy in the living room, telling her to "leave-it" and then blocking her if needed so she doesn't get it.

#4 Then add the Leave-it Game Version 2

In this version you toss the treat out of leash range and then stand completely still. When Fido pulls to the end of the leash and you fail to budge, she'll soon figure out pulling gets her nowhere. Since she's been rewarded so much for sitting and looking at you, she'll turn back and sit in front of you. Give her a sequence of treats and then when she has a stable "watch" then say the release word and point to the treat. Make sure she can get to the treat on a loose leash or you will have negated what you just did. Note that this exercise helps teach Fido that when she gets to the end of her leash she should turn and then sit and look at you.



#5 Now Require That Your Dog Sit Politely for Everything She Wants.

For more detailed instruction read section 5.3 in *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*, watch [Sit for Petting: StellaH Learns Self Control](#)

Say please by sitting automatically to be petted: This is the most difficult exercise for people because humans tend to pet their pets without thinking. So it's an exercise for humans to be aware of when they are unconsciously rewarding the wrong behaviors. This exercise is especially important for dogs that jump on people for attention or that are highly motivated for petting and attention and anxious when they don't get it when they want it (such as with separation anxiety). In this exercise only pet your dog when she's sitting. Pet in short 5 seconds bouts so that you can reward her for remaining sitting. Remove your hands and even stand up straight and look away if the dog even starts to get up. For wiggly dogs you can start by giving treats while simultaneously petting so the dog will hold still, and stop the petting and treat giving at the same time. Then work towards petting followed immediately by giving treats before the dog starts to wiggle. Then pet while the dog's getting treats but space the treats out in time. Then stop giving treats altogether and just reward with the petting. For dogs that are really wiggly, hyperactive, or anxious, require that they lie down instead of sitting to be petted.



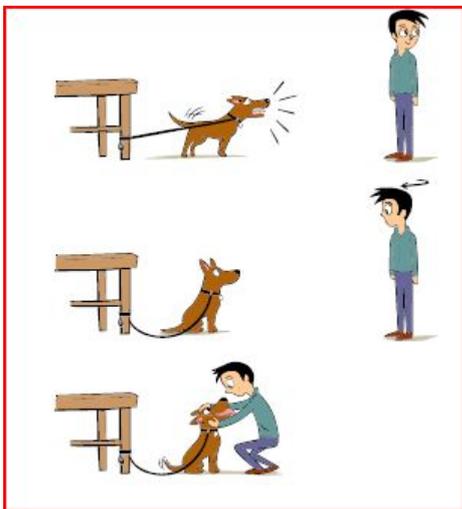
Say please by sitting automatically to get the leash on or have taken off: Wait for your dog to sit politely before you go to put the leash on. If needed, you can give treats while putting the leash on. If treats are needed, practice putting the leash on at least 5-10x in a day. That way, by day two or three, treats will no longer be required.

Say please by sitting automatically to go through door: The leave-it technique applies to waiting to go through doorways. Instead of letting Fido rush past you, first wait until he sits to open the door. Then when you open the door, block him, as you learned in the leave-it exercise from coming out. Only let him through the door when he's sitting stably and focused on you.

Say please by sitting automatically to get out of the car: If your dog loves riding in the car, and in particular getting out, then have her sit patiently before you let her out of the car. Again use the blocking exercise to train this. Ultimately the goal is she automatically sits and waits for your release word and doesn't need any treats.

Before you toss a toy: When Fido wants to play fetch, wait until he sits to toss the toy to him. If he has huge arousal issues around toys, then actually teach him to sit or lie down and remain seated even after you toss the toy. This exercise is particularly important for dogs that get more aroused and unruly during or after playing fetch and with those who are possessive over their toys.

Say please by sitting in order to get you to approach: For dogs that are overly dependent and who whine or bark when you are out of their reach because they want your attention, tether them to furniture and walk away. Then go up and pet them only if they will sit when you are just outside of their petting range. When they understand this association, then graduate to expecting them to sit if they want you to approach. That is, we want them to learn that whining, barking, and howling do not work to get your attention; rather, sitting or lying down and controlling their emotions is what gets you to approach and pet them.



These are the standard times when dogs should say please by sitting but also tailor the "please" to your needs. Some dogs may need to understand in additional situations (such as coming out of their crate) that they only get what they want when they are calm and collected. Overall these exercises will help your dog be calmer, more focused and exhibit better self control. As a result he'll be able to be more attentive to your signals and directions.

Conclusion: That's the basic overview of the program. For exercises in detail read *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days: How to Start Your Puppy Off Right*. This book is appropriate for puppies as well as adult dogs and their owners. This plan as detailed above will provide you with a dog who's focused on you inside which will you can then use to build on his focus with you outside and in more distracting situations.

To download the free poster on The Learn to Earn Program, go [here](#).

Stay tuned for the next blog where I answer some common questions about the *Learn to Earn Program*.

Tags: *dog, dogs, impulse control, leadership, learn to earn program, the learn to earn program*

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Posted by Melanie on 02/17 at 12:27 PM

Dr. Yin--

Thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm going to try this with my horse, Tex. You are wonderful for sharing.

Sincerely, Melanie.

Posted by Sue Yanoff on 02/19 at 02:37 PM

Dr. Yin

I have read your book, *The Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*, (several times) and am applying the techniques to my beagle puppy. We started when I got her last week at 8 weeks of age. She is doing great but I have a few questions.

1. When she is tethered to me, and I want to walk to another room, she sometimes does not want to come with me. I encourage her, then reward her when she gets to me. I do not want to pull her, but sometimes she does not want to come. Is there a better way to move around with the pup tethered to me?

2. She is getting very good at sitting in her bed in the kitchen or near my desk when I am working. Sometimes she gets out of the bed (still tethered, so she cannot go far). Is it O.K. to allow her to get in and out when she wants, or should I train her to stay in the bed and not get out?

3. If my other dog or one of the cats come near us when the pup is tethered to me, she runs to greet them. What should I do when she gets to the end of the leash and pulls?

Thank you for sharing your time and expertise with us.

Sue

Posted by Amy Clark on 02/21 at 09:51 AM

I am so happy to see your questions because I have the same one about our puppy being tethered to me. I sometimes feel like I have to drag him or I'll never get to the other room. Sometimes he even lays down and then I'm just standing there. I'll be interested to see other responses!

Posted by Sue Yanoff on 02/21 at 05:23 PM

Amy

I can usually get my puppy to follow me by coaxing her and then rewarding her with a treat when she gets to me. I love Dr. Yin's system, but I am running into little things that are not addressed in her book. In most cases I can figure out what to do, but it would be nice to hear Dr. Yin's expert opinion.

What kind of puppy do you have?

Sue

Posted by Amy Clark on 02/21 at 09:00 PM

Hi Sue,

We have a black Cockapoo. He is the cutest thing! Once we get through some basic training, I can tell he's going to be a great family pet. Good luck with your training!

Posted by Sophia Yin on 02/22 at 07:15 PM

Hi Sue:

What to do when puppy doesn't want to follow is shown in the later chapter of Perfect Puppy when I work the Lucy is outside. In that case it's about having the leash loose (because some puppies can be afraid of the leash and pressure at first) and then showing a yummy treat so she comes to you. You may need to get to her level with the treat or you may need to face the other way and get low (with treat low) and pretend that you are running forward (with babysteps). Once puppy can do this consistently and follow you on loose leash (or even dragging the leash at first), then you can later get them used to leash pressure since they will have to learn to stay calm/ avoid panicking or getting scared. If they balk, keep light pressure without changing leash length and give them a couple of seconds to figure out that nothing bad's happening. Simultaneously show treat and coax them forward. You should only have to do that two times for them to learn they need not panic at the end of a leash. Of course, perhaps a better way is to work on the leave-it exercise where you are stationary and you toss food to the end of the leash. e.g. that's another way they can learn to avoid panicking when they get to the end of the leash.

Posted by Sophia Yin on 02/22 at 07:19 PM

Sue:

Yes she can get out of her bed when she's tethered to you. She just can't go past her tether. When she goes after the cat, try to redirect her attention back to you and reward her for sitting. If needed, practice the repeat sit exercises and suddenly settle exercises in the same room as the cat so that she learns that behaviors focused on you are more fun.

Sophia

Posted by Sue Yanoff on 02/23 at 01:09 PM

Thank you. We will work on that.

Sue

Posted by natasha on 02/28 at 07:04 AM

Hi Dr. Yin:

just reading your book now and was wondering, how do I not stoop but not crouch down with my very small Yorkie puppie, when trying the Learn to earn.... and is the tethered part good for all dogs? my Yorkie is tiny 1 1/2 pound 14 week old will it work for him ?

thanks

love all the photos in your book!!

Posted by Ingrid on 03/08 at 11:17 PM

Hi Dr. Yin, I received your book from the breeder of my Wheaten Terrier puppy and have been enjoying it, although I'm not as consistent as I know I need to be. My question is this- I am planning on showing my dog(which I've never done before) and he needs to stand very well and particularly not sit while in the show ring. How do I implement your program with that in mind? He is quite good at sitting, but not so good at standing. Thank you!

Posted by Sophia Yin on 03/08 at 11:30 PM

The ring is a very different environment/context and it should be easy for him to learn to sit in one (most context) but to stand in this one context--based just on the type of situation or also based on how you hold his leash (it's held differently in show).

I'd specifically work on a stand cue (so that you can practice anywhere--not just at a show:-) and reward with many treats in a row for standing (just the way you did for sitting once they were seated). If you pair this cue with how you hold the leash then you will be able to get rid of the verbal/visual cue.

Posted by Ingrid on 03/09 at 07:18 AM

Thank you for responding, I had been hesitant to really enforce sit with everything, but I'll give it renewed attention. Thanks!

Posted by Rachel on 03/12 at 08:57 PM

Hi,

I have been reading your blog and watching your videos. Your methods seem great to me and I am eager to try some out. I have a bit of a dog situation which is causing me a huge amount of stress and I am nervous that even if I teach this dog everything I possibly can, it still might be aggressive some day, are all puppies/dogs "trainable"?

Hi... My husband, I & our 3 1/2 year old daughter just rescued this dog about 4 days ago. I am starting to notice some issues and I am worried. My husband and I are very much into training this dog. She came to us scared of everything and was over crated, most of her life. We have no idea what she went through except that she came from a not so good area of NJ and was given to a high kill shelter in Ewing, NJ. A few days later she was saved by another shelter in Princeton, NJ because they thought she had a good chance to be adopted. All the other dogs at the Ewing shelter seem to be mostly Pit Bulls.

We brought her home not knowing if she was house trained. She is easily trainable, she knew sit but we taught her to use the doggy door, stay (somewhat), paw & laydown... all in the matter of three days. She came to us with a UTI and had just been fixed. The first few days were OK, she was really sweet and scared and mellow. She seems to be scared of everything and has had many pee accidents in the house. The last two days she makes it to the back door but not out it. She is still a little scared of the doggie door. Yesterday she started to really perk up and we started walking her and playing with her outside. That is when I started some issues which put up red flags for me. She is highly aggressive with her toys. She clearly doesn't know how to "play". You throw the ball and she fetches it and then just gets crazy with it and won't let it go and starts to do Zoomies around the yard and there is no stopping her. She gets this glazed look in her eyes and won't listen to anything. Then I started noticing a sort of obsession with my husband, who has taken on the "alpha" role.

The dog will only really listen to me even know we are both doing the training. Today my husband was out in the driveway with my daughter riding her bike and the dog was obsessively waiting by the door for him, listening and totally ignoring me. Then later, he came in with my daughter and the dog tried jumping up on me biting on my shirt and pants legs. Then she did the same to my 3 year old, which scared me so much. Yesterday she got very aggressive outside and my daughter was running and the dog almost took her down by biting onto her hood of her jacket and swinging her head/jaw. The dog also keeps peeing by the back door even know she knows how to use the doggie door now. Also, she has been trying to hump when someone picks my daughter up and tries to play with her, etc... I am in the pet business myself and have never in my life

been fearful of dogs until now. Having a child you cherish puts a whole new meaning to pet ownership. If I fear anything that can hurt my child, then I start to freak out. Maybe the dog can sense this, I don't know. She is a super sweet dog and my husband and daughter are already super attached but I have such fears that it is making me physically ill. I don't trust the dog to be in the same room with my daughter except, and I don't know if I ever will. Before this week, the thought of ever giving a dog back, especially a rescue dog that needs help, was something I would NEVER do. But today I feel different. We lost our dog two weeks ago unexpectedly and suddenly and I wasn't ready for this new dog but my husband was. I gave in because he really needed this. But my idea was to adopt a smaller, more calm breed being as we have a small child and want to have more. He wanted a big dog. This dog is 60lbs of pure muscle and I can not even handle walking her. No problem for my husband.

I need advice, is any dog "trainable"? Is going with my gut the best thing to do here or do we get some professional help and see if we can change the behavior? Or does this breed require more exercise then it's getting (we have been doing a half hour walk a day and also lots of play time). From the look on this dog's face when she is in that obsessive mode, I am not convinced she will ever fully change and I fear the future with a powerful dog I can't control. I know all dogs can bite and be aggressive, but my daughter was once nipped by a small dog and the difference was, that dog is containable, this one is not. Any help, advice, etc.. would be so helpful. Thanks!

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