

# The Whistle Sit

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Stopping to the whistle is one of the most important commands a retriever learns. In this article, we'll describe how to give a pup a good head start on this skill, and also how to teach the adult dog to stop to the whistle.

## Starting the Pup

We will start by teaching the pup to sit on command, then we'll "chain in" the whistle to mean the same thing. We'll then show you an easy way to teach the pup that "Sit" also means "stay until released."

An added benefit of this method is that the pup gets into the habit of turning to look at you when he sits. This is important preparation for handling, when the dog must look at you for the next cast.

We recommend using food treats for starting the pup's training. Not only do they provide an incentive, ensuring that the pup will enjoy his lesson, but using food introduces the pup to the idea of *earning rewards*. "Learning to learn" at a young age is of great value for any dog, and will make his adult training go much easier.

## Sit on command

Get your pup's attention, then hold a treat just above his nose. Tell him "Sit." As he reaches for the food, move it back and over his head, causing him to rock back into a sit. As soon as his rear end hits the ground, give him the reward.

With repetition, you can phase out presenting the food before you give the command. Just say "Sit" and watch him plant his rear. Then produce the reward. He's learned that he can earn a food treat by sitting when you say "Sit."

## Whistle sit for pups

Now start "chaining in" the whistle sit. Blow one quick blast on your whistle just before you say "Sit." Reward the sit. Soon, he'll learn that the whistle means the same thing as the verbal "Sit."

## Sit and stay

Crate training is an ideal time to teach a pup to accept waiting until you release it.

## **The Whistle Sit**

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After a pup has been in the crate awhile and you open the door, he'll naturally try to come out. Swing the crate door shut in his face. Keep repeating, until he stops trying to leave the crate.

Then, when he has accepted waiting for a few moments with the crate door open, give him a release command such as "Break." Encourage him to come out and get a food treat.

In effect, you're teaching him the beginning of being steady, using the crate "picture." He sees that, once he's in a crate, he can't leave until *you* release him with the release command.

### **Turn and watch the handler after sitting**

Now that he knows to wait in the crate with the door open, and also to sit to the whistle for a treat, you can put these two together. You can take advantage of the fact that the confined area of a crate gives the pup a good reason to turn all the way around and look at you after hearing the Sit Whistle.

After the pup enters the crate, blow your whistle. He'll naturally turn around so he can see you. When he sits, reward him with a treat.

Repeat, making this into a game. You'll build in a habit of the dog turning all the way around and squaring up to face you when he hears the whistle.

Starting the Adult dog on the whistle sit

### **Introducing the electric collar for "Sit"**

The electric collar will be your primary means of reinforcing the Sit Whistle in the field. So it's important that the dog understand how to respond to this correction. Otherwise, when you use the collar in the field, he'll probably just try to return to you rather than sit.

An excellent way to teach a dog the proper response to any particular collar correction is to arrange the lesson so that the dog thinks that he's "turning the collar off" by performing the command. Here are two things to remember:

You should start with stimulation that is mild, so that the dog will be able to learn and not panic. You must use "continuous" stimulation (the stimulation stays on as long as the button is held down), so that the dog will have something to "turn off."



**With the dog on a leash, fasten the collar around his waist so that the contact points are on the top of his rump. The moment he tries to stand, press the button and sat, "Sit."**

### **Put the collar on the waist**

With the dog on a leash, fasten the collar around his waist so that the contact points are on the top of his rump. (To reach around a large dog, buckle an extra collar strap to your regular collar strap.)

Most dogs are more sensitive on the rump than on the neck, so you should lower the intensity plug or contact point by a level or two when you start this procedure.

### **Step 1 - Standing up "turns on" the collar**

To begin, let the dog get used to the feel of the strap around his flank by having him sit quietly with it on. After he's used to the feel of wearing the collar on the rump, begin Step 1. Have him sit, without using the collar. But the moment he tries to stand up, press the button and say "Sit."

When he sits back down, release the button. If you need to, step at him and take up the slack in the leash to prevent him from walking to you.

### **Step 2 - Sit from motion while heeling**

When you see that he's making the effort to stay sitting, begin heeling with the collar still around his waist. He should be on leash. As you're walking with him, say "Sit" and press the button. At first, help him come to a stop by acting as if you're going to stop, too. Release the button as he sits.

Repeat this step until you see him stopping quickly on your command. He's trying to beat the collar. Now you can phase out the handler help. Just keep walking normally as you say "Sit," drop the leash and walk away.

### **Step 3 - Sitting from a run**

Repeat the exercise from a jog. Sitting the dog from a run will help develop a quick stop.

By now you should see him trying to stop quickly in order to beat the collar, so let him "win." Don't use the collar with the first command. In essence, you're rewarding his commitment to a fast sit by *not* pressing the button.

### **Step 4 - Move the collar to the neck**

When you're seeing the dog make an effort to respond quickly to the "Sit" command, and this response is consistent over several sessions, it's time to move the collar to the normal position on the dog's neck. If you lowered the intensity when you put the collar on his rump, raise it back to his normal training level.

Repeat the exercises with the collar on the neck, until he stops as quickly with it on his neck as he did with it on the rump.

### Step 5 - Adding the Whistle

Now he's ready for Step 5, learning that the whistle and the verbal "Sit" command mean the same thing. To do this, we chain the new command (Sit Whistle) to the known command ("Sit").

Repeat the exercise of jogging with the dog and sitting him as you jog away. But begin blowing the whistle just before you say "Sit."

When he's used to hearing the whistle followed by the "Sit," begin using just the whistle alone. Now, if he doesn't sit in response to it, follow up with a "Sit" command that you reinforce with the collar. After a few repetitions, he'll learn that sitting quickly to the whistle avoids the reinforced second command.

### Step 6 - Whistle Sit during the come-in

Leave the dog sitting and move about 15 yards away. Call him to you, and stop him with the whistle 10 yards from you.

The first time you do this, don't use the collar to get him stopped, just walk toward him and repeat your verbal "Sit" command until he sits. Then repeat the process, but reinforce the Sit Whistle with your collar if he fails to stop and sit.

### Step 7 - Chaining-in other cues for "Sit"

If you hunt your dog or run the hunt tests, there can be a Step 7 in your Sit program. Now is the perfect time to teach a dog that there are other events, besides your commands, that also mean "Sit." The sound of gunfire, and the sight of a flushing bird, are two such "events."

Sitting automatically--and staying put--in both these situations, is a real advantage in the hunting dog. This training also adds greatly to the handler's control on "walk-ups" at the hunting tests. We'll cover these in detail in future articles.

## Using the whistle sit in drills

### Putting things together

Once your dog knows his "Over" and "Back" casts when sitting in front of you, and he knows to retrieve from a pile of bumpers, you'll want to start putting things together into the "single T," and then the "modified double T" handling patterns.

At this stage of training, handlers may find that the dog they so carefully taught to sit to the whistle develops the bad habit of making a loop before actually sitting. The handler, intent on achieving the "main purpose" of whatever drill he's working on, overlooks the looping tendency until the loop has become a bad habit.

## **Don't accept a looping Whistle Sit**

Do something about the loop before it becomes a habit. When you see the loop, quickly reinforce a second Sit Whistle with your collar. You've already taught the dog in the yard that a quick sit avoids the collar, so he'll know to sit more quickly next time, and not loop.

Then simplify things for him. On the next repetition, take some of the distance out of your drill. Remember that distance makes every aspect of control work more difficult for a field dog.

If you continually see a looped sit, then you are setting up drills that are too long for the dog at his stage of training (a very common mistake). Shorten up until you are consistently seeing the stop you want.

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