

Training Your Dog to be Steady

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The boundary of the platform makes it clear to the dog that he must wait until he's sent

A steady dog is a pleasure to hunt over, and an unsteady dog can mess up a day's hunt. Also a steady dog is essential if you plan to run field trials or the higher levels of hunt tests.

We've found that using a four-inch high platform is the best way to introduce the "steady" concept to all dogs, whether they're going to be hunting companions, family pets, or "event dogs." A raised surface makes the rules clear to the dog right from the start, because stepping off it "turns on the collar." Because this method eliminates the need for severe approaches to steadying, the dog's mind stays clear, and his marking doesn't go downhill during the steadying process. Later you can transfer what your dog knows about staying in place on the platform to a small piece of carpet or anything else he can visually identify as a "place."

Start with a piece of plywood raised up on 2 x 4's for the dog's "place board." It makes it easy for the dog to identify where to stay until released. Use low-level, **continuous** stimulation for these lessons.

Begin by placing a dog crate 12 inches or so back from the front edge of the board, and tie the crate door open. Run a rope through the back of the crate so a helper can guide the dog. If you don't have a helper, you can run the rope around a post and back to you.

Have the dog enter the crate a few times so he's familiar with it. Then leave him in it, and tell him "Stay." Back away from the door of the crate, so he can leave if he wants.

As soon as the dog steps off the board, press the button and give him the command you use that means "Get in your crate" (such as "Kennel" or "Place"). Use the rope if needed to guide him back onto the board.

Release the button as his **front feet touch the board**. The edge of the platform becomes his guide.

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As soon as the dog steps off the board, press the button and give him the command, "Place." Use the rope if needed to guide him back onto the board.

Let him relax a minute, and lead him off the board. Just before you lead him off, give him a command such as "Here" so he knows that he's now released from the "Stay" command.

Repeat this sequence several times until you see the dog start to step off the board, and then change his mind. When you see this happen, you know that your dog is beginning to understand to stay on the board to keep the collar turned off.

Now you should teach him how to **go and get on the board** on command to turn off mild stimulation. He needs this understanding, because, if he breaks when the distraction level increases, you'll need to send him back to the board. Also, being able to send the dog to wait in a "place" remote from you can be very useful when hunting waterfowl.



With the dog still on the rope, work him toward the place board. When he is about four feet from the platform, press the button and command him to get on the platform.

With the dog still on the rope, walk him toward the place board. When he is about four feet from the platform, press the button and command him to get on the platform. Release the button when his front feet step onto the platform. Use the rope to guide him away from you and onto the platform if necessary.

When you see that the dog understands how to get on the platform on command and stay on it, you can remove the rope since you will no longer need it to guide the dog.

Now your dog is ready to stay on the board without the aid of the dog crate. Have your dog practice staying on it the board different situations. Take a platform to different areas where you train, and gradually introduce distractions that will tempt the dog to leave the board before you release him.

For example, at first have him honor the work of another dog from a distance, and when he shows you he can remain steady, gradually move the place board closer to the "action." Then begin throwing bumpers for your dog to retrieve, but he must wait on the board until you release him.

As the dog progresses, you can flight and shoot birds while he watches from the board. When he shows you that he can remain steady for this excitement, you can begin releasing him to retrieve.

You may find that when your dog is excited by your distractions, he no longer "feels" the low level intensity you used in calm situations. If so, you will need to change the variable intensity plug or contact point in your collar to a higher level.

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Any time the dog gets off the board without being released, press the button of your transmitter, and command him to get back on the board. If he continues to go anyway, call him back with "Here" and release the button as soon as he turns back.

If he doesn't turn back, you will have to release the button, but realize the distraction was too much too soon, and the intensity level is probably too low for the situation. Increase the level of intensity, and do repetitions with easier distractions until the dog shows you he can handle them, and stops trying to get off the board. Then increase the distraction level again.

After the dog is thoroughly trained to stay on a place board, you can substitute another identifiable "place" for the board, such as a towel, or a piece of burlap or astro turf. Whatever you choose, practice with it on the platform so that the dog associates it with his "place."

When you require a dog to stay on a carpet or towel, don't correct him for just having his feet off it. Instead, correct him only if he takes off and leaves. Then correct the same way you would if he got off his place board.

When the dog is good at staying on a carpet, he will have a high understanding of remaining steady. Now he can make the transition to staying in place without the aid of a carpet.

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