

Handler skills for heeling

When you think of your normal body movements AS cues, such as turning your head to look where you are about to go, or leaning forward when you are about to go faster, you are more likely to do them slightly ahead of the actual move and this gives the dog the cue he needs to be able to stay in position.

And the other big way to help the dog and prevent many heeling issues is proper footwork that keeps your feet out of the dog's path! If they are giving you eye contact, they can't see your feet. And if they stumble over your feet a couple times or get stepped on, boom, you have wide heeling or lagging due to trust issues. So proper footwork is essential, especially in the learning phase for the dog!

Clear and consistent verbal cues and hand signals.

- Heel position- left arm across belly
- Right side heeling. right arm across belly
- Left finish- Hand sweep to the left
- Right finish- Hand sweep to the right
- Front- recall cue for dog in front or finger pointing sweep toward front if dog is starting in heel/side.
- Back up –open left hand palm pumping toward the dog about belly high
- Down- open left hand palm facing floor moving from hip toward floor
- Sit- open left hand palm facing up moving from hip and bending at elbow
- Stand- (dog in heel) open left palm toward dog sweeping to the left.
(dog in front) Open left palm held up at about waist high
- Stay- (dog in heel) Closed left palm (fingers toward dog) held in front of dog's face
(dog in front) Closed fist (fingers toward dog) held in front of MY face
- Recall- Open LEFT hand sweeping up toward my chest with elbow out
- Position of your left hand during heeling: at belly = focus on handler. Down at left side = focus forward for retrieving/jumping

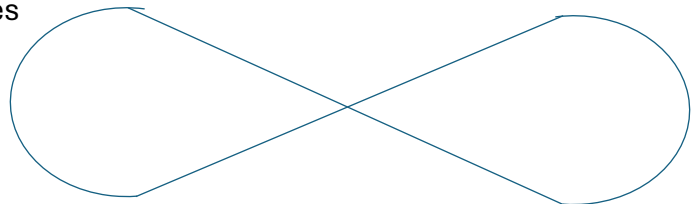
Move at a “brisk pace”- with purpose.

Walk with rhythm- determine what speed makes the dog look good (start at 125-135 bpm)

Look at the DOG'S path as you move/turn

Figure 8: 2 curves connected by straight lines

Focus on the cone as you go around & at the end of the curve focus on the next cone

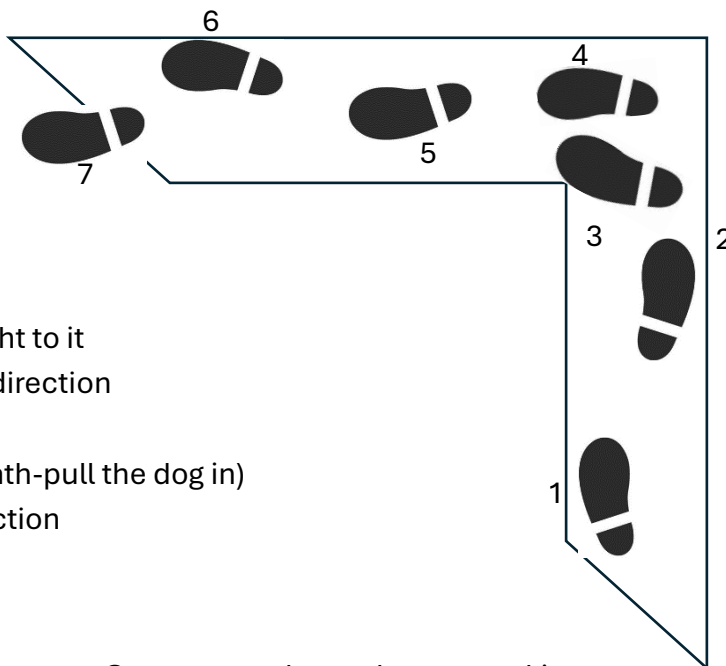


Footwork!!

Start each turn with a head turn to look where the DOG is about to go

Left Turn:

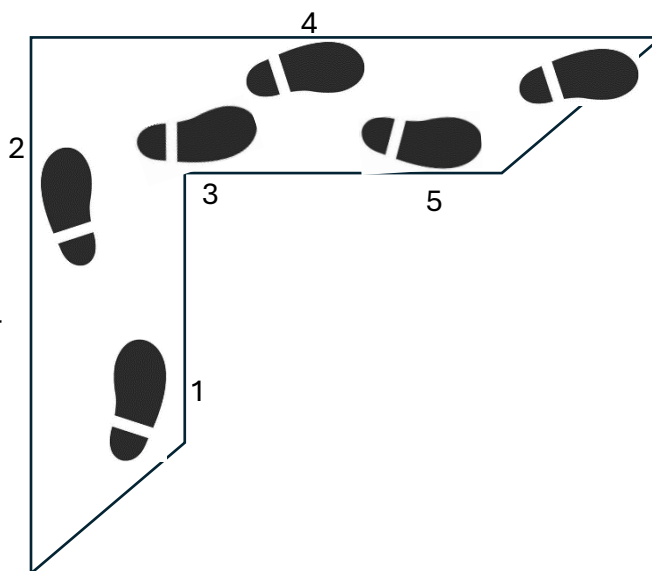
- 1 Lead in step- left foot
- 2 Step and shift weight onto right foot
- 3 Left foot turns to point in new direction
Heel is in front of right foot
- 4 Right foot comes along side- shift weight to it
Dog swings rear into position for new direction
- 5 Left foot single tracks in front of right
(so you are not stepping in the dog's path-pull the dog in)
- 6 Normal step with right foot in new direction
- 7 Normal step with left foot



Slowly add speed as the dog masters the move. Once you and your dog are working at normal speed, if you do several left turns in a row the dog may start anticipating and lagging. Left turns should be followed by an activity that requires energy from the dog. That could be a fast pace, a quick right turn, or even an about right turn, a send out/reward tossed forward, or send to a circle a cone.

Right turn:

- 1 Lead in step
- 2 Keep left foot on original path
- 3 Turn right foot in new direction
(heel in line with toe of left foot)
- 4 Bring right foot up in new direction
(can single track this step in front of your right foot if needed. Or make it a half step for a slow dog)
- 5 Continue on new path



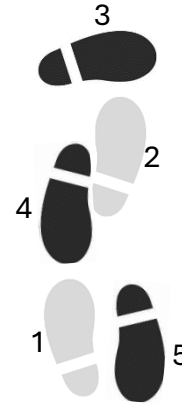
Practice slowly. Gradually add speed

All turns: TURN YOUR SHOULDERS WITH YOUR HIPS AS SMOOTHLY AS POSSIBLE!

There shouldn't be any 'snap' or whip to your body as you turn. Be fair to the dog!

About right turn:

- 1 Lead in step
- 2 Plant right foot and shift weight to it
- 3 “T-feet” Place left foot in front of and across the toe of right foot (shift weight to left foot)
- 4 Turn right foot around and place it to the right
- 5 Normal step with left foot



This foot pattern never gets in the dog’s way

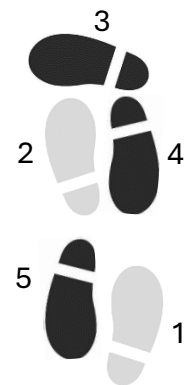
No chance of kicking the dog or stepping on them.

With practice it is a very smooth turn that can maintain foot fall rhythm

Start slow and gradually add speed- repeat when you add the dog.

About left turn:

- 1 Lead in step
- 2 Plant left foot and shift weight to it
- 3 “T feet” Place right foot in front of and across the toe of left foot
Shift weight to right foot
- 4 Turn left foot around and place it to the left
- 5 Normal step with right foot



Main points to remember:

Keep your feet under you and out of the dog’s path

Left turns- step away from the dog’s path and pull them in

Mix it up! Keep it fun! Don’t drill, play games that teach.

Upper body cues:

Lean forward or back as a cue to predict speed. When you start working on it with the dog, exaggerate the movement so the dog definitely picks up on it. Gradually make it less and less obvious. But be sure it always happens BEFORE you change to a faster speed. And move to a faster speed smoothly, not suddenly.

Stride and Tempo

Length of your stride and the tempo/pace at which you move can help or hinder the dog. The more consistent these are, the easier it is for the dog. And if you change your pace to match the dog’s best speed, it will greatly help the dog!