

Heeling- the dog's skills

Eye contact- a component of EACH step you teach the dog. But you are not going to be maintaining eye contact with the dog (you need to look where the dog is going). So the dog needs to learn to look up at you even if you are not looking back! Use a mirror, reflection, or helper to watch the dog. For small dogs, the dog looking at your elbow may be the best to teach.

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| | Dog understands that a tight leash is a cue for looking to you |
| | Dog understands the concept of walking on a loose leash and has the self-control needed to do it. Watches the handler enough to change directions/speed as needed. |
| | Dog is marked/rewarded any time it happens to walk next to you on your left or right to increase value for that position. Careful with your feet to not create aversion/avoidance. |
| | Small dogs- with handler kneeling or dog on a table, dog learns to nose target handler elbow in heel position. Fade the touch and gradually add distance from elbow and mark looking. Drop/deliver treats from under the elbow. |
| | Pivot training – heel, front, and side |
| | Dog can pivot from front position into heel/side without a foot platform using hand signal |
| | Dog can stay in position while the handler “pivots on a plate” left and right. |
| | Dog can pivot with the handler, maintaining eye contact, in several different locations and with various distractions. |
| | Dog loves to get on the sit platform and down/stand platform and loves front foot targets. Can also use a target ‘box’ (PVC square/rectangle dog gets in). |
| | Canine conditioning exercises are used to build the muscles the dog needs to be able to correctly perform a fold back down, tuck sit, and pop back stand. |
| | Dog is fluent with the sit, down, stand cues and can move between them correctly with only 1 cue needed for each transition. Can use a platform or front foot target to get proper positioning (fold back down, tuck sit, pop back stand) Ideally on hand signal cues |
| | Dog loves his sit and down/stand platforms or targets and will go to them on cue and get into the proper cued position. “go sit”, “go down”, “go stand” |
| | Dog knows how to change positions while remaining on the platform or target. And can maintain eye contact while doing so, both in front of the handler and beside the handler. |
| | Dog can move from one platform/box/target to another (heel, front, side) and quickly reestablishes eye contact once the move is made. |
| | Dog is fluent with verbal and hand signals for moving between heel, front, and side |
| | Dog can move between heel, front, and side on cue, in any order, without a platform/box, while maintaining eye contact. |
| | Can do the above in multiple different locations with a variety of distractions. |
| | Dog knows how to circle a cone and can be sent in any direction from the handler to circle a cone. Helps with reducing lagging on left turns, and builds muscles, coordination & fun. |
| | Dog can maintain eye contact for up to 30 sec. + while stationary in heel/side position. Teach this as if it was a stay, building duration slowly with lots of rewards but stay silent. This is without you looking at the dog. Use a mirror, reflection, or helper to watch the dog. |
| | Always use start/end cues for full attention. Hand on belly is the start cue for heel. Break cue lets the dog know when consistent eyes on you is no longer expected. |
| | Dog knows how to back up , on cue, in a straight line, for several steps, independent of handler movement. Another rear end awareness and control exercise. |
| | Dog can back up 1 step in heel position while maintaining eye contact |
| | Build up slowly to multiple steps backward in heel with eye contact |

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| | Teach the dog to sit automatically when you stop |
| | When the dog can maintain several steps in proper position with sustained eye contact, start to drift away from the dog as you walk . If the dog is on the left, slowly drift to the right. If the dog is on the right, slowly drift to the left. Dog should move rear end to stay in alignment. If not, review pivoting before trying this. This becomes wide arcs and eventually serpentines. |
| | Gradually build on the number of steps in correct position in any direction with maintained eye contact on each side. Work on this in different places and slowly add distractions. |
| | Work on turns with proper footwork and eye position cues done slowly at first. Build speed. Only take a few steps prior to the turn and after the turn/before reward. |
| | Once you have the turns up to full speed (your heeling bpm), you can start to use them along with straight-line heeling. Use a speed generator (send out) after left turns to avoid lagging. |
| | Also work on: |
| | Changes of pace (exaggerate upper body leaning forward or back at first) |
| | Side steps |
| | Front to finish (both sides) |
| | “Find heel” after recall from any point around you |
| | All the rally signs/moves |
| | Delayed rewards/rewards not on you |
| | Ring entry/set-up |
| | What you’ll do in the ring between obedience exercises |
| | Heeling games |
| | Focus signal- If you want heeling, put your hand at your belly. If you want focus forward, move your dog side hand down to your side before you toss a toy or have anything happen during which the dog should focus on what is in front of him. (Hand is out away from body for conformation ‘strut’) |