

Lesson 1: Teaching Your Dog His Name



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Even if your dog already knows his name, please don't skip this lesson. We promise you'll learn something!

The first thing we all teach our dogs, even before we realize we're doing any training, is that when we make a certain specific sound, we want their attention. This "sound" is their name.

That's all it is, and that's all it should be used for.

Many dog owners tend to think of their dog's name as more than that. They use it as a "catch-all" command with multiple definitions that vary depending on what they want their dog to do at the moment: "Max!" (Meaning "Come here!"); "Max!" (Meaning "Stop that!"); "Max!" (Meaning "Get down!"); "Max!" (Meaning "Stop barking!"); "Max!" (Meaning "Don't eat that cat poop!"). You get the idea.

Your dog may be the smartest dog in the world, but he is not a mind reader.

You shouldn't use your dog's name any differently than a child's name. For example, if you call a child's name, he may acknowledge that he hears you (if you're lucky), but his

likely response will be to call back, “What?” He probably won’t even look up from the video game or whatever else he was doing when you called his name. You’ll need to follow up with an instruction; tell him what you want: “Bobby! Stop playing that game and do your homework!” (Then he may or may not do as you ask, depending on how well he’s been trained.) ☺

The point is, plan to use your dog’s name in the same way—to get his attention. Period. Then use other sounds (commands) and actions to tell or show him what you want him to do.

Important: Even after your dog learns his name, he may continue doing whatever he was doing when he hears you use it (just like Bobby). Don’t get upset or impatient. And don’t repeat his name: “Max... Max!... MAX!!!” Doing this will only teach your dog to ignore you until he hears his name over and over. We’ll give you better solutions.

So let’s get on with the lesson.

Lesson 1: Teaching Your Dog His Name

Read this lesson first, and then practice it with your dog.

1. First, load up your pocket (or a bag or pouch) with 20 or so treats.
2. Take your dog to an area where there won’t be a lot of distractions.
3. Wait for your dog to look at something other than you, then say his name (once!).
4. When he looks at you, immediately give him a treat and say “Good!” *(Or whatever you’ve chosen as the primary reinforcer, phrase or clicker. We’re going to just use “Good!” in our training examples.)*
5. Now move a few steps to another location and again wait for your dog to be looking away from you.
6. Say your dog’s name again and immediately reward him again with the treat and praise when he looks at you.
7. Repeat this process five times. If your dog was particularly distracted before responding to his name, give him extra praise and treats.

If your dog doesn’t do what you want

If you say his name and he doesn’t look at you, he may be too distracted. Move him a few paces to a different location and try again.

Say his name. Use an enthusiastic tone of voice. Give immediate rewards if he looks at you.

If he still doesn't respond to his name, clap your hands, whistle or make some other attention-getting sound. When he looks, say his name again and immediately give the rewards. Do this as a last resort. You want him to learn to respond to his name, not the other sounds.

[Note: If your dog does not show any response to those attention-getting sounds, please have his hearing checked. Seriously. Some breeds, such as Dalmatians, are prone to hearing problems. A dog owner who thinks the dog is too dumb to learn is sometimes surprised to learn the dog is actually deaf!]

Another tactic: put the treat in your hand and let your dog sniff your closed fist so he'll know it's there. Pull your hand away and wait until your dog looks away from you. Say his name and immediately reward his response.

If your dog continues to ignore his name after several attempts, try moving to a less distracting location. (Distractions include smells, not just sights and sounds.)

Keep trying, be patient, and remember not to repeat his name. Give immediate rewards when he responds.

This Week's Homework

Practice this lesson.

During this week, you'll be training yourself as well as your dog. The important lesson for you: **Learn to say your dog's name only once.** This is difficult for most people. We rely on verbal communication. Dogs don't. So you'll have to train yourself not to do what may come naturally: repeating yourself until you get a response.

Practice this lesson several times each day during the week. Vary the time of day and location (both inside and outside). Do not, however, move to areas with greater distractions to challenge your dog with higher degrees of difficulty, even if he is a fast learner. The Happy Mutt Training System works best when you build on a strong foundation of success and progress slowly, one step at a time.

Do five repetitions during each lesson.

Concentrate on saying your dog's name only once.

Remember: do not use your dog's name as a "catch-all" command with multiple definitions. As our training progresses, you'll learn that each desired action will have its own separate command (and it won't be your dog's name).

In Addition to Practicing This Lesson...

- **Learn the type of reward that is the best motivator for your dog.** Food treats, such as small pieces of cooked chicken, can be kept fresh by placing them in sealable plastic bags and storing them in the refrigerator.
- **Focus on positive reinforcement.** You'll be teaching your dog that listening to you and learning are fun. Your goal is to have a happy student, eager for each lesson. Use treats your dog loves most, and give them immediately as instant reinforcers.
- Remember to use a combination of primary (treats) and secondary (praise or clicker) reinforcers together. When your dog responds correctly, immediately give the treat and say "Good!" Always use the same praise word/phrase.
- **Have fun playing with your dog!** Don't focus all your time together on training. Spend lots of quality time just enjoying each other's company.

Coming up next week: Lesson 2, Teaching Your Dog to Sit.