

Teaching Go to Mat



Teaching your dog to go to a mat is a great way to manage undesirable behaviors such as begging at the dinner table, charging the door at visitors, and constant attention seeking. The mat is also a great place for your dog to find comfort and security.

Throughout this protocol, the term mat can be interchanged with place or crate.

*It is important to keep training fun, making the mat or place the **BEST** thing to your dog. The cue “go to mat” should never be used as punishment and should always be given in an upbeat happy voice. You want your dog to love going to his mat or place, even if you are not happy with his behavior.*

During the training process, all good things (toys, treat dispensing toys, chew bones) should be given to your dog on the mat or place. Even if they take the object off the mat to enjoy (that is okay). If you are consistent, your dog will soon stay on the mat to enjoy the object.

It is also a good idea to spend about 2 – 3 minutes periodically delivering good treats on the mat. Lay the designated mat near you and begin tossing treats in a boring rhythmic manner. This is just another way of building a great association with the mat for your dog.

Shaping to the Mat

1. You will need a mat, blanket, or towel, one that your dog has not seen before and will examine as if it were the most interesting thing in the world.
2. Without saying anything, put the mat on the floor near you. The second that your dog shows any interest (by looking at it, sniffing it, putting a paw on it), click or verbally mark the behavior, and put a treat on the mat.
3. Continue marking (clicking or verbal) and putting treats on the mat, as long as your dog is interacting with it (sniffing, standing or paw on it). During the training process, only treat when your dog is interacting with the mat. The second your dog leaves the mat, all clicking, praising, and treating ends. Stand quietly and wait. Most dogs at this point will go back to the mat to restart the game.
4. Once your dog is focused on the mat, begin clicking only when your dog is on the mat, and then toss your treat about 4 – 5 feet away from the mat so that your dog has to move off the mat to get the treat. With this step, you are restarting your dog by moving him off the mat so that he chooses to go to the mat on his own.
5. Once your dog is consistently going to the mat on his own, you will want to start teaching him a cue to go to mat. Decide what your cue will be, “Go to Mat”, “Chill”, “Place”, whatever works best

for you. Begin with step number 4, using your cue just as your dog is stepping on the mat. After your dog consistently gives you the go to mat behavior, you can begin cueing your dog as he moves toward the mat.

6. When confident that your dog knows the cue, begin practicing cueing him to the mat and rewarding generously on the mat, when he goes to the mat on cue.
7. Next, you will teach a release cue, such as “Okay”, “Free”, or “Release”. Cue your dog to go to mat, reward with a treat on the mat and then toss a treat 3 – 4 feet off the mat. Give your release cue as you toss the treat. Make sure your dog sees you tossing the treat so that he moves off the mat. Repeat until you can give the release cue before tossing the treat and your dog moves off the mat - follow-up with a treat.
8. Now you are ready to teach your dog to stay on the mat. Begin by cueing your dog to go to mat and then practice teaching a Stay (as we do in the Joyful Dog handout). You can also add value to the mat by giving him long-lasting treats such as a Kong, chew bone, etc. on the mat. Practice often, using the different options for encouraging your dog to stay on the mat. When done with the mat exercise, give your release cue letting him know it is okay to leave the mat.
9. When your dog is committed to being on the mat, you can start increasing the distance for the cue, and time on the mat.

Distance

- a. Begin to slowly increase the space between you and the mat before giving the cue to “go to mat”. Depending on your dog, it could be anywhere between 2- 5 feet at a time.
- b. Be patient, give your dog time to think and process what you are asking of him.
- c. If he does not readily go to the mat on cue, it means you are too far away and need to move closer to the mat and increase the distance more slowly.
- d. Once your dog is consistently going to mat on cue with the mat in view, you can then begin cueing him from another room. Again, be patient and give your dog a chance to process what you are asking. The first couple of times, you may have to take him to the mat. Do this in an excited happy manner making the mat a great place by tossing treats on it.
- e. Repeat until your dog readily goes to his mat from another room on cue.

Time on Mat

- a. Once your dog is consistently going to mat on cue with the mat in view, you can begin working on increasing their time on the mat. Begin by increasing the time between treats while your dog is on the mat.
- b. If he leaves the mat before you give a release cue, pick up the mat for a few seconds and ignore him, then give him another chance.
- c. If he consistently remains on the mat until your release cue, you can start taking little steps around him. If you have an excitable dog, start by just bending your knees as if you are about to take a step.
- d. After each little movement you make, return and treat your dog if he remains on the mat. It should not take long for your dog to understand that he will continue receiving treats if he stays on the mat until you release him.