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Your Smart Dog WAIT A Minute! November 2007

I was getting out of the car at the vet's office the other day and needed to get my purse, the treat bag, and of course, Nemo's leash. Thankfully, Nemo knows "Wait," which means "pause right there until I give you the next direction." I was able to gather all those things, clip his leash onto his collar, make sure the coast was clear, and then could release him safely from the car.

Wait isn't the first thing I teach my dogs, but it's high on the list. I use it daily with my dogs and couldn't get along without it. This month's newsletter will cover the "Wait," behavior and why it's so useful.

First things first: "wait," is not "stay." Stay means freeze, I'll come back to you and *together* we'll go somewhere. Wait means hang on, I've got to do something, then I'll tell you what to do next. It's kind of like a pause. Wait is meant to be a temporary hold, not something the dog will do for a long time.

Here are some situations in which I use wait: *getting out of the car – I don't want the dog to dash out before I'm ready; *getting in the car – my car is usually full of stuff and I have to clear a space for the dog; *before I go out the door with the dog – I usually have a key in my hand and have to lock the door; *when they come in from outside and I need to wipe their feet – I ask

them to wait on the rug right inside the door so they don't track mud through the house; *before I put their food bowl down – to eliminate rushing toward the bowl and knocking it out of my hand (what a mess!); *and as people are entering the house – a nice "wait" lets the visitors get in easily.

Now that you have an idea of when you'd use Wait, let's look at how you might teach it. This is easier if you have two people. One person holds the dog by his collar – not yanking, just holding him so he can't move forward. The other person has something the dog likes: a toy, a piece of food, etc. Show the dog the "thing," and place it on the floor out of his reach. Say "wait" and wait for him to stop leaning toward the "thing." When he stops leaning in, click and say "release," and let him have the "thing."

You can also teach this at the door with your dog on a short leash. Tell your dog "wait," and then open the door slightly. As soon as your dog gets up or moves forward, simply shut the door. Repeat the "wait" cue and try again. The dog will quickly learn that his moving causes the door to close – which is the exact opposite of what he'd like to happen. Or in the previous example, moving doesn't get them any closer to the valued item. It is only waiting – that is, not moving – that gets them what they want.



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Wait is a relatively simple cue and your dog should pick it up quickly. It's so valuable and can be used in so many situations, I can't imagine living with a dog who doesn't know "wait." It not only makes your life easier, but could be the difference between your dog bolting out of your car and into traffic.

We teach the wait behavior in our second level courses *Adolescent Middle School* and *Doggie High School*. These courses come after the introductory courses *Smart Puppy* and *Dog Manners 101*. Both courses courses will be offered in 2008.

A quick note: I use the word "Wait," but you can use any word you'd like. "Pause," "Hold," or "Still," would be good cues for this behavior. Just pick one and be consistent and before you know it, you'll have a "Waiting" dog! And you, too, will wonder how you got along without it!
Happy Waiting!

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