

Recall

Goal: Your dog will come to you when called.

You do not teach your dog a solid recall; you build it slowly over time! Have you ever called your dog only to have her look right at you then ignore you or dart off. You may say, “Well she knows what she is supposed to do, but she can be stubborn sometimes.” The fact is that your dog probably does not know what you are asking of her. When she looks at you, she is weighing her options. A dog at this stage in recall training will only respond if she knows that coming to you will yield a higher reward than staying where she is. Your goal is to reach a stage in training where your dog’s response to the word, “Come,” becomes automated. The recall must be trained the correct way over and over until the dog reacts when she hears the cue because she no longer needs to weigh her options.

The key to success here is to start at a close range in a low distraction area. In the early training stages, never ask your dog to Come if she is distracted. Keep it simple for now.

Unfortunately, most people accidentally teach their dogs not to come to them when called. If you try to ask for a recall before your dog is ready, she will ignore you. You will become frustrated and angry and begin to yell at your dog. She’ll start to move away from you and you’ll start to run after her. And when she finally does come to you, she’s probably in for a good scolding and perhaps a whipping.

Your dog should think that coming to you is the greatest thing in the world. Be surprising. Reward her with high-value treats she may never have tasted before, such as cooked chicken or liver.

Step 1: Work in a quiet place

Start in a quiet, enclosed area of your home. A long hallway with all the doors closed is an excellent choice. Allow your dog to roam about as much as possible. When she has her back to you, call her by saying her name and the cue “Come,” in an excited tone.

Your dog should, at least, look at you. If she does, say, “Good,” and offer a treat. You want to mark your dog’s response the instant she has the idea to come to you. Timing is very important. Don’t wait until your dog arrives at your feet to say, “Good,” say it the split second she turns in your direction.

After a few repetitions, move to other areas of your house. Once your dog is responding well, change it up a little. Without your dog being aware of it, put some treats in your pocket or on a shelf that is out of sight. Wait until your dog is in another room and not paying attention to you, “Sophie, come.” Don’t do this if your dog is sleeping or playing with its favorite toy. She should not be paying attention to you when you call, but neither should she be highly distracted by something else. If you have done enough preparation, she should come running. As soon as you hear her running in your direction, say, “Good,” and give her a treat when she arrives.

Your dog is learning that when she hears her name and the word “Come,” running to you is a great idea. Only after you have a reliable recall in the home with no distractions will you begin to ask your dog to Come away from distractions.

Step 2: Adding low-value, controlled distractions

In order to successfully call your dog off a distraction, you must be sure that in the initial phases of training that the distraction is of low value and that it is under your complete control.

Start by having an accomplice (a friend or family member) enclose a low-value treat in his or her closed fist. Let your dog smell that treat as you stand directly behind her. Say, “Sophie, come.” She will probably continue to sniff the treat in your accomplice’s hand. Don’t repeat the command, but feel free to make as much noise as possible: shuffle your feet, clap your hands, making smooching sounds – just don’t say, “Come,” again. Because your dog can’t get to the treat enclosed in your accomplice’s fist, she’ll eventually turn to you. The instant she does, say, “Good,” and give her a high-value.

Work on this over and over, until your dog will instantly turn to you when she hears you say, “Come.”

Step 3: Taking it outside

When you first try your recall outside, work in the smallest, quietest fenced outside area you have access to. If you do not have a fenced yard, you may use a 25-30 foot long-line tied to your dog. If your yard is very large, you may wish to use a long-line anyway just to keep your dog close. When using a long-line, step on it in order to stop your dog rather than picking it up, if possible. It is best if the dog does not perceive the long line as one long leash.

Because of your dog’s sense of smell and her eagerness to explore, being outside can be a distraction in and of itself. You can offset that to some degree by working in a familiar area and by working at close-range to your dog. Just as you did inside, wait until your dog is not looking at you, call her name and say, “Come.” Follow the same steps you did while working inside.

Add distractions outside just as you did inside.

Try to be surprising to your dog when you begin to work outside. If she has a particular toy she likes, use that as a reward. Be careful, however, not to use a toy to bribe your dog to come to you. Don’t wave it around and coax her to come. Use it as a reward after your dog has made the decision to come to you.

Be cautious as well about petting your dog as a reward for coming to you. We have witnessed many cases in which dog’s feel punished if their owner pets them on a recall. Some dogs love affection when recalled. But others find it a hindrance from the reward of being outside. If you have such a dog, offer a quick treat, then release your dog with a

quick wave of the hand and, “Okay,” and let her go back to what she was doing. Practice these steps as often as possible and you will soon start seeing positive results!

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