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5 Basic Commands Every Puppy Should Learn (Plus How to Teach Them)

By Alex Ramirez | Puppy Behavior & Training | August 30, 2026 | Est. reading time: 13 minutes

The 5 basic dog commands every puppy needs to learn first are sit, stay, come, down, and leave it, and mastering these foundational cues prevents behavioral issues before they start.

Bringing home a new puppy feels like stepping onto a moving treadmill. Between midnight bathroom breaks, sharp little needle teeth, and managing your exhaustion, figuring out where to begin training sends you straight into a Google spiral. You do not need a degree in animal behavior to get started. You need a pocketful of high-value treats, a quiet corner of your living room, and a plan. This plan breaks training down into tiny, manageable wins for both of you.

5 Basic Commands Every Puppy Should Learn: The Quick Answer

The 5 basic dog commands every puppy should learn are sit, stay, come, down, and leave it. These five cues form the bedrock of house manners, safety, and clear communication between you and your dog. When taught using short, positive daily sessions, they transform a chaotic puppy into a predictable, confident household companion.

What Commands Should You Teach a Puppy First?

You should teach sit, come, and leave it first because they directly manage impulse control and immediate physical safety. Puppies have goldfish-like attention spans. Early training sessions target behaviors that keep them safe from household hazards. Starting with "sit" teaches your puppy that good things happen when they pause instead of jumping. "Come" protects them if they slip out the front door into the suburban yard or neighborhood street.

Focusing on high-value safety commands first also builds your confidence as a pet parent. You stop reacting to chaos. You guide your puppy toward success. Keep sessions under five minutes. End every single mini-training block on a successful note with a jackpot reward of three treats and verbal praise.

The 5 Basic Commands, Step by Step

Sit

Teaching your puppy to sit is the easiest starting point because it relies on a natural luring motion with a treat.

- 1 Hold a high-value treat right in front of your puppy's nose, letting them sniff it without taking it.
- 2 Slowly move the treat backward over their head toward their ears. As their nose tilts up to follow the treat, their rear end will naturally lower to the floor.
- 3 The exact second their bottom touches the floor, say "Sit," give them the treat, and offer warm verbal praise.
- 4 Practice this three to five times in a row, then release your puppy to play so they stay enthusiastic about the game.

Stay

The stay command requires building duration very slowly to prevent your puppy from breaking position out of sheer excitement.

- 1 Ask your puppy to sit or down, and hold an open palm facing them while saying "Stay."
- 2 Wait for one single second. If they hold the position, mark it with a marker word like "Yes!" and deliver a treat right where they are sitting.
- 3 Gradually increase the time you ask them to wait from one second to three seconds, then five seconds.
- 4 Only add distance once they can hold their position for ten seconds while you stand completely still in front of them.

Come (Recall)

A reliable recall can save your puppy's life, so it must always be associated with high-value rewards like boiled chicken or cheese.

- 1 Crouch down low, open your arms wide, and say your puppy's name followed by "Come!" in an upbeat, exciting tone.
- 2 The moment they start moving toward you, praise them enthusiastically the entire way.
- 3 When they reach you, gently hold their collar before giving them the treat so they learn that coming when called means staying close to you, not grabbing the snack and bolting.
- 4 Never call your puppy to you for something negative like a bath or nail trim, as this ruins their recall motivation.

Down

The down command teaches your puppy to lower their center of gravity, which helps calm an overexcited or hyperactive dog.

- 1 Start with your puppy in a seated position holding a treat right at their nose.
- 2 Slowly lower the treat straight down between their front paws, then drag it an inch or two along the floor away from them.
- 3 As they follow the scent with their nose, their front legs will slide forward into a resting position.

- 4 The moment their elbows and belly touch the floor, say "Down," release the treat, and praise them lavishly.

Leave It

Leave it teaches your puppy to voluntarily turn away from dangerous or forbidden items when you ask them to.

- 1 Hold a low-value treat in a closed fist and present it to your puppy while saying "Leave it."
- 2 Ignore their sniffing, licking, or pawing at your hand, and wait patiently until they pull their head back or look away from your fist.
- 3 The second they back off, say "Yes!" and reward them with a completely different, much higher-value treat from your opposite hand.
- 4 Never let them eat the actual item inside the closed fist, or they learn that "leave it" just means "wait a second before you grab it."

What Is the 7-7-7 Rule for Puppies?

The 7-7-7 rule for puppies is a socialization guideline suggesting puppies should experience 7 types of new surfaces, meet 7 different types of people, and explore 7 novel environments before they reach specific developmental milestones. While the famous 3-3-3 rule explains the decompression timeline after bringing a rescue dog home, the 7-7-7 guideline focuses purely on building environmental resilience during your puppy's primary socialization window.

Pairing this socialization framework with your basic obedience training ensures your puppy does not just listen in the quiet kitchen, but can also focus when exposed to the distractions of the outside world. If your puppy is overwhelmed by a busy sidewalk, their brain cannot process commands like sit or leave it. Keep training environments quiet at first, slowly moving to the backyard, the front porch, and finally public parks as their confidence grows.

What Are the 10 Most Important Commands to Teach a Puppy?

The 10 most important commands to teach a puppy expand the foundational five with vital safety and household manners cues including drop it, wait, off, heel, and place. Once your puppy has mastered sit, stay, come, down, and leave it, layering in these secondary commands bridges the gap between basic indoor obedience and real-world freedom.

- **Drop It:** Tells your puppy to immediately release something already inside their mouth, protecting them from swallowing dangerous objects.
- **Wait:** Similar to stay, but specifically used at doors, car crates, or meal bowls to prevent bolting until you give a release word like "Okay."
- **Off:** Tells all four paws to stay on the floor, stopping jumping up on guests or kitchen counters.
- **Heel:** Teaches your puppy to walk politely on a loose leash by your side without pulling your arm out of its socket.

- **Place:** Directs your puppy to go immediately to a designated mat, bed, or crate and stay there until released, which is invaluable during family dinners.

Dog Commands and Hand Signals

Command	Primary Hand Signal	Typical Use Case
Sit	Flat palm facing upward, moving from waist height upward	Stopping at curbs, waiting for food bowls
Stay	Flat palm facing away from you, pushed forward like a stop sign	Doorways, grooming, staying put while you cross a room
Come	Sweeping motion bringing your hand toward your chest	Emergency recall in the yard or park
Down	Flat palm facing downward, moving straight down to the floor	Settling down during meals or vet exams
Leave It	Closed fist extended toward the item, pulling back when ignored	Avoiding dropped food, trash, or toxic plants

Pairing verbal cues with hand signals from day one creates a remarkably reliable communication system with your puppy. Dogs are naturally visual learners who pay much closer attention to our body language than our spoken vocabulary. Introducing hand signals alongside verbal words also future-proofs your dog's training, ensuring they can still respond seamlessly if they experience hearing loss as a senior.

How Long Does It Take a Puppy to Learn Basic Commands?

Most puppies begin recognizing basic commands within one to two weeks of consistent, daily practice, but complete reliability takes several months of reinforcement. A young puppy's brain is growing at an incredible rate, but their working memory and impulse control are genuinely limited. Expecting a 10-week-old puppy to hold a stay for two minutes or ignore a dropped hotdog on the kitchen floor sets both of you up for frustration.

Keep your training sessions short — about three to five minutes, two or three times a day. Consistency always beats duration when working with young dogs. Practicing "sit" right before putting down their dinner bowl or before opening the back door for a potty break weaves training into daily life rather than making it feel like a chore.

Common Mistakes When Teaching Basic Commands

The most common mistakes puppy parents make during basic training include using inconsistent hand cues, training when the puppy is overtired, and letting sessions drag on past five minutes. When multiple family members use different words for the same behavior — such as one person saying "Down" and another saying "Off" for jumping — the puppy becomes confused and stops responding reliably. Sit down

with everyone in the household to establish a single shared vocabulary list.

Another frequent pitfall is trying to train a biting, zooming puppy who has entered the evening "witching hour." Overtired puppies cannot focus or regulate their impulses. If your puppy is nipping at your ankles and racing around the living room, put them down for a mandatory nap in their crate rather than trying to force a training session.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the 5 basic dog commands?

The 5 basic dog commands are sit, stay, come, down, and leave it, which provide the essential framework for good manners and safety. These foundational cues cover posture, impulse control, and emergency response. When taught consistently through positive reinforcement, they give you the tools needed to navigate daily life with your new companion.

What are the 10 most important commands to teach a puppy?

The 10 most important puppy commands include the core five (sit, stay, come, down, leave it) plus drop it, wait, off, heel, and place. Expanding your training checklist past the initial foundational skills bridges the gap between basic indoor obedience and polite public behavior.

What is the 7-7-7 rule for puppies?

The 7-7-7 rule for puppies is a socialization guideline recommending that a puppy experiences 7 new surfaces, meets 7 different types of people, and explores 7 novel environments before a specified age milestone. This framework focuses purely on building environmental confidence and emotional resilience.

What commands should you teach a puppy first?

You should teach sit, come, and leave it first because they directly target impulse control, attention, and physical safety. Starting with these specific cues helps you manage high-stress moments like doorways, dropped food items, or sudden doors opening.

How long does it take a puppy to learn basic commands?

Most puppies begin recognizing basic commands within one to two weeks of short daily practice, but full reliability in distracting environments takes months. Consistency always beats long practice sessions.

Do I need to teach hand signals along with verbal commands?

You should always teach hand signals alongside verbal cues because dogs are naturally visual learners who respond rapidly to body language. Pairing a hand motion with your spoken word creates a dual-cue system that improves clarity during training sessions.

Conclusion

Mastering these five foundational commands builds a deep language of trust and mutual respect between you and your growing puppy. Short, positive daily practice sessions always yield better behavior than long, frustrating weekend drills.