

Name Game

Aside from the reward marker, our dog's name is honestly one of the most important things they can know. If we teach our dogs their name properly it can almost completely replace a recall cue! The problem with our dog's names is that we tend to use them way too often, and we use them to mean too many different things! Our dog's name can mean "get down" or "drop it" or "stop it". Generally we are looking for it to terminate a behavior, but there's not really any information behind it.

Instead of using it as a swiss army knife cue, our focus is to teach our dogs that their name always means the same thing: stop what you are doing and look at me. Now if you (like me) are a person who likes to chat with their dog, this can be a challenge. If you are this person, I highly recommend trying to use nicknames when you are talking to your dog throughout the day and saving their "formal" name for training or working situations where you really need their attention. If you aren't sure that you would be able to stop using their full name on a regular basis then you can always do the reverse! Teach a nickname as their "pay attention" name. Just make sure you can remember it!

- Start with your dog's focus already on you.
- Say your dog's name, and then immediately mark and treat. Do this 5 times.
- After those 5 treats, wait for your dog to get distracted slightly. Just enough that they turn their head away from you.
- As soon as they do, say their name. If they turn to look at you, mark and treat! Then wait for them to get distracted and do it again.
 - If they don't turn to look at you, count to three and try again. If they don't turn to you after the second attempt, wait for them to refocus on you on their own and then do another 5 treats of just saying their name, mark and treat.
- As your dog is able to respond to their name when they get slightly distracted, slowly start to increase your distraction level. Start by waiting for them to be distracted enough to move away from you slightly, then say their name. Then slowly build up from there.
 - Anytime you practice this when your dog is away from you, make sure to mark when they turn to look at you, don't wait until they reach you. We want to make sure they know we are reinforcing them for looking at us, not necessarily coming to us. You can still deliver the treat when they get to you, just make sure to mark the head turn.
- Anytime you try to make it harder and your dog is unsuccessful, count to three and try again. If they are still unsuccessful, go back to their last point of success and practice there for a little longer.
 - It can also be good to look at the step you made and see if you can find a smaller step in between your last success and the new level of difficulty. For example, let's say you are practicing outside. Your dog is able to respond to their name when they are sitting in front of you but looking away, however when you try it after they've taken a few steps away and are sniffing something they aren't able to respond. Next time you are ready to make it harder again, try using their name after they stand up and turn away from you,

but before they really take any steps. Then turned away and one step. Then two steps and so on!