

# Getting Your Dog Café-Ready

By Laura Garber

I share my life with a German Shepherd dog named Trista. From the very start of our life together, I trained her to hold a good down-stay. For those first weeks and months, we actively practiced everywhere: at home, on park benches, in sidewalk cafés. The first stages required frequent food reinforcement, or reward, to keep her attentive and working. As she became more consistent, I spaced out the food rewards, relying more on verbal encouragement. And with more time, she accomplished fairly long stretches with no attention from me at all.

Developing this behavior in your dog just takes careful, thorough practice with gradual progression. Here's a step-by-step tutorial that will help you get your dog café-ready:

## Teaching Your Dog To Hold the Down (an Implied Down-Stay)

Some dogs tend to pop up out of the down once they've collected their treat. The way to work on this is to give little morsels, one after the other, in quick succession as long as your dog remains in the *down*. If your dog gets up, mark with an "uh-uh" and the treats stop. Ask for a *down* again and start treat after treat again. Little by little, increase the time between treats, using soft verbal encouragement to bridge the gap between treats. Periodically allow your dog to break the *down* with the release word "OK!" and encourage him to get up, but don't give him a food treat. This way he's learning that being in the *down* is rewarding, getting up is not. Gradually work on you being able to stand between treats without your dog getting up. Also do the exercise while you're in a seated position.

**A Tip:** When working on sedentary exercises like these, it's best if your dog has already had a bit of exercise and is ready for some quiet time. When he's fresh first thing in the morning, he's going to be raring to go and in no

mood for holding a down-stay.

## Next Steps: Proofing

**Duration:** Remember to build on duration gradually. Don't expect him to hold the *down* for a half an hour right from the start. Start with 5 or 10 seconds, gradually increasing it. If you notice that he's frequently breaking from the *down* before you've released him, you may be expecting too much of him; cut back on duration. Set him up for success.

**Distance:** Start incorporating some movement into the exercise. These are really exercises in proofing a stay without the use of the word: With your dog in a *down*, back away a step, then come back to treat. Turn a quarter turn, then a half turn so that he sees your backside, then turn back and come back to treat. Step to the side; do a little hop; walk partway around him – but build gradually. Again, set him up for success!

**Distraction:** At this point, you should be able to stand or sit with your dog beside you, giving occasional treats and bridging with some verbal encouragement. Change venues: practice in different rooms of the house or in the hallway of your apartment building.

**A Tip:** With each jump in difficulty, you need to reward your dog more frequently.

## Taking It On the Road

With your dog's meal in your pocket, take a walk together. Periodically find a place to stop, ask your dog for a *down*, and start feeding him his kibble. After a short time, say "OK, let's go!" and resume your walk. For a hungry dog, the stops along the way will be a very welcome snack. Sit on a park bench, a neighbor's stoop, anywhere you can find a spot. Start with quieter byways and build gradually to streets more active with people,

  


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dogs, and traffic.

**A Tip:** Remember that the outside world is way more distracting than your nice, quiet home, so reward very frequently. If necessary, mix something really yummy in with his kibble or use something altogether better.

### Travels With Trista

These days I take Trista everywhere, on trips across the country involving boat ferries, horse-drawn carriages, motels and shops that allow dogs and, of course, sidewalk cafés. She can go so many places with me precisely because she is a pleasure to be with and around: she lies quietly beside me, bothers no one by soliciting attention or making

noise, tolerates the unexpected with grace, and seems happy just to be included. And our relationship is deepened precisely because of the mutual respect we have for each other and because we can share so much together.

With patient, thorough work, this is the life you can share with your dog, too. He is a café companion in the ruff!



Laura Garber & her dog, Trista



A canine behavior counselor and trainer living in Hoboken, N.J., LAURA GARBER, CPDT, works in the behavior department at the ASPCA in Manhattan. Her company, WoofGang, LLC, is committed to deepening the bonds between dogs and their people through positive training and behavior modification techniques, and it is these same topics that inspire her writing. Write her with questions at [Laura@myWoofGang.com](mailto:Laura@myWoofGang.com).

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