

## 10 Ways To Teach A Sit WITHOUT A Food Lure! Unreal Results For Puppies And Dogs Of All Ages

### Speaker Key

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### Transcript

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SG If you've ever been to a dog training class, there's a very good chance somebody has shown you how to take a lure, put it above your puppy or dog's nose and get them into a sitting position. Well, if you've been following this podcast, you know we don't do things the way other people do it. And that's why in this podcast today, I'm going to share with you the why and the how that I go about teaching the sit 10 different ways. None of them involving a lure.

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Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I'm going to share with you, yes, the 10 ways that I teach a sit, and yes, I use each and every one of those methods. I'm going to share with you why I do those 10 different methods. Why I think it's really not a great idea for dog training schools to be teaching a sit anyway, and why it's going to be a massive benefit to your dog to pick one or more of these 10 ways and get working on them right away.

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First of all, what is a sit? For me, it's very, very particular, which is why I have so many different ways of training it. Most of the time I want my dog [sitting at my side](#). Either side is fine with me. I would prefer that they're sitting straight. But, what I really would like to see is that my dog's hocks, that is the lower part of their leg, is flat on the ground and that those hocks are lining up with the dog's hips.

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Now what a lot of dogs, especially puppies will do, they'll do a sloppy sit. Sometimes we referred to that as a puppy sit. And I've seen this, some really crazy sits. My brother's rescue Beagle, his legs look like they're going to come right out of the sockets.

So, I want those hocks right under the dog's hips. Why? Not just because it looks good, but guys, it really contributes to that dog's development. If the dog is always sitting sloppy it affects not only the way that the muscles are developed as the puppy grows it also affects things like their chiropractic alignment, potentially affecting their digestion or breathing if they're really sitting horribly.

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So that's my goal, hips and hocks aligned. And what happens for most dogs, if you do this right, the dog's toes and knees are also aligned. So, if the toes are winging out, chances are you need some work on your dog's or your puppy's fitness. And the way I teach sits might just help that. Just a little bit of foreshadowing for you right there.

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So, I want my dog to be functionally correct when they sit, I'd like them to sit fast. Why do I care about sitting fast? Because I think it's just more fun for the dog. The dog is expressing their joy when they're doing things fast. I prefer that the dog not sit in front. Now, if and when I do competition obedience, which is a sport that I really do love. It will be a very specific place in front that I want my dog to sit. Other than that, I don't want my dog sitting in front of me, which is where most people reinforce their dogs.



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So, their dogs find it very reinforcing to sit in front of them. But I want my dog at my side, because I want to be able to walk, I want to be able to jog. And I don't want my dog tripping me up. And for those of us who do sports, it really is very inconvenient if our dog is constantly crossing our path. So, the more reinforcing you do with your dog at your side, guess what? Your dog's going to pull on leash less. And they're going to find more value to be here, so they're not going to get underfoot.

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So, we want our dog to sit tidy, we want a dog to sit at our side. Yes, for those of you who do obedience, there's an occasional time you might want them in front, but that's a very specific time. We want our dogs to sit fast. We want our dogs to be able to go in a sit both from a stationary position, like from a stand or a down position, and also while they're moving.

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I want my dog to do what's called a push back sit, sometimes. I want my dogs to do what's called a pop sit, where their front paws stay stationary, and they bring their butt up to their front.

Now you could go, "Susan, I just want to train my family pet to sit!" Guess what, you can pick any one of these 10 ways and it'll get the job done. And it will be fun for both of you. All 10 of these. Well, maybe one not. Most of these involve either shaping a behavior or using a target to create a behavior.

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So, let's jump right in and I'm doing these mostly in the order that I would teach them to my own dogs. Now I personally, don't want to teach a sit super early. I'm going to play around with it because of course, puppies are going to go into a sit but I don't want to name the behavior with a young puppy, because most of the time they're sitting in a way that's not functionally correct. And if you put a name on that the puppy may say "Oh yeah, sit. That's when I slop on one hip, that's what you like right?"

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And so, I work at training these behaviors and I don't give them a name. I give them a name when I really, really like them. And you're going to go, "Well Susan, how does my dog know what I want if I'm not saying a word?" Well, as I've mentioned in [podcast episode number 113](#), where I talked about adding cues to behaviors, the dog is going to offer the behaviors based on the placement of the reinforcement and the placement of your target.

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So, let's jump right into that now and start with the first method that I use for teaching puppies and that is a [Tug Game](#). So, I'll get my puppies tugging on a toy and then I'll gently pull it out of their mouth. Slap it on the toy away from them and they dive over it. They got back and forth, back and forth, they're loving this game.

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Now what I'm going to do is I'm going to take that toy. I'm going to hold it up on my chest. The puppy is going to offer, probably bouncing and biting at me. I'm just going to withhold the toy until they offer something different. And it might be like backing up. And if they back away, then I'm going to tell them "Get the toy." And they're going to go again. We're going to keep playing this game until they offer a sit. And they will. They offer a sit; I'm going to immediately say "get it".



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So, they're going to figure out when I withhold a toy from them or something they want, the way to get it isn't by biting and barking and bouncing off me. The way to get it is to go into a sitting position. So, this does a number of things. It starts to build the default position for what I want. It also starts to build joy for the position of sitting because we're doing it in a game of tug. The dog's engaged, they're having fun. Guess what, do you think that sit is going to be slow? Oh, nay nay.

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We're going to have a very quick sit because it's in the process of tugging and a great game with me. So, I use that tug game for pretty much every puppy I've ever owned in my entire life. The second step I take in shaping a sit, and that is all within the confines of [Crate Games](#). Now, [Crate Games](#) is a game that I developed many, many years ago. And you can find information about it, we'll put a link in the show notes.

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And in it the dog actually gets shaped from within the crate. Most often the dog is learning a push back sit where they're pushing their front paws back towards their back paws, which I like to have the two different methods of sitting. So, this is creating that pushback. So, the dog is getting reinforced in position.

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The other thing that [Crate Games](#) helps to teach is the sit stay. So, "you don't leave position until you hear your release word." So that's why it happens right after the tug game, because those two help to build duration for the sitting behavior. And neither one of them need to have a cue.

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The puppy knows when I'm on the floor playing a game, if I withhold the toy, I just automatically offer a sit. The puppy learns if I ever want to get out of this crate, when the hand comes on the door, I just automatically go into a sit. You could go for months without adding a cue to the behavior. Now I know eventually you do want to be able to say "sit" it will be there for you but just be a little more patient.

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The third way, the next method in line when I have a puppy is with bed games. So now I have a puppy that has offered sits in two different ways. And I love to play games where I'm playing with the tug similar to game number one, but I have the puppy in a bed. I'm tugging with them. I tug them off of the bed and I withhold the toy and they'll jump back in the bed.

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I tugged them off of the bed and they go back and forth and eventually they jump up, and in the bed, and they offer a sit. Why? Because of the tugging game. Now you can do this with cookies as well. If you've got an older dog that doesn't like tugging, you're just going to say "search" and throw the cookies away.

Why do I like this? Because the bed has a little barrier. So, this doesn't work with like a flatbed. It's got to be a bed with a little bit of a side, because then I get that dog or puppy jumping over something into a sit. And guess what, it adds that speed. It adds the joy for the game. It adds just another layer of the dog intently going "This is a lot of fun!".



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So, we've got tugging, we've got Crate Games, we've got bed games. Yes, they are all related. And guess what? They are all being shaped. Now the fourth method involves a Target. If you've been on my YouTube page, you may have seen the video [Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#), where we teach our dogs to put their front paws on a target.

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Now I've got my dog with their front paws holding still. I love it. So, what can you do from a position where your paws are holding still? There's very little that the puppy is going to be able to offer. You can use a hand target to get them to a sit here. You could also use a [target stick](#). But they're more likely going to offer because you're going to bring that cookie, I like to put the [target at my side](#).

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I'm going to bring the cookie up over the dog's head and just feed them. They are automatically going to offer a sit because you're up there, their feet, they know not to move. They're looking up, the butt goes down just as a matter of gravity. I got to look up to see you up there and then you can bring the cookie down into position.

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So, the perch gives the job of the dog sitting with their feet together. A lot of my Border Collies like to sit with their feet stretched out as if they're herding something.

By having them now use a perch, I'm getting that tidiness. Front feet together, back feet up on top, hocks under the hips, and the back feet and the front feet close together. That's giving me a nice tidy sit. And this time I'm using a target for those front paws.

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Now the fifth way, I love this method. I love it for dogs or puppies who really struggle getting all of their body parts under themselves. In here, I'll use a plank. So, I'll use a plank with a couple of 2 x 4s underneath it.

You can also just use a solid piece of wood depending on the size of the dog. Like if you've got a really small puppy, you might go something like six or seven inches wide. The standard that I use is nine inches wide.

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You can put two of these together and gradually when the dog gets better at bringing their legs underneath them, you're just going to go to one plank. You can also just use a cardboard box and take like one side out of it.

I would make sure that the sides are maybe only, I don't know, an inch or two inches high. And that creates a barrier that the dog knows "I need to sit within this." Of course, you can keep the edge all around, I just make it easier for the dog to load in.

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Now Bob and Marian Bailey when they were teaching cats to do long duration [Sit Stays](#), they used a box as well. Because it created that nice tidy sit and it gave the animals a barrier that 'this is where I would like you to sit'. It's kind of like a combination of the plank and Crate Games that created the understanding that this is where you need to stay.



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I like the plank because the plank is up off the ground and the dog has to physically use the adductor muscles to keep their hocks under their hips. Now with a box, they can use the outside edges of the box to rest their legs on. So, a plank is really my preference here, but the same thing goes. I would just get the dog up on a plank, the planks beside me.

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You could even put the plank beside a wall so that, what can you do from this position? I've got to look all the way up there. I'm probably going to go into a sit. I'm going to reinforce that. Eventually you want to move that plank away from the wall getting a nice tight sit. Leading us to method number six. So, we've got front perch target, we've got the plank target, and now we're using a target stick.

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So, you're going to teach the dog to touch their nose to the target. You can move that target around anywhere you want, then the dog's nose is going to follow it. Now you can just put it above the dog's head, much like they would have done a food lure. Why is this different? Because the dog does not want to eat the target stick.

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The value happens because we've conditioned them to touch the target stick to get a cookie. You can just get one of those wiffle balls, practice golf balls and put it on a wooden dowel and that is your target stick. Get your dog beside you, put the stick over their head and they're going to reach up to touch it with their nose. Ta-da! Their backend is going to fall into a sit and there you've got your position.

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Why do I like the target stick? I might use that when I want to get the dog to sit further away from me, or I love this for getting the dog from the front into the side. That's a quick and fun way when you're working with a puppy from the front into the side. I have also use this most recently to teach my youngest dog This! to line up between my legs.

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So go in between my legs into a sit position, I've used a target stick for that. Method number seven, this is shaping and it's very similar to the bed games in that we're just using cookie throws. So, your dog's going to be near you in a sit, down, stand. It doesn't matter.

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And you're going to give [your cue 'search'](#), throw the cookie. I'd like to throw it in a corner, not so far away. And the dog's going to come back. Anything different gets reinforced. So, the dog comes back, they're in a stand, say 'search', throw it over the head. The next time they come back, they are not going to get reinforced for that.

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So, they're going to offer something different. It might be a down. Reward that once, but do not reward that more than once. Search, throw the cookie. Now this game can be done in conjunction with the paws up on the perch if you're doing a sit in front or it can be done with a plank. That's what I like to do to get my dogs coming up in a front position is doing the search game where the dog has to go and chase the cookie and then come back into position.



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What's great about this game is that we are doing many, many repetitions of the same behavior. The dog comes in, they eventually learn you want them to sit, they sit, you say 'search,' you throw a cookie. Make sure you're throwing with both hands because if you're only throwing with one hand the dog will start sitting crooked.

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They'll be sitting towards that hand to get ready to spin and go back. You can also mix up with throwing behind you so that they don't second guess and get ready to turn around. So, the search game, it allows you to reset and sit, reset and sit, reset and sit. This is really important when we're wanting our dogs to learn, number one, to come in while you're moving into a sit and also to jump up on a plank and get your body all tucked in into a nice fast sit.

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And of course, you can build duration from this as well. Just don't say 'search' for maybe a second or two then five seconds and then back to two seconds, eventually maybe one or two minutes. But why would you want your dog sitting that long, for a game, right?

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Fast and fun while we're building understanding. And that leads to method number eight. I use this with my puppies just as a fun way of entertaining them when we're in the kitchen. So, I get near a cupboard door, a countertop, my puppy is beside me so now my leg and the counter, you can do this with a wall, creates a little alley.

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Again, what can a puppy do? They might spin out in front. In which case you can take like a box or something that they're not going to step up on to create a boundary. And they're beside you. The counter is right there. They're going to look up and eventually very quickly they offer sit, I say 'search', throw the cookie behind me, they grab the cookie.

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I'm looking at the spot they were just sitting in. So, they'll come right back to where I'm looking, and they'll sometimes offer sit. Use your perch right there. Give them a target for their front feet. You can get rid of that box in front, use a perch for their front feet, throw the cookie again.

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You can use a perch instead of the box. You can just shape this with a clicker. The moment the dog comes back, click them when they get near your leg. You click near your leg four or five times; they are not going to go by that leg. Now it's "what can you do beside my leg?" The sit happens very, very quickly. So, shaping the behavior near a cupboard in your kitchen, something I do with all of my young puppies.

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Method number nine. And that is capturing your dog sitting. Now you might think, "well you've taught them all these other ways why would you ever do this?" I love this method. Here's when I use it. When my dog appropriately greets somebody, they go into a sit position I'm immediately going to go in and reinforce that.



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Why would they ever just randomly offer a sit when [most dogs like to jump up](#)? Because we've done so much value building for the sit position. Of course, it's going to be one that they will offer if the person that they're greeting ignores them until they offer that sit. When I go to open the front door and the puppy or the dog immediately goes into a sit, I will reinforce that with either a cookie, me saying "yes," or just opening the door.

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So, capturing random sits around the house helps to build value for the puppy, letting you know what they want. My puppy This! that's how she tells me she needs to go out. Wherever I'm working, wherever I am in the house, she just comes up and sits beside me and looks at me. "Oh, you need to go out." I have no idea why she's decided that's how she's going to tell me, but that's what she's decided. Maybe because that sit it's such a highly reinforced position.

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And the tenth and final way that you can teach your dog a sit without ever using a food lure and that is free shaping. Get a bowl of cookies, get a clicker, just hang out with your puppy and wait and see what they offer. Now this is the tenth and final way, because this is something I rarely do. I would have to say it's probably something I never do. I'm just putting it out there as an option of ways to get your dog to sit without using a food lure.

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Why is it something that I would never do? Well, I just showed you nine amazing ways that I do all the time, so why would I go to something that's a little bit more random, it isn't quite as fast, I could get sloppy sits. Yes, you can by successive approximations gradually get a better sit. But why leave it to random gradual shaping when you could use either targeting or fun shaping to get the behaviors you want?

If you're listening to this podcast, jump over to YouTube and you will see demonstrations of each and every method that I've mentioned in this podcast. I would love to hear from you. I would love to get your feedback. How many of these methods have you tried? And if you haven't tried one, please give it a go and let me know what you think. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 113: Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both](#)

[Podcast Episode 89: Why Dogs Should Not Tug: The Truth Revealed](#)

[Get Crate Games Online](#)

[YouTube Video: Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#)

[YouTube Video: Target Stick Training Part One](#)

[YouTube Video: Target Stick Training Part Two](#)

[Podcast Episode 32: 20 Easy Ways to Exercise Your Dog at Home \(Search Game\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 134: How To Teach A Dog Stay WITHOUT Luring, Collar Pops Or Using The Word "Stay"](#)

[Podcast Episode 121: How To Stop Dogs Jumping Up On People](#)



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### About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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