

# Advanced training: Load and Unload a Washing Machine



This guide provides clear, practical steps to teach your dog how to load and unload a washing machine. It's a fun and functional way to build confidence and helpful skills with your dog.

**This skill is only to be introduced once your dog has a confident general retrieve to your hand/lap (see the “Advanced training: Retrieve” training guide for more information about this task).**

## Step 1: Build Confidence Around the Machine

Let your dog explore the washing machine before starting any formal training. Drop treats nearby, then inside the drum, to help them feel comfortable. Remove rattling collars or place a towel inside if the metal surface worries them.

## Part 1: Teaching the “Load” (Putting Laundry In)

### Step 2: Use a Target (e.g. a Frisbee or target mat)

Place a target mat or frisbee on your lap or hold it in your hand. Ask your dog to fetch a small, soft item (like a sock) and place it on the target. Reward your dog for placing the item on the target.

### Step 3: Strengthen the Target

Hold the target in your hand and present it in different positions, such as by your side or directly in front of you. Ask your dog to fetch the soft item and place it on the target. Praise and reward them each time they successfully place the item on the target.

### Step 4: Move the Target Gradually

As your dog grows in confidence and knows to aim for the target, slowly move the target closer to the washing machine. Keep rewarding as your dog learns to bring the item to the new target location.

### Step 5: Place the Target Inside the Machine

Now place the target inside the washing machine drum. Ask your dog to “fetch” the item and reward them once the item is on the target inside the washing machine, place the treats on the target. It may help to point towards the target in the machine, so they don't try to bring the item to your lap. Once your dog has a strong fetch you can move onto introducing the “load” cue.

### Step 6: Introduce the “load” cue

Ask your dog to “fetch” the item, then say “load” as they approach the target inside the washing machine. Once they place the item on the target, offer praise and reward directly on the target location to reinforce the behaviour. Use your finger to point to the washing machine if needed to reinforce the “load” cue if needed.

### Step 7: Remove the Target

Once confident, remove the target altogether. Continue asking your dog to load the item into the machine using just the verbal cue. Reward at the back of the drum to encourage full placement.

### Step 8: Increase Complexity

Start handing items directly to the dog to load. Practice with multiple items, one after another. Ignore any attempts to remove items – only reward successful loads.

## Part 2: Teaching the “Unload” (Taking Laundry Out)

### Step 9: Introduce the Unload Separately

It's best to teach each skill separately to avoid confusion – always use a different session from 'loading'. Place one item inside the drum and say “fetch it”. Reward the dog when they bring it to your hand.

### Step 10: Add the Cue “Unload”

Once your dog is consistently retrieving items from the drum, begin saying “Unload” just before they do so. Encourage them to bring the item to you or place it in a laundry basket. You can use the target mat again to guide placement, gradually phasing it out as their understanding becomes more reliable.

### Step 11: Progress to Larger Items

Gradually increase item difficulty: try towels, sheets, or heavier laundry. Allow multiple tries, reward persistence and effort. Encourage confidence and a full reach into the drum. If your dog knows the “pull” cue, this can be helpful to use when removing larger items such as towels.

### Step 12: Progress to Wet Items

Once your dog can confidently retrieve larger dry items, start introducing wet items. Begin with smaller wet items and gradually increase their size, just as you did in step 11. Remember to encourage your dog to reach fully into the drum and build their confidence at each stage.

### Top tips

- Keep sessions short and fun, and always end on a positive.
- Use high-value rewards and lots of praise.
- Allow your dog to think, give them time to figure it out.
- Don't mix loading and unloading in the same session until both are fluent.
- Reward only for correct actions, ignore mistakes calmly.
- Start with smaller, dry items and progress to wet / larger items when your dog is confident.

