

Advanced training: Pull

Start by practising this skill at home first, where there are fewer distractions. You should always start teaching any new tasks in an environment that your dog knows, feels secure and where there are no distractions. Once your dog has progressed and is reliably performing the new task, then you can start trying in new environments with distractions gradually being introduced.

In the following exercises you will not need to physically manoeuvre your dog into position. By allowing your dog to choose where they go, this allows them to consent to performing the task you are teaching them.

When teaching new tasks, you may need a 'special treat' such as sausage, chicken, or ham cut into small pieces to encourage the dog to focus on you.



Teaching the pull

This part of the pull exercise is the foundation. Once the dog has learnt this element, it will be used to help teach all the other pull tasks.

1. Start by sitting in a chair or mobility aid and have the object that want the dog to pull in your hand. This could be a rope toy or a fleece tug, ideally you want something that your dog likes, and is long enough for them to pull on.
2. With the dog in front of you, wave the tug in front of them, and then mark and treat any contact that the dog makes with the tug. Marking can be done with a voice cue such as "yes" or "good" but remember to always use the same word each time. You can also mark with a clicker - please see separate handout on marking behaviour with your voice or a clicker.
3. At this stage it's all about encouraging the dog to engage with the tug and then marking and rewarding when they do. Some dogs may want to run around excitedly with the tug, and this is fine at this stage.
4. Now it's time to sharpen up the behaviour. Concentrate on teaching the dog to ideally pull on the tug backwards in a straight line and focus on marking and then rewarding whilst the dog is in the action of pulling.
5. Keep repeating, but now practice allowing the tug to pass through your hand, encouraging your dog to move backwards in a straight line whilst pulling the tug, through your hands.
6. Now if your dog is reliably pulling the tug, it's time to add the cue, we use the words "pull pull". Say your cue just as the dog approaches the tug, ready to pull.
7. When practising it's good to toss a treat a few feet away in a straight line, in between attempts, as this will you to practice saying your cue each time the dog returns from getting their treat
8. You will now need to practice, and this will help you sharpen up the behaviour and improve your timing of when to mark, treat and say your cue.

Top Tips

- If your dog lacks interest in the tug, try attaching a favourite toy to the end of it.
- Make sessions fun; by treating them like you're playing a game.

Opening the door

It's now time to put the pull task into good use; teaching the dog to do specific tasks that utilise the pull that it has just learnt. In this first task we are going to train the dog to pull on a cord attached to the door handle, enabling the dog to open the door when we ask them to.

When first teaching this new task, remember to practice in the home, ideally with no distractions. Remember to keep sessions short to avoid your dog becoming frustrated or losing attention, and you may need to use a higher value treat like cheese, chicken or hot-dog. Please remember to be enthusiastic and to keep sessions fun as this will help your dog to learn more effectively.

Depending on your mobility aid and dexterity, it may be easier to use a mobility aid or be seated for this exercise. Also consider this when choosing your treats—pick one which is easier for you to handle and give promptly, when your dog succeeds.

Teaching the pull to open door

1. Start by sitting in a chair or mobility aid in front of the door you are going to practice with. Firstly, just practice slowly opening and closing the door in front of the dog, and treat the dog. This gets the dog used to the movement/sound of the door opening and closing.
2. Once the dog is comfortable with the door opening and closing it's time to add in the tug. Practice playing tug in front of the door, you could also start to move the door handle as the dog approaches, then use your marker word and treat.
3. Now practice holding the tug next to the door handle, before encouraging the dog to pull by saying your cue "pull pull" now say your marker word and toss the treat as before, this will allow you to have more practice repetitions.
4. When the dog is comfortable then it's now time to attach the tug to the door handle. When you first do this it's important to stop the door from opening, if possible, lock the door or you could put your foot or mobility aid in front of the door to prevent it moving. Now ask the dog using your cue "pull pull" to pull on the tug. You may need to wiggle the tug a little to encourage the dog to pull, now use your marker word and treat.
5. The next step is to practice but this time allowing the door to open, but this can be scary for some dogs. To help with this, use your foot or mobility aid to stop the door from opening fully/too quickly, then gradually increase how far the door can open, step by step until your dog is comfortable with the door opening fully when they pull on the tug.
6. The next challenge is to practice when the door is closed, this can be difficult at first, so you may want to initially have the door just slightly open, before trying with it closed. Remember to use lots of vocal encouragement, especially when the dog manages it. When they first do it, you can give them several treats once (this is called a jackpot).
7. Once the dog can open the door when it's closed, you can practice by throwing a treat and then saying your cue "pull pull" as the dog approaches the door.

Top Tips

- Always practice on the same door to start, before moving to other doors. When trying on another door remember that you may need to go back a few steps and build things up.
- When attaching the the tug to the door, experiment with it's location – sometimes having the cord closer to the edge of the handle (secured with elastic bands) for example, makes it easier for the dog to open)

Clothes pull: Part 1

Now you have taught the dog to pull when you say your cue: “pull pull”, you can now teach the dog to help you undress, by asking them to pull at your your clothes to help take them off. When teaching the clothes pull, you can use the same cue “pull pull” and, like the previous pull exercises, remember to be enthusiastic with your encouragement as this will help your dog to succeed.

Depending on your mobility aid and dexterity, it may be easier to use a mobility aid or be seated for this exercise. Also consider this when choosing your treats—pick one which is easier for you to handle and give promptly, and one that the dog finds super tasty.

Teaching the pull to help take off your gloves and socks

When teaching your dog to help take off your gloves or socks the way you teach it will be the same, you will just need to encourage them to pull either your glove or sock.

1. First you will need to hold the glove/sock in your hand and encourage your dog to pull it, by wiggling it about and when your dog pulls, you can use your marker word and treat the dog. Remember to keep it fun, like a game and be enthusiastic with your praise, and repeat, remembering that you can throw treats so you can get in more repetitions.
2. When the dog is readily pulling at your glove/sock, you can add in your cue “pull pull” just as you offer the glove/sock to the dog to pull, before saying your marker word and then treating your dog.
3. The next step is to repeat the above repetitions but have the glove/sock just on the end of your hand/foot. At this stage make it easy for your dog to remove by having it just on the end of your hand/foot. You may need to wiggle your hand/foot whilst saying your cue” pull pull” to help encourage the dog to help remove your glove/sock. To help you practice you can say your marker word and then treat the dog once they’ve removed your glove/sock, which will help them to drop it so you can practice again.
4. Now gradually put on your glove/sock a little bit more on each time, until your dog can pull it off once it’s fully on your hand/foot. Remember to use your cue “pull pull” just as you offer your glove/sock in front of your dog to pull off. Once the dog has removed your glove/sock, use your marker word and then treat your dog. You can throw the treat as this will allow you to time to put your glove/sock back on so you can practice more repetitions.
5. Now practice until you are happy that the dog is reliably pulling off your gloves/socks when you say your cue “pull pull”. You can now start to introduce different gloves/socks, maybe try ones that are longer or tighter and that may be more difficult to take off. Remember if you’re making the task more difficult that you may need to use extra encouragement and when the dog succeeds you could reward them with a jackpot (a handful of treats instead of just one).

Top Tips

- When practicing allow enough space for your dog to be able to pull backwards without bumping into anything.
- In the early stages make it a game, the dog may run around with the sock/glove, this is ok.
- Start by using loose fitting gloves and socks before trying with tighter fitting ones.
- If your dog isn’t sure about pulling the glove/sock but is confident pulling the tug from the earlier stages, try attaching the glove/sock to the end of your tug toy 1st

Clothes pull: Part 2

Another task that you can teach the dog when you have taught a pull, is helping to take off your jumper or coat. We do this by teaching them to pull on your sleeves which helps you to remove your top. Like the other pull exercises we make it fun, marking and rewarding this behaviour. When the dog is doing it reliably, we start to introduce your cue: “pull pull”.

Teaching the pull to help take off your jumper or coat

1. Start by simply playing tuggy with the dog, use the tug that you used to teach the dog to pull. Make it fun and use your cue “pull pull”, remembering to use your marker word. Treat the dog for pulling on the tug.
2. Once you have engaged the dog in some pulling on the tug, put the tug down your sleeve and have the tug hanging out the end. (Don't actually put the clothing on at this stage, just hold the sleeve loose in your hands)
3. Encourage the dog to pull on the tug, use the cue: “pull pull”. Use your marker word and treat your dog when the dog pulls the tug. Remember throwing the treat will allow you to keep practising by allowing your dog to keep coming back to pull on the tug.
4. Keep the end of the tug next to the end of your sleeve and encourage the dog to start to pull on the end of your sleeve. This can be achieved by slowly pulling in the tug until only the end of your sleeve is visible. When the dog is pulling on your sleeve, use lots of encouragement and your marker word and treat your dog. Keep repeating; you can move your sleeve about to encourage your dog to pull on it, each time using your marker word and treating the dog for pulling your sleeve.
5. Now take away the tug and encourage your dog to pull on your sleeve. When your dog is reliably pulling on your sleeve, we want to make taking it off easy for the dog. Have your arm loosely in your sleeve but don't have your top fully on. Encourage your dog to pull at your sleeve. Use your cue: “pull pull”, and be enthusiastic when the dog removes your sleeve, use your marker word and treat your dog. Repeat the exercise keeping your sleeve loose, helping the dog to be successful.
6. Practise this with both arms, and then make it harder for the dog by putting the sleeve further up your arm and over your shoulder. Do this gradually, using your cue: “pull pull”. Remember to praise the dog and use your marker word. Treat each time you increase the difficulty.
7. Finally, you can now practice with your top fully on. This can be a difficult pull task for dogs so you will need to use lots of encouragement. You can use your cue, “pull pull” as you encourage the dog to pull your sleeve, and use lots of praise when the dog is successful. Once your dog is doing the sleeve pull reliably you can start practicing on the other sleeve, and then different tops and coats.

Top Tips

- Once your dog can pull off your top and you want to progress to different tops and jackets, remember to go back a few steps to make it easier for your dog, this will help them to succeed.
- Start with lighter tops and build up to heavy winter coats. Consider different fabrics and how these may feel in your dog's mouth, so each piece of clothing will need introducing separately.