

Teaching your dog the Companion Dog exercises

By Ingrida Robinson, Teressa Keenan and George Jensen

Training your PBGV to be in formal obedience can be a lot of fun and very rewarding for you and him. It will only take a few minutes of training every day to earn a Companion Dog (CD) title, and your dog will love you for it! The exercises that are a part of obtaining a CD title are very similar to the behaviors that we want our dogs to have in the home. Around the house the behaviors such as come, sit, stay, heel (or walk nicely) and down usually don't need to be performed with the precision needed for formal obedience, but are easily refined for that. The formal obedience exercises were developed by the American Kennel Club to demonstrate the usefulness of the purebred dog as a companion to man. In the ring the dog's usefulness is demonstrated by performing these actions as exercises. They aren't intended to show a "robotics" dog doing a specified routine in the obedience ring. (And there's no way a PBGV would allow its handler to train it to perform as a robot, now is there?) In fact, there is emphasis on how smoothly and naturally the exercises are performed as a team.

If you have never titled a dog under AKC obedience regulations, the AKC rules require that the handler of the dog entered in a Novice A class be a member of the dog's immediate family. Thus, when you train for formal obedience you are enhancing your relationship with your PBGV and the training that you give Fido makes him a better companion for you. The authors of this article have found that their animals look forward to this training with enthusiasm. If the training is performed on a regular basis the dogs will, in their own way, ask to be trained. It's fun! To find out more about the AKC rules governing formal obedience you can obtain a copy of the rules handbook from the AKC representative at a dog show or the AKC website (<http://www.akc.org/registration/rules/RO2999.cfm>). There are several other organizations that offer obedience trials. Two of these are the United Kennel Club (UKC) and the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC). Their regulations are similar to the AKC's with some slight variations. This article will address training for AKC trials. Every exhibitor should read and understand all of the obedience regulations before participating in a trial.

There are six scored exercises for the CD title. Each exercise has specific parts that must be performed by the dog and/or handler working together as a team. The AKC calls these parts the "principal features" of the exercise. As you and your dog perform the principal features the judge deducts points for performance errors and assigns a score. The score is based on how well the handler/dog team performs. To earn a qualifying score the team must score a minimum of 170 of the total available 200 points, and must earn at least 50% of the available points for each exercise. To achieve a CD title the

team must earn three qualifying scores at three trials under three different judges.

There are 200 points available for a dog and his handler when they enter the ring. These points are divided between the exercises as follows (which are performed in the ring in this order): Heel on Lead and Figure eight - 40 points, Stand for Examination - 30 points, Heel off Lead -30 points, Recall - 30 points, and Long Sit and Long Down - 30 points each. In general, points are deducted if Fido or the handler does not perform the principal feature(s) of each exercise with certain precision, if the handler does not follow the judge's instructions, if the handler talks to the dog during an exercise, or if he gives the dog extra commands during an exercise. The handler and Fido are only competing against themselves. You can use this as a test of how well you have trained as a team. Therefore, entering a trial gives an indication of how much you have accomplished together. Looking at it this way, you can go have fun, get the bonus of a qualifying score, and know what you have achieved!

In the following paragraphs we will explain ways to teach Fido what he needs to do in order to earn a qualifying performance with you at an obedience trial. All three authors participated in the preparation of this article; therefore the approaches for teaching each exercise are a compilation of their individual training methods. You may find other ways to help Fido understand better.

After teaching your dog the principal features of each exercise, you will need to practice around distractions. Distractions will help your dog understand that the action must be performed despite what is going on around him. In the beginning the distractions will be minimal. You will introduce the distractions so that he has an error rate of about 25%. This is good! It will help him understand what success is by producing a success rate of 75%! Errors don't mean that your dog is being bad; it just means he's not performing the exercise the way the AKC judge will evaluate his performance.

Here's how you'll teach Fido to be successful. Out of four repetitions with the same distraction, your teaching phase would look like this: repetition # 1 and #2 let your dog be successful (the distraction is far enough away to ensure he succeeds), the 3rd repetition should initially ensure failure (bring the distraction close enough to cause dog to fail, but not to overwhelm the dog), and the 4th time you will cause the dog to again be successful by moving the distraction at a distance midway between where it was for the #2 and #3 repetitions.

In the beginning, you'll realize that there are hundreds of distractions (let's use 680 as a pretend number) that will prevent your dog from standing still while the judge touches him on the Stand For Exam exercise. By training at the 75% success rate, you will ultimately whittle down that number of distractions to a couple dozen. You'll teach him to achieve success by exposing him to enough of those 680 distractions that he'll ignore many other distractions and pay attention to what you want him to do. For example: he'll gradually learn that he can stand still while: a man stands 100/80/60/10 feet away from him; a squirrel runs across his path 300/December 200/100/6 yards away; a man wears a floppy tie/pants with cat hair on them touching him; he stands on pavement/on sand/on grass/in your bed/on a table/in snow/on bubble wrap/in a puddle; a fishing pole/small stick/wet sponge strokes him; he wears a hat; leaves/Styrofoam peanuts/dog kibble fall on his head; his handler wears extra large shoes; his handler wears a large sombrero; his handler wears large paper bag on his head; his handler stands two/four/six/twelve feet away; his handler walks 1/4, 1/2, 3/4 circle around him; a judge wearing a long flowing floppy skirt bends over him; a towel is draped over his back/over his head/entire body; his tail is being held still; the judge person holds a clipboard/big biscuit/squeaky toy; he is being photographed; he is being measured at the withers; his food bowl is pushed under him; a ball rolls under him; the neighbor kids pet him; a bitch in heat enters the room; Frisbees fly back and forth over his head. **WHEW!** That's, count them, **fifty** distractions! (Go ahead and steal our distraction ideas. Some of these have really happened to our dogs, and training in goofy ways is very interesting for Fido.)

The Novice exercises for earning a CD title are the fundamentals for the higher Open (CDX) and Utility (UD) levels of competition. If you plan to eventually show in Open or Utility, it will be easier if you precisely train the dog's body now while he's learning the fundamentals.

Heel position is one of the most basic positions for formal obedience. All of the exercises in the three formal obedience levels begin with the dog in heel position. Heel position is also sometimes difficult for the dog to learn because the dog must be in the proper heel position whether he is sitting, lying down, standing next to you, or moving with you during exercises. Both you and your dog need to understand what heel position is because there are times when the dog must place himself into heel position beside you, and there are times when the handler must position himself in proper heel position in relation to the dog. Don't get discouraged. Heel position can take several months to train. The handler must be able to recognize when the dog is in heel position, and when he isn't. It will take the dog a while to learn this also.

So, What Is Heel Position?

The AKC defines heel position as: "The dog should be straight in line with the direction in which the handler is facing, at the handler's left side. The area from the dog's head to shoulder is

to be in line with the handler's left hip. The dog should be close, but not crowding, so that the handler has freedom of motion at all times." Ok, that's the theory.

What Is Heel Position In Terms Of Practical Application?

Let's put the theory of heel position into its actual application. The dog's heel position should be constant...it should not vary or fluctuate whether you and Fido are static in a position or while moving. So we need to teach Fido that slowing down (lagging) isn't correct heel position, and neither is getting too far ahead of the handler (forging). And looking at him from the front and back means that he isn't so close that the handler or dog bump into or trip over each other (crowding), nor is Fido so far away from the handler such that they no longer look like a team (wide). The terms lagging, forging, crowding and wide are not AKC definitions. If you or your dog resembles any of these four characteristics, the judge just deducts points for you and/or your dog being out of heel position. Now, here are visual descriptions of what heel position is, and isn't, as shown from the side view and front view.



Sitting at good heel position.



Sitting head-on crowded.

The first photo shows good heel position. This handler has chosen to align the top of the dog's ear with her hipbone. The dog's head must always line up exactly this way whenever the

dog is in heel position. And when this handler tells her dog to get into heel position, this exact position is the only correct place to be.

The second photo shows the dog being too close. If the handler needed to turn left while walking the dog would be in her way and bump her left foot. This would limit her freedom of movement. Wouldn't it look better if the dog was about inch or so further away from the handler?

How To Get Your Dog Into Heel Position

An easy way to get Fido into the proper position is to lure him there by using food. (In this article we will always refer to food, but if your dog is more motivated with toys, by all means use those!) With Fido on leash, lure him into a sit such that the area between the dog's head and shoulders is in line with your left hipbone. Using a full-length mirror is helpful for this so that you can see whether his back and butt are in straight alignment with you. Ask yourself whether Fido's spine (all the way back to his butt) is parallel to yours. Now position yourselves facing the mirror while in heel position. Is

Fido too close to you? Is he crowding? Or is he too wide? For heel position his head (where the ear attaches to the head) will probably be about five inches away from your left of your knee. PERFECT!

Compare the difficulty of your dog knowing heel position to this analogy: let's say that whenever you park your car in the garage, the car must always be equidistant between the three walls and garage door. You can't see how close the front bumper is to the wall before you hit the wall. And if you don't drive in far enough, the garage door will smash the back of your car. You certainly don't want to bang the car door into the wall when you open it to get out. How will you know exactly where to position your car? What markers will you use to know that your four tires are correctly in position? Ah, ha! You hang a little rubber ball from the ceiling exactly such that when the front windshield touches it, and the rubber ball is in alignment at the twelve o'clock position on your steering wheel, your entire car will be perfectly positioned in the garage. This means your car is not forging, not lagging, not too far to one side or the other. Can you visualize the rubber ball being the food lure above Fido's head?

Now your job is to practice getting Fido into the proper heel position in a variety of places with a variety of distractions. You may have to continue using your food to lure him into heel position each time you go to a different location or when you encounter new distractions. But soon he'll understand the concept that when you say "Place" (or whatever word you use to designate that position), it means that perfect spot on your left side.

How To Use Food To Keep Fido In Heel Position

One of the keys to teaching heel position is to teach Fido where to position his body in relation to the food that your left hand is holding. This means that your left hand should always be in the same position while holding the food so that Fido can properly align himself under the food. (You wouldn't appreciate someone moving the rubber ball in your garage as you're trying to steer your car in, would you?) Go back to the mirror scenario. Notice where your left arm and hand have to be in order for Fido to be in perfect position. It's important to always keep your left arm and hand in this same position while using the food, even when you are both moving. If you're not able to crouch down to hold the food at your dog's nose level, see the section below on how to use a dowel or stick with food on it.

Moving While In Heel Position

The principle feature of this first exercise in the Novice class, Heel on Leash and Figure Eight is the ability of the dog and handler to work as a team. Both of these heeling patterns are scored as one exercise, but they are really two very different concepts for your dog to learn. We will explain these as two separate exercises to teach to your dog.

Use Of A Dowel Or Stick Since our PBGVs are short, a stick or dowel can be a useful tool for teaching your dog to heel and move with you, and for positioning your dog for sitting next to you. The dowel is used to gently tap the dog's body into the correct place or position, or to use it as a barrier to define a space within which the dog must stay. The dowel or stick should be about three feet long and no more than 1/2" diameter. You can also use a piece of 1/2" PVC tubing. By putting a 45° ell (elbow) on the end of the tubing you have a way of giving a treat to your PBGV without needing to bend over.

One of the ways to use the dowel is for a solid leash. By inserting it thru the "D" ring of the dogs collar it serves as an extension of your arm to keep Fido in heel position while training him. The dowel can be used either with or without a normal training lead. With the dowel held vertically from your shoulder your arm is straight so that you can teach Fido where he is to walk beside you without jerking on the lead. When you turn, the dog is gently kept in proper position during the action and cannot go wide, crowd you, lag or forge. Once Fido gets the idea of where he is supposed to be, you can quietly slip the dowel out of the "D" ring, but keep it right next to him, to see if he will remain in the correct heeling position.



Use of dowel for a solid leash.



Use of dowel to correct lagging or forging.

Another use for the dowel in training Fido to heel is to use it to correct lagging or forging. Here Fido needs to get used to the presence

of the dowel because you will use it to barely touch him to guide him in the proper position. By placing the dowel's tip lightly behind his left ear you can teach him to turn or to speed up. To slow him down touch him lightly on his left shoulder. The dowel held to the outside of the dog also defines his space to walk in (think of it as an alleyway). When you are using the dowel in these ways only touch the dog if he starts to drift away from you. As Fido gets better in maintaining his position only use the dowel when necessary to remind him where he is supposed to be.



Using the dowel to teach turning.



Using the dowel to correct forging or lagging.

Use The Tube To Deliver Treats

Place a bit of Fido's favorite treat in the 45 degree elbow and let him sniff it. Now you can use the end of the ell as a target for him to follow without needing to bend over. By keeping your left hand just above the target (the treat) you will soon be



George and Maggie Sniffing it.

able to transfer your Fido's attention to your left hand. With practice you can turn the ell over and drop the treat in Fido's mouth giving him instant feedback. At the beginning of your training always have a treat in the

ell. A good command while using the dowel in this manner is "pay attention". Once Fido begins to follow the target just be sure the smell is there and soon only use the target when needed. In this way, you can teach your PBGV to get his head up away from those enticing smells emanating from the grass or floor. By holding the dowel in your left hand with the ell in front of Fido's nose and your left hand just above the ell Fido will soon focus on your left hand as the target.



George and Maggie with treat.

Heel On Leash

Using the food as your lure, you will give your dog the command to heel and then start walking

forward. When you say "Fido, heel", step out briskly. Be confident that Fido will be following right along. Of course he will! He's going to be looking up at and licking the food you've got in your left hand or in the ell tube. You will practice walking straight lines and halting, straight lines and

left turns, straight lines and right turns, straight lines and about turns. When the judge orders you to go "fast", you will noticeably speed up to that which is approximately double your regular brisk walking pace. When the judge orders "slow", you will noticeably decrease your speed to about one-half of your brisk regular walking pace. It's also beneficial for the handler to practice footwork without the dog. Practice the turns and speed changes so that you don't trip over your own feet. If you are consistent on how you place your feet when you turn, it will help Fido better understand what he needs to do.



Teressa and Nara going fast.

The Figure Eight

In the obedience ring the Figure Eight is part of the Heel on Lead exercise. Envision the figure eight pattern as a large "X" drawn on the floor connected by two half-circles. The two human posts stand eight feet apart. (At home you can use traffic cones or chairs.) The handler's speed must remain constant. The dog must adjust his speed to remain in heel position with the handler.

The dog and handler set themselves up midway between the posts about two to three feet back from where the imaginary lines of the "X" intersect. (The judge will be standing opposite you.) Starting from this spot allows the dog to stand up and start heeling before he needs to move his body somewhat diagonally in order to remain in heel position; his spine needs to remain parallel with yours. The handler will be walking the



Ingrida and Abraham performing the figure eight exercise.

path of the "X" around the posts. From the starting position the regulations allow you to choose whether you heel to the left or right first, but pick one direction and always go that way in the ring. Just for grins and mind games, though, you would train your dog for either direction!

In our description here we will give directions for starting to the left. The

slow/inside post is the one where the dog is closest to the post, i.e., the dog is between the handler and the post. When you say “Fido, heel”, walk briskly towards the imaginary line of the “X” pattern and turn left heading towards the half-circle around the post. Fido will have to slow down a tiny little bit when he starts the semi-circle. He has a shorter distance to travel on the inside of the half-circle while your pace must remain constant.

On the outside post (the one where the dog is furthest away



Sophie is between Ingrida and the post.

from the post, i.e., the handler is between the dog and the post) the dog will have to speed up because he has the further distance to travel. In the beginning teaching stages encourage the dog to run ahead of you to catch up to the food in your left hand. (Here is where the dowel with a piece of food in it can be useful as a target.) This encouraged speed will help him keep up with you. On the outside post it is very easy for the dog to get distracted, start lagging, or stop completely. You’ll do a lot of practicing around distractions to help him stay in heel position during this part of the pattern.



Ingrida using food and dowel to help Sophie speed up.

Off-Leash Heeling

This is one of the most challenging exercises for many Novice students. But it doesn’t need to be. The dog must be taught to heel off-leash just like he was taught to heel on-leash. Learning off-leash heeling is almost like a separate exercise because the security of the leash is no longer there for both the dog and the handler.



Teresa and Nara who isn't paying attention.

An underlying issue that will keep your dog at your side while heeling is the relationship between you and your dog. Your relationship isn’t important just to heeling off-leash or only to obedience training. It is important between the two of you during your entire lives

together. Fido must want to remain at your side instead of running away from you to sniff the ring, until you release him, and allow him to do so.

Back to heeling off-leash. Remember when your first bicycle had training wheels? For most of us the training wheels came off gradually...they were removed one at a time, or perhaps they got bent out of shape by hitting curbs such that eventually they were useless anyway. Then one day you realized you just didn’t need them anymore because you could ride on two wheels and remain upright! Well, transitioning from on-leash to off-leash is the same. We’ll replace the leash with a very light line or the dowel inserted through the “D” ring of Fido’s collar. The line or dowel will serve the same purpose as the training wheels.

Your light line will be a very lightweight string with a paperclip at the end. The paperclip will be the clip that attaches to the dog’s collar. You’ll tie the other end to your belt loop making sure that if Fido moves away and ends up pulling on the string the knot won’t come undone. The length of the string will be long enough so that it hangs in a nice U-shape under Fido’s chin. Not too long to trip him up, not too short to be taut. The purpose of the lightweight string and the lightweight clip is to give the impression of being off-leash, but the handler has a way to prevent the dog from running away. The handler will never use the string to pull the dog into position. The string is not a leash nor is the dowel. Both can be used at the same time. The string and dowel do not have the same purpose as a leash. If the dog gets out of heel position, the handler will use food and praise to lure the dog back into heel position. The handler will not have to lunge or chase Fido because Fido can’t run away...the string will only be about three or four feet long. The handler won’t get nervous because the dog can’t run off!

Our game-plan for teaching off-leash heeling is identical to teaching on-leash heeling. You will start at square one by using food again to teach Fido the location of heel position. You will teach him to move while remaining in heel position by using the food as a lure. You will teach him to remain in heel position even while moving around distractions. You’re doing great! But Stop! Fido is out of heel position! WHAT NOW! Stay calm. Gently wiggle the fingers of your left hand to get Fido’s attention back onto the food. Or if using the dowel as described earlier, show the piece of food in the ell as the target. Wait until he maneuvers himself back under the food. Praise him and feed him. Wonderful dog, you think to yourself. He’s realizing where he needs to be. Good boy!

You should spend a fair amount of time teaching the heeling and heel position on the light line. You and the dog must be confident and precise at this stage because the next phase is to remove the light line, and heel completely leash-free. When you transition to removing the light line, you will again go back to square one for teaching the dog heeling, including the

use of food. Initially you'll want to do this in some enclosed areas like tennis courts or indoors. However, your dog will catch on to this cool game much more quickly around distractions because the food will be there!

Before we move on to another Novice exercise, let's summarize the concept of heel position and heeling off-leash. Both of these require time to learn, understand and gain confidence, both for the dog and the handler. The handler must be able to recognize when the dog is in or is out of heel position so that it can be promptly rewarded or remedied. You will wean the dog off of the food lure by systematically reducing the number of times he gets fed for his efforts. This entire learning process can take several months; however, it's something that you can always practice. Spend just a couple of minutes every other day on it. In your home, in front of the grocery store, waiting to pick up your children from school, in the retirement center or nursing home. People who are watching will be impressed no matter what! Only you and your Fido will know that you are training!

Stand For Exam

The principal feature of this exercise is that the dog stands in position before and during the examination without displaying resentment. Resentment doesn't just mean baring his teeth and looking fierce. It would also include dogs that appear shy or resentful of being touched. The more your dog is used to standing, without moving his feet while being touched by a variety of people and around various distractions, the better. If your dog knows how to stand for conformation, then you've got a majority of this exercise accomplished!

If your dog is fidgety in the beginning, use chutes to help "ground" the dog. The chutes can be made of wood or plastic, but must be heavy and sturdy enough so that the dog doesn't just push them out of the way with his fidgety feet. If he tends to creep forward, use a third piece crossways in the front. If he creeps backwards, use a piece crossways in the back. You could also build a multi-purpose chute resembling a rectangular box made from PVC pipe material. Gradually you'll reduce the size of the chute or box.



Caffrey standing in wooden chutes.

Now that Fido is standing there, looking so handsome, tell him to stay. Walk six feet straight ahead and only then turn around to face him. The judge will approach Fido to allow Fido to sniff the back of his hand. With one hand, the judge will touch the top of Fido's head, his body and his hindquarters. The judge will step back and order the handler to return to his dog.

You will walk counterclockwise behind Fido, and return to heel position.

If Fido is really fidgety with accepting strangers touching him, start by teaching him the sit-for-exam in the chute. Sit-for-exam isn't an AKC exercise, but sitting will help him more readily accept being touched without moving. This will also help him understand the concept that he must remain seated, in the chute, during mild distractions. As he becomes more comfortable with the distractions and an assortment of people touching him, teach him to stand in the chutes. Then proceed through the same increasing level of distractions as used in the sit-for-exam.

The Recall

This is the last of the individual exercises. The principal features of the recall exercise are that the dog stays where left until called by its handler, and that the dog respond promptly to the handler's command or signal to come. After completing the heel off-leash exercise, the judge will direct you and your dog where to set up for the start of the recall exercise. The exercise begins with Fido sitting next to you in heel position. The judge will ask you if you are ready. Upon your affirmative reply the judge will tell you to "leave your dog". You may give a verbal command and/or a signal to the dog to stay while you walk to the opposite side of the ring, turn and face your dog. Your arms must be hanging naturally at your sides. The judge gives the order to "call your dog". You may only give a verbal command or a signal for your dog to come to you. Ideally the dog will come directly to you at a fast trot or run and will sit straight and be centered in front of you. He should sit close enough so that you can touch his head without excessively bending, stretching or moving your feet. When the judge orders you to "finish", you will give either a verbal command or a signal for your dog to return to heel position. It does not matter whether your dog circles around your right side or swings into position along your left side as long as Fido goes directly to the correct position and sits straight. It's a good idea to position yourself about four feet from the ring barrier when you've walked across the ring. This will allow Fido adequate room to circle around you if he does his finish by going around your right side.



Sophie sitting in front.

The recall is worth a total of 30 points. The dog must remain seated (he cannot lie down or stand up) in the place you leave him with your single command. He must not anticipate coming before being called. He must come on the first command or signal, and he must sit close enough to you after

coming so that you can touch his head. Excessive speed is not necessary, but he should come at a brisk trot or run. Why wouldn't he? He knows that there will be treats somewhere on you or outside the ring after this exercise! Fido should end up sitting in front of you before the judge orders you to "finish" him. What if he doesn't come directly to you? It's acceptable if Fido ends up sitting anywhere within a 360 degree circle of you, close enough so that you can touch him. It's just that a few points would be deducted since he wasn't sitting directly in front of you prior to the judge ordering you to finish the dog.

If you have already taught your dog to come as explained in the previous home obedience article, then teaching this recall exercise will just be a refinement of Fido's coming behavior and adding the finish. For this article we will assume that he already understands that "come" means he should stop what he's doing, look to you for further instructions, and then run toward you so he can be praised and rewarded. For formal obedience, it might be desirable to use a different command than you use for home obedience so that the dog differentiates between coming close enough for petting or cookies, and coming directly to you into a straight front position. For example if you use "come" when you're out on a walk, you might want to use "here" or "front" as your formal obedience word. But start with "come" if your dog is already familiar with that term. You can then change the word after a few repetitions.

As a separate behavior you might want to teach Fido to sit and wait while you walk away. Using the command "wait" rather than "stay" for this. The word "wait" would indicate that Fido should wait until the handler gives him another command that would move Fido from his designated sitting position to do something else. This would be distinguished from the "stay" command that would mean that Fido is to remain in a specific position until the handler comes back to the dog to release him. Using two different words will help Fido understand the difference between the two actions so that he knows what to expect. To teach "wait" start with Fido sitting in heel position. Tell him to "wait" and pivot directly in front of him. If he remains in position, give him a reward and release him from the sit. If this goes well, repeat the previous steps adding one or two steps forward before pivoting to face him. If he holds his position again reward and release. If he moves with you gently put him back in his place to remind him that you want him to wait there. Gradually increase the distance you walk away from your dog before turning and facing him until you are able to go a distance of about 30 feet. Go back to the dog, reward and release.

Once Fido has run to you he needs to properly sit in front. Getting Fido to "front" is very useful in handling your dog whether in obedience or in general life. It's easier to remove the morning newspaper from his mouth if he's sitting directly in front of you, or to take that embarrassing laundry from him

while your guests are watching. If you continue in formal obedience, the dog needs to know how to front for several Open and Utility exercises. Learning to front also teaches the dog to look at your face and pay attention...very important for PBGVs!

Teaching The Front Position

Move Fido directly in front of you and ask him to sit. This is easily done by having him on a lead and gently guiding him to the front position or by using a treat to lure him into the position. When he is sitting upright and straight, centered directly in front of you, close but not touching you and looking up into your eyes, praise him for a "good front" and reward him with great treats and/or a hug. Dropping the treat from your hand held at the center of your body or from your mouth into Fido's mouth so he can catch it is also good way to give him the treat. This way your PBGV learns to look up at your face.

If Fido has trouble getting lined up straight, you can practice this between a wall and a table, or next to a fence, or use the chutes described in the Stand for Exam section. If you use physical objects to help guide Fido into position you will want to gradually make the "walls" shorter and shorter until they are nothing more than a 2 x 4 lying on the ground or lines painted on the ground. You can also use a longer dowel in each hand to guide Fido into correct position. The dowels are extensions of your arms. Hold the dowels so that they are only a bit wider than your dog's width. When he enters this chute, he'll only be able to sit straight. Automatic success! (Eventually Fido will not need any of these visual aids. He will come in straight and centered every time.) As your dog understands where "front" is you can play games that require him to do fronts to earn rewards. For example, heel with Fido and then suddenly take a few steps backwards saying "front" in an upbeat and happy tone. Fido should immediately turn and sit in front of you. Or pivot away from him and ask him to find front position. Use your imagination.



George is guiding Fido into Position.



Fido is in position.

Now you are ready to put the “come” and the “front” parts together. With Fido sitting in heel position, tell him to ‘stay’ and take two or three steps away, turn and face him. Then in a happy upbeat tone tell him to “come, front”. To Fido this might just seem like another front game. As Fido gets the idea of this new game you can gradually increase the distance you go away from him and drop the word “come” so your command is just “front”. The definition of “front” then means: from the sitting position, run or trot briskly towards the handler AND sit straight in front of the handler. AKC only allows the handler one command or signal by which to get the dog from where he’s sitting to the front position.

The Finish

To complete the recall exercise Fido needs to move from sitting in front of the handler to the heel position. This is what the judge calls the “finish”. There are two ways that Fido can move from front to finish; either one is acceptable in competition as long as it’s done in a prompt and smart manner (see AKC’s definitions of “smart” and “prompt”). You probably want to teach the finishes separately and identify each with its own command. There may be times in the ring when it’s wiser strategy to use one kind of finish instead of the other. There are several common words used for telling Fido to return to heel position: “get back”, “return”, “swing”, “around”, “finish”, and “heel”.

One way for your dog to finish from the front position is to briskly walk around to your right, going behind you and coming into heel position. To teach this behavior, take a piece of food in each hand. You will use the food in your right hand to lure him around your right side, and then pretend to pass the food behind your back to your left hand (left and right hands should meet behind your back) so that he continues following the food in your left hand with which you will guide him into the correct heel position. Ready to try it? Cheerfully say your command word as you use your right hand to lure Fido around behind you. Pretend to switch the food from the right to the left hand guiding him into the heel position. Once he is sitting in heel position, praise and reward with the food in your left hand. Good job!

Remember that in the heel position the dog’s spine must be parallel with the handler’s. When you finish your dog using the above method, you may notice that his back end is curled behind you (do this in front of a mirror or use a reflection in glass). This means that he needs to make a bigger loop as he walks behind you so that his body has enough distance to become parallel with yours as he walks forward into heel position. To cause him to make a bigger loop, rock or step your right foot straight back about four inches as he starts walking around to your right.

If Fido is too wiggly to follow the food around your body you can use light pressure on the leash being held in your right hand to help guide him around. As he moves around behind

you, move the leash from your right to left hand behind your back. Keep practicing this motion while gradually reducing your hand/rocking movement until Fido will do the maneuver on his own.



Above: George rocks back to begin the finish.

Right: George is guiding Fido into the finish position..

For the other finish your dog will move in a clockwise or counterclockwise teardrop shape (pick one direction only) along your left side and then walk forward into heel position. Some dogs will end up creating their own little style when doing this finish. Some jump straight up, spin around in mid-air to land exactly in heel position at the handler’s side. Others do a little hop into heel position by positioning their front feet first, and then hopping their butts into place. You may want to reward and reinforce whatever creation your dog comes up. Flair and flash look impressive! To teach this finish start with your dog sitting in the front position. With a piece of food in your left hand (or with light tension on the leash being held in your left hand) rock or step back with your left foot and guide the dog into the teardrop shape that extends behind you. Bring your left foot back up and use the food to guide Fido into heel position. By rocking back you will give your dog more room to learn how to move his body around on your side.

Just like the other finish, keep practicing while gradually reducing your body movements until Fido can flip around and get into position without you moving at all. Once Fido understands this finish command you can work on improving speed and accuracy. You can also keep things fun and interesting by varying which finish you tell him to do.

When Fido understands all the parts that make up the recall exercise and can do them perfectly in your living room or back yard, you need to practice it in as many different places with as many different distractions as possible. Fido may occasionally fail to get into a great heel position on his own. A useful command to teach him is “fix it”. To teach this, gently take hold of his collar guiding him into the correct position. You can also use a long stick (dowel) to gently push his rear into position.

Group Exercises: The Long Sit And The Long Down

The principal feature of these two exercises is that the dog remains in the sitting or down position until released by the handler. These exercises are done by all of the dogs that competed in the individual exercises in the class. There could be a maximum of twelve dogs per group exercise in the ring simultaneously because each dog is allocated about four linear feet of space.

After the individual exercises for each dog are completed, the ring steward will call the handlers and dogs to line up in catalog order outside the ring. This is a good time to observe the body language of the dogs in front and in back of you, especially if you haven't seen them in the obedience ring before. The other dogs' body language and strength of focus on its handler will likely give you some clues about how solid those dogs will be during the sit and down-stay exercises. They may be fine during the individual exercises, but the group environment is a totally different environment. The judge will ask the steward to lead everyone into the ring and will line them up along one side of the ring, spacing the dogs approximately four feet apart. Your dog will enter the ring on leash, walking or heeling nicely beside you. This is not the time for your dog to sniff the back end of the dog in front of you or to be plotting with the dog in back of him about running wildly in the ring! Teach your dog to ignore the other dogs around him. You want your dog focused on you.

When you get to the area designated for you and your dog, sit your dog in heel position. Unclip the leash, remove your armband and place them both behind your dog. Place them far enough back so that Fido's wagging tail doesn't swish the leash or armband sending it flying into the neighbor dog! (If you are at an outside show it's a good idea to clip your armband to the leash snap to prevent the armband from blowing away.) Step back into heel position. Keep his focus on you. This is a good time to softly praise your dog or remind him what he is to do/not do during this exercise. Promise him that he'll earn half of an ice cream cone if he properly performs this exercise!

In the Novice classes, the sit-stay is always done first. As in all the individual exercises, the judge will ask if everyone is ready. Look down at your wonderful Peeb to make sure he's still properly sitting. If he is, reply affirmatively. There are times when you would reply "no", such as if your dog has flopped down onto his belly, or pulled the GameBoy out of his pocket or wandered backwards to sniff the gate. Calmly take the GameBoy out of Fido's paws and verbally reposition him (not physically) to sit. When the judge orders the handlers to "sit your dog", again look at Fido. Since he's already sitting, you don't need to remind him to sit, but you could smile at him, knowing that this is his strongest exercise and that he'll come through with flying colors! When the judge says "leave your dogs", give your dog his command and/or signal to stay

and walk to the opposite side of the ring, turn and face your dog. All handlers will leave their dogs simultaneously. After one minute the judge will tell the handlers to "return to your dogs". All the handlers will simultaneously walk back to their dogs, returning to heel position by walking counterclockwise behind their dogs. The dog must not move from its position until the judge says "exercise finished".

The same process is used for the down-stay. Promise your dog the other half of the ice cream cone! When the judge commands "down your dogs" again you may use voice and/or signal to your dog to position himself. The handlers will be across the ring from their dogs for three minutes instead of one minute.

The sit-stay and the down-stay are each worth 30 points. The dog will pass the exercise if it doesn't move away from the place where it was left, if it remains seated on the sit stay and if it remains down on the down stay until the handler releases the dog from its position. If Fido leaves his position and goes over to another dog, starts a sniffing party or cavorts with another dog, repeatedly barks or whines, he will get a non-qualifying score for that exercise. If any dog did these things during the sit-stay, the judge may feel that excusing him from the ring prior to starting the down-stay exercise is appropriate for the safety and concern of the other dogs.

How To Teach The Sit-Stay And Down-Stay

Teaching these exercises can be an expansion of what he already knows about the "wait" command you use around the house. For the group exercises Fido must understand that a sit-stay and down-stay mean that he is to remain in a specific position, in a specific place, and not move until you come back and allow him to move.

The sit-stay and down-stay are taught identically. Each just has its own position. The sit-stay is identical to the stay required at the beginning of the recall exercise. One way to teach Fido is by using the following method.

Start with Fido sitting in heel position. Tell him to stay, take one step away, and turn to face Fido. Either sit or kneel down in front of him. If he doesn't move while you do this, calmly tell him "good sit stay" and give him a small treat. With a treat in each hand, move your right hand close to Fido. If he doesn't move out of position with this distraction, praise him and feed a treat from your left hand. If he should move out of position, tell him he's wrong and then gently guide him back into position repeating the sit stay command. When Fido is perfect with this distraction, you can increase the difficulty of the distraction by placing a treat on the ground just out of Fido's reach. If he moves to snatch up the treat, you grab the treat first, tell him he's made a mistake and gently guide him back into position. Then try again. When Fido holds his position while the cookie is on the ground, praise him and feed him a treat from your hand. Vary the distractions by placing food on the ground all around in front of him. Sometimes place one

treat on the ground and then give Fido a treat from your hand, sometimes place two or three treats on the ground before feeding him from your hand. Sometimes take one of the treats off the ground and feed it to Fido.

The above paragraph is a series of progressive steps that might take several weeks of training sessions to achieve. Start with the sit-stay training session being about a minute long. You would probably break this down into 15- or 20-second learning sessions after which you'd release him from the sit-stay, and then repeat. Once he will stay in place for the required time, always have him stay longer than the required time period. Some dogs have pretty accurate clocks in their heads and will recognize exactly how long they are to remain seated or downed before they release themselves! A good time to practice this is before he gets his food bowl.

When Fido starts getting good at this sit-stay game you can release him from the sit stay with a jackpot type of release word and allow him to eat all the treats that are lying on the floor. The idea for Fido to understand is that if he sits in one place and doesn't move out of position, mom or dad will give him treats. But if he moves, all of the treats disappear and he doesn't get anything. Once Fido understands the concept of sit stay, you can change the game a little by doing other things instead of laying food on the ground. Take a step to his right or left. Walk around him. March in place. Always stay within a couple of feet of him so you can praise or correct his actions. Always return to him and give a quiet calm reward for holding his position as you move around. When he's comfortable with you moving a short distance away, gradually increase the distance you go from him and the time he must stay in position. Then gradually increase the level of activity that goes on around him. Hop and skip or do jumping jacks, perhaps drop a ball or other toy or more food (just make sure that if you drop any toys or food you can retrieve them first if Fido makes a break for it – you do not want him rewarding himself for moving out of position). Once Fido is comfortable with all of these distractions, have another dog sit in his vicinity, then closer to him. Then have him sit between two other dogs. When you add other dogs to the picture you may have to stay closer to Fido to help him. Once Fido is staying in position between two dogs start adding other moving distractions such as children running and playing close by, food or toys being tossed or dropped close to the dogs etc. Have another person heel figure eights around the dogs that are staying. Use your imagination...anything goes as long as Fido can trust you that nothing bad will happen. You will gently help him remember to remain in the sit or down position if he should move out of the correct position. Eventually Fido will realize you are just strange (if he hasn't already!) and no matter what happens he will sit and stay until you finish goofing off and return with his reward.

Now you have the basics of how to teach your dog the skills to earn a Companion Dog title. Spend a few minutes a day

training with your PBGV. Practicing in various locations and refining the skills will help you gain confidence. Attend fun matches so you can practice the formality of the entire performance process, gain experience and become more comfortable in the ring. Doing this will enable you and your wonderful dog to earn qualifying scores when participating at obedience trials! There are several PBGVs out there proving themselves in the obedience ring. Come along, join us!

Feel free to call or email us if you have questions or need clarifications about the teaching phases described. There are many ways to teach these exercises, and if these ways don't work, we'll gladly help you come up with alternatives. George and Teresa have trained their dogs alone. George has successfully achieved Companion Dog titles on several of his PBGVs. Teresa has earned CDs on two dogs of another breed, and has a CD leg on her first PBGV. Ingrida's PBGVs have completed three Companion Dog titles, one Companion Dog Excellent (CDX) title, and she has trained all but one through the Utility level.

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Obedience Titles earned:

Am/Can Ch Charlen's Just 'N Time for Xmas CD
Owner George Jensen

CD earned in Spokane WA, May 2003