



GREYHOUND

Basic Commands and Training



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The importance of training

Greyhound training should be fun for you and your greyhound. Everyone likes a well behaved and socialised greyhound. Providing some basic training will help equip your greyhound to adjust to their life after racing and know what is expected of them in their new home.

Positive training techniques

Positive training works by rewarding our greyhounds for the behaviours we want and ignoring or preventing the behaviours we don't want. By rewarding our greyhound as soon as they perform the required behaviour (such as 'Down'), we are letting them know they have performed the correct action and giving them a reason to repeat the behaviour next time we ask for it.

Greyhounds are a sensitive breed and do not respond well to punishment. Using aversive training techniques such as shouting, physical punishment, or using rattle cans, will not teach your greyhound what you want them to do. It is more likely to make your greyhound fearful and cause other behaviour problems.

Short training sessions ending on a positive note are always best. Modern behaviour science demonstrates that punishment is not effective.

Using rewards in training

When you start training your greyhound, you need to reward them as soon as they have performed the required action. The type of rewards you use need to be something your greyhound really wants.

This will vary from greyhound to greyhound and rewards can include food, praise, gentle petting and games with toys.

For most greyhounds food rewards work very well. Small pieces of food that are moist, soft and smelly such as cooked chicken, cheese, meaty strips, frankfurter and sausage are ideal.

The rewards need to be easy to handle and about the size of a large pea so they can be delivered and eaten quickly.



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Remember, in the initial stages of training you will reward your greyhound every time they perform the behaviour.

Once you are sure your greyhound knows and understands what you're asking them to do, you can start rewarding intermittently, for example 3 times out of 10. Your greyhound may not be used to interacting in this way, so remember to take small steps and gently encourage your greyhound.

Rewarding your greyhound helps towards building a positive relationship.

Training Tip:

Remember to keep training sessions short and fun. Several 5 – 10 minute sessions a day will be more beneficial than one long session- for you and your greyhound.



Before you start your training

You will need:

- A flat, comfortable lead (leather or soft webbing)
- A suitable and secure collar (for example a leather greyhound collar, fish tail shape or similar)
- A muzzle (the plastic box type for greyhounds)
- Small, high value treats (the size of a large pea)
- A quiet area, without any distractions to train in



Attention building and focus

Just like us, greyhounds can only really learn when they're paying attention and focused on the teacher. Teaching your greyhound to pay attention to you is an important part of early training and can be achieved quite easily.

The aim of the attention building exercise is to teach your greyhound to make eye contact with you and hold your gaze.

To begin, make sure that your greyhound is in front of you and that you have a handful of food rewards.

1. Let your greyhound see that you have food rewards. Close your hand around the rewards and hold your arm out horizontally by your side. Your greyhound is likely to keep staring at the hand with the rewards and may even bark or whine to get the food. Ignore this and keep your eyes on the greyhound.
2. Usually after 4 – 10 seconds, your greyhound will look at your face or eyes. Say 'yes' and praise your greyhound while giving a food reward.
3. Stand still and repeat the exercise again. You should find after 3 or 4 repetitions that your greyhound automatically starts to look at your face and into your eyes. Say 'yes' each time and praise and reward your greyhound.
4. Gradually build on the length of time you can hold your greyhound's gaze, praising and rewarding them each time.



Training Tip:

You do not need to make this exercise into a verbal command. If you train and practice it frequently, your greyhound will automatically want to make eye contact with you, rather than just making eye contact when you ask them to.

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Leave it!

Leave it is a very useful command for all greyhounds to know. It means leave that item, ignore it and pay attention to me. It has many practical uses for all greyhounds, especially when it comes to things like cat training or preventing counter-surfing (stealing food).

Training 'leave it'

1. Show your greyhound that you have a tasty food reward in your hand. Hold the food firmly between your thumb and forefinger, so only a bit is poking out and say 'leave it'. Your greyhound is likely to try and get the food by licking, nibbling or pawing at your hand. Ignore this and keep your hand still.
2. The moment your greyhound takes their nose away from your hand, even if only for a second, feed them a food reward from your other hand.
3. Stand still and repeat the exercise again. You should find after three or four repetitions your greyhound automatically starts to look at your face and into your eyes. Say 'yes' each time and praise and reward your greyhound.
4. Gradually build on the length of time you can hold your greyhounds gaze, praising and rewarding them each time.





Stay

Stay is an invaluable and practical command. It can be used so that your greyhound waits by the door, doesn't jump out of the car boot before you release them and stays on their bed or mat while you eat your dinner.

Training the stay

Make sure you have plenty of food rewards and that you start your training in a place with no distractions.

1. Ensure you have your greyhound's attention and with your greyhound straight in front of you, say 'stay' and give your hand signal for 'stay' (hand held up with flat of your palm facing the greyhound). Reward almost immediately if the greyhound stays still. Repeat this a couple of times. Reward after one second of stillness, then work up to a count to two, then praise and reward your greyhound for not moving each time.
2. Gradually build up the length of time your greyhound will stay directly in front of you, rewarding each time.
3. Once your greyhound is reliably remaining in the 'stay position' directly in front of you, you can then start adding in some distance. Give your stay command and then step one foot backwards. Step back to your greyhound and reward. If your greyhound moves, repeat but step away more slowly, or reduce the size of your step backwards.
4. Repeat over several sessions, gradually building up the distance from your greyhound until you can move further away and circle them. Remember to step back to your greyhound each time and praise and reward.
5. Do not be tempted to call your greyhound out of the stay while your greyhound is learning this command. This helps ensure that your greyhound builds a solid stay, otherwise you will be rewarding them for the release and not staying still.



Training Tip:

Don't be tempted to rush your training for 'stay'. Work on 1 element at a time such as the length of time, the distance away from your greyhound, or level of distractions, before combining all 3.



Come when called

If you want to let your greyhound off the lead, it is essential that they have strong recall and will come back to you when they are called.

As greyhounds are sight hounds, they can be distracted by movement and things we may not be able to see.

Never let your greyhound off in a public place, unless you are 100% sure that they will return to you when called.

Always use a muzzle when you first let your greyhound off the lead. Do not start this training exercise until you are certain that you have mastered the 'stay' and 'leave it' commands.



Training the recall

To begin training the recall, you will need a helper, plenty of food rewards and a quiet environment to train in. If a helper is not available, a long line can be used to encourage your greyhound to come to you.

1. Ask your helper to hold your greyhound. Stand in front of your greyhound and show them you have a tasty food treat, or toy, that they may want. Walk 5 paces backwards and call your greyhound using the 'come' command.
2. As soon as your greyhound comes to you, slip 2 fingers under their collar. Praise them and feed them the food reward.
3. Gradually increase the distance from your greyhound when you call, ensuring you always praise and reward them for coming to you.
4. Once your greyhound is reliably coming to you in an environment without distractions, start practising in more difficult and distracting places such as the garden, or a quiet corner of a park. Remember you will need to reduce the distance slightly each time you start in a new environment.



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Using a long line

A long line is a very long lead, usually made of soft webbing, which attaches to the greyhound's harness. Generally, a long line comes in lengths of five to ten metres and provides the greyhound with some freedom, whilst remaining under your control. It is useful if you don't have someone to help you with your training and particularly when you start to practise recall in more distracting environments.

As greyhounds can accelerate up to speeds of 40mph in a matter of seconds, it is advisable to use a long line in conjunction with a harness rather than a neck collar to prevent neck injury.

Training tip

Slipping two fingers under the collar when your greyhound comes to you and before you feed the treat, gets your greyhound used to having their collar felt when they come to you. This will prevent them from running off, meaning you can clip the lead back on when you need to.

If you find that your greyhound isn't responding in a training session or appears to have forgotten what they have learnt, take a short break and resume the training later. If your greyhound was responding well before, it may be that you have jumped too far ahead with the training. Many greyhounds and their owners enjoy participating in greyhound sports such as agility and competitive obedience. If you are interested in finding out more contact the Kennel Club at www.kennelclub.org.uk.

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