



## Chapter 11 Training Your Leonberger

Leonberger puppies are cute beyond words. They are fuzzy and soft and endlessly entertaining. They can be walked on a leash and brought along on activities because they are easy to hold onto, and if any troubles arise, they can simply be picked up.

However, Leonbergers grow FAST. The average leo puppy at 6 months old is 60 to 90 pounds, or more! Impulse control, everyday manners, and basic skills must be taught before they outweigh you or can suddenly physically drag you behind them. Training needs to start the day you get your puppy.



Keep in mind that behaviors that are cute and funny in young puppies will not necessarily be cute or funny in adolescents or adults. It is much easier to avoid the behaviors altogether by showing the young puppy what you want it to do, than it is to wait until the dog is big and worry about how to stop something annoying the dog has been doing for months.



Seelowen's L'Amer Peychaud waits patiently at the door.

Leonbergers respond best to gentle training methods, calmly focusing on positive reinforcement as much as possible.

Start right away shaping the puppy's behavior by discouraging the unwanted behaviors and rewarding the desired behaviors. For instance, a puppy may run wildly to enthusiastically greet a visitor coming through the front door. This behavior could be annoying at the least in an adult Leonberger, and potentially dangerous in some cases. Knocking over small children or elderly/frail visitors is something that can be avoided by teaching the puppy the proper and acceptable way to greet someone from the very beginning. Decide if you

want the dog to merely keep his paws to himself, or if you prefer that the dog sit when greeting visitors, and introduce that as the proper way to greet guests from his first day at your home.

Remember, training happens all the time, not just when you snap a leash on your puppy and go to class. Every interaction throughout the day can be used to help shape his future adult behaviors and manners.

## LEASH MANNERS

Leash manners are very important from the very beginning. Letting the puppy pull you along behind him actually teaches the puppy to pull. Every time he pulls you to something he wants, he rewards himself by getting what he wanted. Each time he self-rewards this way, it reinforces the pulling, and causes him to ignore the pressure on the collar.

The way to avoid this is to start right away from the very first time he's on the leash, not letting him pull to anything. When he pulls, the moment there is tension on his collar, stop walking. Wait him out, until he happens to move in a way that puts slack back in the leash. The moment that



happens, quietly praise him and start forward again. For strong pullers, you may have to offer a treat that moment that he stops pulling. A clicker works very well in this process by marking the exact moment he put slack in the leash, and allowing him to learn what exactly earned him that treat.

By progressing in this way, the puppy will come to learn that pressure on his collar means he should stop, like applying a brake pedal. It encourages him to check back in with you when you stop moving. And it rewards him for keeping the leash slack.

## MOUTHING

Puppies learn much about the world through their mouths. It's natural for them to mouth and chomp a little bit on human hands when they are very young. This is how they played with their littermates, after all. However, mouthing is one of those behaviors that is not as pleasant when the dog is older, so it's best to redirect it to something more acceptable when he is a baby.

Fortunately, because puppies are so inclined to mouth and chomp things, it is relatively easy to teach a puppy what is appropriate to chomp on and what is not. The easiest way to stop the puppy from chomping on your hands is to freeze when he does it. Just hold still (make protect your finger tips from puppy teeth). Once your hand ceases to be a moving object, most



puppy what is and what is not. puppy from to freeze when he a fist if you must to his little needle-like hand ceases to be puppies lose

interest quickly. The moment he lets go, quietly praise him and immediately offer him something he CAN chomp on instead. Have toys handy, strewn about the room, and even a few in your pockets at this stage. Every single time he mouths you, freeze until he lets go, and immediately offer him something else to chomp on. When the puppy engages with the toy, reward that by resuming play with the toy as the object (not your hands).

## SIT

Sitting is something dogs do every day, so you are not teaching the dog



Aira sits for a treat

something he does not know how to DO. All you are doing is identifying it as a specific behavior, giving it a name, and teaching the dog to do it on command. It is part of the process whereby the puppy learns that his behaviors create responses and have consequences.

Sit is a critical behavior for a dog to learn on cue. Think of it as being able to put your dog into “park” when things get complicated out on a walk.

Putting a dog into “sit” allows you and the dog to regroup and settle down before proceeding.

*Note: there is no reason not to teach sit to a puppy destined for the show ring. Simply teach it as a cued behavior, and do the same with the show ring behaviors, and then you can ask for the appropriate behaviors inside and outside the ring.*

Teaching sit to a small puppy is very simple. Hold a tiny tidbit of healthy, yummy treat in your fingertips. Put the treat in front of the puppy’s nose and let him smell it. With the treat still right in front of his nose, slowly lift the treat upward so that his nose tilts up with it. Do not pull it away from him or he will simply follow it. Just lift it upward about a couple of inches. As his nose goes up in the air, his butt will naturally drop into a sit. The moment he is in a sit, give him the treat. That’s all he has to do the first time, put his butt down in a sit. Don’t say anything yet. Let him learn this part in silence.



Walk away a couple of steps so he gets up and follows you, and repeat the process. Again, give the treat as soon as he sits. After a few repetitions (it will vary from dog to dog), the puppy will begin to realize that it was his behavior that is causing you to give him the treat, and he will begin to sit faster, even before you can move the treat upward. Each time, continue to give him a tiny tidbit of treat the moment he sits. A clicker works well to speed this connection in his mind, by marking the moment his butt hits the floor as the correct moment.

Eventually the puppy will figure out that the sit is what has earned him all those treats, and he will sit on his own without the treat in front of him. When that happens, say, “Sit,” and then give him two or three little tidbits right in a row. You identify that behavior as “sit” because the puppy does it on his own



without being lured into position. This is the definition you want him to understand when you say “sit” in the future, so wait until it appears in the learning process before labeling it for him. Every time the puppy offers the sit without a treat lure, say “sit” and give him a treat while he’s still in the sit. Eventually you will be able to say “sit” and the puppy will understand what that means, and put himself into sit position.

Using food in training the sit allows children to work with the puppy as well, and teaches the puppy that it is beneficial to cooperate with children as well as adults.

## DOWN

Lying down, just like sit, is something puppies do every day on their own. All we are doing is putting it on a cue. Teaching down to a small puppy can also be done easily with food. It is easiest to start when the puppy is already sitting, but as soon as the puppy begins to understand what “down” means, it is important to also teach the puppy to lie down from a standing position too.

With the puppy sitting, hold a small tidbit of treat right in front of his nose, and draw it slowly down his chest toward the floor between his front paws. Do not draw the treat outward in front of him, or he will likely just get up out of the sit to follow it. As his nose follows the treat down, he may just kind of collapse into a down. If this happens, give him the treat. If instead he gets confused or gets up, start over, and this time give him the treat for simply following it down to his chest. And gradually lower it until his nose is following it all the way to the floor. For some puppies you may need to move the treat almost toward his tummy between his front legs to get him to lie down in his attempt to follow it.



It does not matter at this point what position he's in, whether he's on his side, on one elbow, or in a perfect sphinx down. We're just looking for him to be lying down.



Seelowen's L'Amer Peychaud pays close attention to learning.

Repeat the luring process, giving him the treat as soon as he is lying down, until that moment when he lies down without the treat in front of his nose. When he does that, calmly say, "Down," and then give him the treat while he's still in that position. As with sit, begin saying the word only when he lies down without the treat in front of his nose, then begin saying it AS he is in the process of lying down, and eventually saying it before he does it, so that he comes to understand that the word "down" means he should put himself into a lying down position.

For leos destined for the obedience or rally ring, teaching a fold-back or accordion down is beneficial. This starts from a standing position and lowers the front end first, then the rear drops down after. This type of drop allows the dog a speedy and clean drop-on-recall, and a clean rally down. When teaching the fold-back down, start slowly using food, and then turn it into a rapid game of seeing how fast he can drop. The faster drops earn the treats.



## COME

Arguably one of the most important things you will ever teach your leo is to come when called. There are entire books, videos, and workshops devoted to this seemingly simple task, and quite a bit of controversy over methods. But the basic introduction is really no different from teaching sit or down. You cause the behavior to happen, reward it when it does, and reinforce until your Leo understands what it means.

The easiest way to teach “come” is to kneel or squat down a few feet away from your puppy and pat the floor or wiggle a toy on the floor. When the puppy comes over to investigate or to get kisses, give him a treat. Move away to another spot and repeat. When the puppy is coming over to investigate willingly without you patting the floor or moving a toy, when he gets to you say, “Come,” and give him another treat.

He does not need to sit to earn this treat. All he needs to do is put himself immediately in front or beside you. As you progress, it’s a good idea to reach down and scratch his throat under his chin, moving his collar a little bit before he gets the treat, so that he comes to view your reaching for his collar as part of the behavior. That way, if you ever need to snap his leash on when he comes to you, he won’t view that as a new thing.

One very important caveat to teaching your leo to come when called: Do not EVER call him to you to punish him or scold him. Ever! The quickest way in the world to teach a dog to avoid coming to you is to punish him when he gets there. Even if he did something truly horrible a moment ago, if he comes when you call him, praise him for coming and forget about the bad thing he just did before that. There is no way you can make him understand that the punishment or scolding is for anything other than coming to you when you called. So the bottom line in teaching the Recall is to never, ever, punish or scold your Leo when he comes when called. Period.

Along that line, avoid calling him to you to end a play session, or to put him in his crate, etc. In the learning stage, the recall should always be followed by a release and reward, or play time, or moving onto another fun activity.



with leash

## Learning Recall



backing away

## STAY

Stay can be difficult for your Leo to understand at first, and some methods of teaching stay make it even more difficult. If you only teach stay in a quiet, contained environment, with you not moving, he may not grasp the significance of stay. The idea behind stay is that the dog must stay put, while you or other dogs etc. can keep moving.

The easiest way to start teaching “stay” is from a sit. Tell the puppy to sit, hold your palm toward your puppy (not right in his face), say “Stay,” pause for a brief moment, then give him a treat. Release him out of the sit, move away a few steps, and repeat the process. If he holds the sit for that brief moment, begin to move a step to one side and back while you say, “Stay.” Then give him the treat, release him up out of the sit, and move away to another spot. Progress to moving a few more steps this way and that while the puppy holds the stay. Always return to the puppy before you reward and release him from the stay. Later on you can add his motion out of the stay as needed for competition if that is your goal.



## Down Stay







## Sit Stay



## PUPPY KINDERGARTEN

There are many benefits from attending Puppy K. First and foremost is socialization with other young puppies of varying sizes and personalities. A well-run puppy K class will offer periods of free-socialization and play spaced throughout the class period. Puppies do a better job of teaching each other what is acceptable play behavior and what is not than humans can. A puppy K instructor will also be able to explain what the various behaviors mean, and how the puppies are resolving any issues that come up.

The other important benefit to Puppy K is laying the foundation for the future training relationship, and learning to explore unfamiliar objects. Though

Claus makes his way through a tunnel.



behaviors such as sit, down, come, and stay are introduced in Puppy K, the real value is in establishing key concepts in the puppy's mind, such as learning cause-and-effect (puppy sits, puppy earns treat), and creating an interactive relationship that engages the puppy's mind.

Basic leash manners, house training, basic grooming, and setting a schedule are typically discussed in Puppy K as well, and continued in Basic Obedience classes.