

# HEELING in 4 easy steps



**T**eaching a dog to heel is a first step in training. Using one of the two types of leashes shown on the next page, place the leash properly over the dog's neck and begin with the dog at your left side, sitting squarely. Reposition the dog as frequently as necessary to achieve the proper alignment. Step off with your left foot, giving the leash a quick jerk while commanding, firmly but quietly, "Heel." As the dog



## The British perspective

In a U.K. field trial, a dog must be off lead at all times and remain at heel without being spoken to even while tempted by the presence of a great amount of game and heavy shooting.

follows, release pressure on the leash. Initially keep the dog in approximate position, using quick, sharp tugs on the leash. First rule: Don't expect too much too soon. Second rule: The leash is used only for corrections, not to drag the dog while begging him to obey.



Begin the exercise with the dog at your left, sitting. The dog should be sitting squarely with his shoulder placed about at the handler's left knee.

2

HEELING IN FOUR EASY STEPS

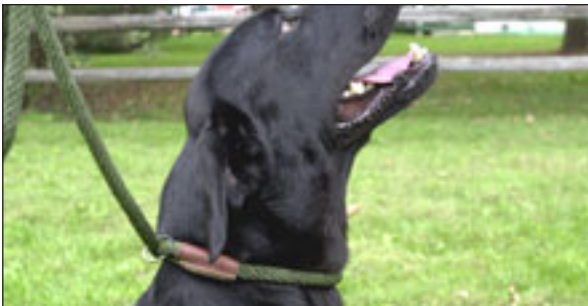
example Lesson



**1** Choose the proper leash and correctly place it around the dog's neck. This Mendota Products leash is ideal. Face the dog and make a "P" with the leash.



**2** Place the leash over the dog's neck. This style of leash is a combination collar and leash, and folds compactly into your pocket when not in use.



**3** Proper placement of the leash allows it to be tugged to initiate a correction, then go slack when the dog obeys. If the leash is incorrectly applied to the dog's neck, it will not go slack after a correction and the trainer will lose the chance to reward the dog for obeying.



**4** An option is a leather leash used with a choke chain that tightens and slackens at the handler's direction.



Step off with your left foot. Initially, the dog will pull ahead, to the side or drag behind. When he does, correct firmly using the leash and issue a soft command, “Heel.” Let the leash fall loose as the dog correctly positions himself. Regularly pivot 180 degrees, tugging sharply as necessary on the leash. Over time, the dog will stay alert to the position of your leg, turning and stopping with it.

**T**he dog will grow comfortable walking at heel in a week or two. That doesn’t mean he knows how to heel, only that he’s learning. Require sharper adherence by the third week. By the fourth week, for brief periods, wrap the long part of the leash around its collar portion, testing to see if the dog will stay at heel without being tethered to you. Return him to the leash for weeks to come. Make it an expectation that his position is alongside your leg. Also practice heeling at various speeds.

Each time you stop, tug straight up on the leash while pushing the dog’s rump down and commanding, “Sit.” Take your time, and require the dog to sit for alternately short and long periods. Part of the British retriever training method is teaching your dog patience. Also, as the dog’s training progresses, use this opportunity to require your dog to sit and stay while you walk away.





Practice “U” turns to the right first. Initially signal the dog you are about to turn by slowing your pace. As you step into the turn, give a quick jerk on the lead while commanding, “Heel,” and continuing your forward momentum in the opposite direction.



Practice “about” turns to the left by raising your right knee to signal the dog to turn away and stop forward motion. With your left hand, tug the leash gently straight up. As you complete the turn, tug the leash again to re-initiate forward motion. As the dog’s training progresses, he will watch the handler’s leg for subtle cues, signaling turns.

**I**nitiating turns is an important part of teaching a dog to heel. When turning to the right (a “U” turn), place your left hand on the leash near the dog’s head. Apply pressure to the leash while turning away from the dog and commanding, “Heel.” Remember: Don’t drag the dog. Reminder: Loosen the leash following all corrections. Follow immediately, as the dog obeys, with verbal praise.

**T**he left, or “about” turn, is completed in similar fashion. To initiate with a young dog, the handler brings her right leg up in preparation for placement in front of the dog. This teaches the dog, over time, to pay attention to the handler’s legs, and in particular not to stride ahead. If necessary to make the point, the handler, in time, should make contact with the dog, using her right knee to keep the animal back while restraining him with the leash.

## Troubleshooting Q&A

**Q** I've taught dogs I've owned in the past to heel. But over time they get sloppy, and in the end seem to forget altogether what I've taught them, unless I place them on the leash. What am I doing wrong?

**A** You've confused teaching a dog how to do something with the dog actually learning the exercise and incorporating it into its day to day existence. This is always the trainer's fault, not the dog's. You need to decide how important owning a trained dog is, and how important it is that your dog achieve its learning potential. If it's important, you need to train until your dog capitulates to the exercise.

**Q** What do you mean capitulates to the exercise? My previous dogs capitulated when I taught them to heel. My complaint is that over time they didn't retain their heeling training.

**A** To achieve a desired result, you must train through three phases of learning on the dog's part. Initially you must teach the dog what you want. Then you must teach and expect him to obey under various circumstances. Then, through repetition, you must convince the dog that this exercise — heeling in this case — will become part of his life and, essentially, lifestyle.

**Q** But isn't repetition of that kind drudgery for the dog and for me alike — to repeat and repeat something until he does it without thinking?

**A** Not at all. The best trainers, knowingly or not, are training through these three phases all the time. They're also constantly moving ahead, teaching new exercises, while almost simultaneously moving back, reinforcing old exercises. Most importantly, they fluidly shift, at times imperceptibly, from applying discipline to offering encouragement and rewarding with praise. All are not only important in dog training, but critical.