

# Squaring the Dog into Position

## canine freestyle moves database

This technique relies on the handler using his feet and hands to teach/guide the dog how to move into a given precise position. Each position is given a unique cue. When the dog understands a given position cue he will put himself into that position when cued.

Using a food lure in the hand or simply a hand target, move the hand parallel to the ground in front of the dog's nose. The dog is led away from the handler. To facilitate this the handler steps out with the appropriate foot so that the dog can be moved as far away from the handler as possible. The other foot remains anchored.

At the end of the stretch, the dog is turned **towards** the handler and guided in a straight line with a straight spine into the correct and precise position. As the dog is being guided into position the foot that stepped out slides back next to the anchored foot with the dog.

The dog results in correct, precise position and is rewarded in that position. (The position can be marked prior rewarding, if using a marker.) The reward should be delivered to the dog with his head up and facing the direction he should be facing (or wherever you want his head to be). If the dog is turning his head/neck to look at where the treat is coming from, reward so that his head is not turned, but is straight. Eventually he will realize he will get the treat faster if his head remains straight (or wherever you want his head to be).

The handler then turns to set the dog up for another trial and the exercise is repeated.

Once the dog understands the behavior required and will stand square in position, a cue can be introduced. The order of events is:

- Cue
- Move dog into position
- Mark behaviour
- Reward in position

Eventually the dog will anticipate the movement expected to follow the given cue and will bypass the "squaring" process and put himself into position. This is when you know he understands that position.

To illustrate the "squaring" technique the Face to Front from Left Side Heel Position will be used here.

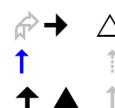
### Face-to-front

Suggested cue ... "Front"

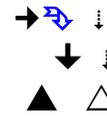


### How to train

1. With the dog in the left hand heel position, step forward with the right foot and with the right hand (or a target stick) indicate to the dog to move out in front. Move the dog out in a straight line. The dog needs enough room to be able to turn around and then come towards you with a straight spine.



2. Once the dog is out as far as you need to reach, return the right foot next to the left foot and lure/guide the dog towards you until he is as close as you want and centred in front of your body. Reward in the correct position. Keep the left foot anchored all the time. Do not move to accommodate the dog.



Points to note in **this** illustration:

- The dog is coming from the left hand side, so the left foot remains anchored while the right foot is moved forwards to assist the dog to move out.
- The bigger the dog the further you need to stretch your arm in order to give the dog enough room to approach you in a straight line with a straight spine and result "squared in position".
- As the dog is coming from the left, the right hand is used to help move the dog out. Some people may like to use their left hand, but if you have a dog that does not like your hands or arms looming over him, he will not follow the target hand in the direction indicated. He may bow/swerve out, hence he will be doing something you do not want.
- Once the dog is in position you can "mark the behavior" if using a marker.
- Once the dog is in position you can reward from either hand. It is important to reward in position.

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Here is a video illustrating squaring the dog into the Front position from the left hand heel position.



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## Troubleshooting

The principle behind the "Squaring the Dog" technique is the same for all orientations/positions:

- The handler steps out with one foot and with one hand guides the dog away from him;
- Turns the dog around towards him (never away from him)
- Guides the dog into the required position so that the dog stands straight (square) and precise.
- Dog is rewarded in correct position.

If the dog comes in crooked, keep your anchored foot anchored, continue facing the direction you were facing when you started and repeat the squaring process. Do not turn to accommodate the dog. The dog is learning to position himself to you. Repeat the squaring process until the dog comes in correctly.

If the dog continually comes in crooked,

- Check that he has been given enough distance in which to turn around and approach with a straight spine in a straight line to the required position. Bigger dogs need more distance.
- Also check that the hand guiding the dog is at nose height and moving parallel to the ground. The hand should move slowly enough for the dog to be able to follow, yet fast enough for it to be interesting.
- Once the dog is in "position" check where your hands are. If your hand(s) are not in the correct position the dog cannot be expected to be in correct position either. The dog's head followed your hand.

If the dog comes into position and then takes a step backwards, check that no part of your body is looming over him. If you need to, lean away from him so that he is confident coming in close. Reward in position which should be close to you. Some dogs do not like your arm over them and will shy away. With practice these dogs may become desensitized to your hand moving over them. If not, use another technique for teaching position.

For each position ensure you always present that part of your body you want the dog to target for that position. If you lean or turn to look at the dog by twisting your head and shoulders you are changing what he sees (changing context), hence learning will be slower because training has become less efficient.

If he still won't come into position, use an x pen set up as a narrow "corridor" with you standing in it so that the dog has no choice but to approach in a straight line and attain correct position.

If using a marker (clicker or verbal marker), only click when the dog is in precise position. Reward in position. If you find learning is taking a long time, have someone look at what you are clicking. Most likely you will not be clicking correct position every time.

Don't put a cue on this behavior until the dog can consistently be guided in correctly.

If using the clicker, ensure your training is clean, that is

- When giving the cue, ensure nothing else is happening, e.g. any movement by you;
- When luring/targeting the dog into position, nothing is happening, e.g. reaching for a the treat;
- When you click nothing else is happening, e.g. reaching into the treats bag; and finally
- When you give the treat, deliver it in the right place; e.g. with the dog's head facing the correct direction for that position.

Orientations/positions are high maintenance behaviors that need to be highly reinforced with high quality rewards and practiced frequently. The greater the history of high value reinforcement in the positions the more the dog will enjoy moving into those position: don't be surprised if he offers those behaviors and when he does, ALWAYS reward.

## PROOFING

One of the difficulties of these positions for the dog is, that in order for the dog to be 'straight' and in correct position to the handler, it is important for the dog to learn to adjust his back legs.

When the dog starts to understand the position and puts his head in the correct position but not the back legs, treat only on corrective movement of the back legs. Eventually the dog learns what it means to be straight.

To proof all these exercises the dog needs to be taught to assume any one of these positions from anywhere around the body. Examples are:

- side-to-front - dog moves from handler's RHS to stand face-to in front of handler
- rear-to-front - dog moves from behind the handler (via L or RHS) to stand face-to in front of handler
- front-to-left - dog moves from front to handler's LHS to stand face-to-left
- side-to-left - dog moves from RHS (via back or front) to handler's LHS to stand face-to-left
- front-to-right - dog moves from front to handler's RHS to stand face-to-right
- left-to-right - dog moves from LHS (via back or front) to handler's RHS to stand face-to-right
- side-to-rear - dog moves from handler's RHS to stand face-to-back behind handler
- front-to-rear - dog moves from front of handler (via L or RHS) to stand face-to-back behind handler

**Once the dog understands a position you can start teaching the dog to maintain that position while you move forwards, backwards and sideways.**

*Note: The Squaring technique used for each position is described in detail in this database and can be accessed via Fundamental Orientations and then drilling down to the specific position you want.*

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