

Look

Whatever a puppy is looking at is what she is thinking about. So if you want your puppy to listen to you, she needs to be comfortable and good at looking at you. When your puppy is focused on you, she has a better chance of ignoring other things around her, and you have a better chance of being successful in your training.

Stage 1 - Establish the Behavior

1. Bait your free hand with treats and don't let your puppy see this.
2. Sit or stand in front of your puppy. Your puppy may sit or stand as well.
3. Place your baited hand in front of your puppy's nose and slowly pull it up to your eyes
4. Wiggle a finger and make sounds if needed to entice your puppy to follow the lure up to your eyes
5. When your puppy looks at your eyes, say your RM and reward with praise and the treat. Be quick with your marker, the eye contact may be a split second at first.
6. Practice at least 10 times and until your puppy looks at you consistently for 2-3 seconds.

Stage 2 - Add the Verbal Cue

1. Decide what verbal cue you want to use - "look" "watch me" "focus" "eyes" etc.
2. Allow your puppy to remove his attention from you and then bait your hand.
3. Present baited hand at nose level.
4. Say "look" and draw your baited hand up to your eyes.
5. When your dog looks at your eyes, say your RM and praise and reward with the treat.
6. Practice at least 10 times and until your dog responds to the cue consistently.

If your dog's focus drops, use attention getting sounds to regain her focus and lure again if needed. You may need to wiggle a finger to maintain your puppy's eye-contact with you. A happy face or smile can help too.

Stage 3 - Add the Hand Signal (stopping the lure)

1. Allow your puppy to wander and remove his attention from you. Have treats ready in the opposite hand from your baited hand - your baited hand that you have used to lure is not baited now.
2. Say your puppy's name to get her attention.
3. Say your verbal cue.
4. Draw your hand (like you did when it was baited) up to your eye and point to your eye.
5. When your puppy looks at your eyes, mark it, reward with the treat in the other hand.
6. Practice at least 10 times or until your puppy responds to the cue consistently.

Stage 4 - Building Duration and Adding a Release

Eye-contact is a skill that is essential for successful training, and building duration will help you down the road when you start working with distractions, practice loose leash walking, teaching a heel, and the list goes on. So this is a cue that I highly recommend using a release cue.

1. Allow your puppy to wander and remove his attention from you. Have treats ready in the opposite hand from your baited hand - your baited hand that you have used to lure is not baited now.
2. Get your puppy's attention. (You should also work on this without an attention getting sound or using your pup's name).

Look

3. Say your verbal cue.
4. Point to your eye.
5. When your puppy looks at your eyes, wait 2-3 seconds and then say your RM when your puppy holds the eye-contact and praise and reward with the treat in the other hand and release with your release cue.
6. You may need to use some attention getting sound (smacks or kissing sounds) to keep your puppy's attention or if he looks away. Wiggling the finger at your eye can also help to keep your puppy's focus on you.
7. Practice with a few seconds for a while. Then add a few more, gradually increasing the amount of time that you delay your reward marker.
8. Practice and make sure that your puppy is not starting to think that the RM is a release: cue - wait - RM - reward - cue again - wait - RM - reward - release - play!

Why Teach Look? When would I use it?

1. Builds confidence with dogs that are shy.
2. Useful when you have to work through distractions - keeps your dog's attention on you, not the distraction.
3. Strengthens the bond between dog and owner.
4. Have your dog focus on you before allowing her to eat her food or high value treat - turning away from food helps build impulse control and lessens ownership and guarding tendencies.
5. Have your dog focus on you before releasing from a down or stay - strengthens your dog's attention on you, watching you and waiting for the release cue.
6. Use focus while walking to pass other people, dogs or objects to prevent reactivity.

Trainer Tips:

1. Once you have taught your puppy all the foundation cues, begin practicing them all together, in random order.
2. Start chaining cues together - first two, then three - cueing each, one after the other and saying your RM and rewarding after the last cue in the chain. This is called creating a behavior chain - linking any number of behaviors together and rewarding at the end of the chain.
3. Begin using foundation cues in daily events that happen with your puppy regularly - eating meals, play, going on walks, going outside to play. These are real life rewards that your puppy should learn to work for by listening to you first, knowing that after that he can do all the puppy things he loves to do.
4. Throughout the day, capture and reward your puppy when he offers these behaviors on his own in different situations. This allows your puppy to learn that certain decision in situations is a good thing and will start learning how to make good choice. For example: sitting before climbing into your lap for attention, looking at you while following you around the room, sitting at the door before going out, sitting and looking at you before play with a toy begins, etc.