



Mat Work Two Levels

The go to your mat behaviour is a multi-purpose skill. It is eventually built into a “relax” classically conditioned behaviour but the beginning of the skill is described here.

The uses of this behaviour are many, here is a partial list:

- A “go lay down” space when you need the dog not under your feet
- A “safe space” for dog to go when the house is busy or guests are over
- An eventual safe space to go to places where the dog is nervous (car, veterinarian, etc) as part of a behaviour modification process
- A “cue” for relaxing and being quiet in overwhelming environments like a training class.

What you will need:

A mat. Ideally a flat, non-slip mat or bed, even an old yoga mat or inexpensive bathmat with do). Round or cushy beds are sometimes hard to “hit” with the tossed treats and work to get into and out of. We want this easy and clean and want the mat easily transportable.

Treats/Food. Small pieces. An adequate amount of both lower value (kibble etc) and higher value (favourite treats, hotdogs, meat, cheese)

Some space for you to sit or stand, the mat to be able to be moved around when needed and for you to toss treats.

STEP ONE:

Drop a few treats onto the mat. Let dog eat them. Toss a kibble over the mat and away so dog goes to get it (use the cue “get it”) as the dog returns drop another treat onto the mat. Repeat several times.

Continued



Mat Work Two Levels

STEP TWO:

Toss a kibble away from the mat. Wait for the dog to return to the mat (without the treat drop). Give the dog time to think on it for a bit, we have just changed the game up.

If the dog steps forward onto the mat, even partially or if the dog LOOKS at the mat, MARK and toss the treat on the mat. In this exercise we feed the “mat” not the dog. The treat should go as far onto the mat as possible to ‘lead’ the dog onto it as completely as possible.

Repeat. Each repetition should be with the thought that the dog will come all the way back and get ON the mat before the MARK and reward. If you do not get this, back up and work only on look at the mat for a few repetitions but don’t stay at that point too long.

Once the dog is consistently coming back to the mat for a reward you can a DOWN when the gets there, MARK and reward on the mat. Repeat three to five times.

STEP THREE:

Continue with above except no longer cue the down. Instead, wait for it to happen. Give the dog a chance to figure it out, when he downs, MARK and reward to the mat. Repeat where dog goes to mat, lies down, MARK and reward to the mat.

When this is consistently happening (use the Push, Drop, Stick rules) you can finally add the cue. Toss the kibble to reset. AS the dog is moving back towards the mat you will say your cue “go to mat” and MARK and reward as before. Do your ten reps as per the PDS rules.

Continued



Mat Work Two Levels

STEP FOUR:

Move the mat a few feet in any direction. Not too far but just enough that it is no longer directly in front of you. This WILL very likely confuse your dog, as he may or may not have made the connection to the MAT but instead it's placement in relation to YOUR position. You may have to back up a bit in your criteria and lure him there once or twice before him starting to make the connection. Get your reps in.

STEP FIVE:

Move the mat again several times. Using your cue as soon as the dog shows he understands it is the mat he going to. Then change YOUR position. Add distance and repeat. You are now proofing the go to mat behaviour.

STEP SIX:

Build duration by gradually increasing the time between the dog going to the mat, lying down and your MARK and reward. Once you get up to about five seconds instead of marking you will simply put food on the mat, every two or three seconds while the dog is there to "keep" him there. Eventually you can add a RELEASE CUE and toss a treat to reset. Make sure to say the cue FIRST and then toss the cookie a second or so later.

STEP SEVEN:

Start instead of treats, using a stuffed Kong™ or a chew to keep your dog there longer.



Mat Work Two Levels

Additional criteria you can add:

Knock at Door means “GO TO MAT”.

Sitting at Table for Dinner means “GO TO MAT”

This cue “replacement” quite literally is someone knocks on the door (not really a visitor) you say GO TO MAT. Mark and Reward. Repeat as per PDS rules and

Then proof to someone coming in the door. Same as for the Sitting at table. Someone sits down, cue is given, Mark and Reward. Two people sit down, cue is given, Mark and Reward.

This behaviour, as you can see, has multiple uses. It is a great way to redirect your dog into an area away from excitement, stress or other behaviours you find to be problematic.

RELAX ON MAT

Things you will need:

Some time. A comfortable place to sit near the mat and your dog and a whole lot of tiny relatively low value rewards.

Step one:

Cue the dog onto the mat as per the “Go to your Mat” lessons done earlier.

Step two:

Mark quietly (yesss) and place a treat between the dog’s front paws on the mat. Wait a few seconds, repeat.



Mat Work Two Levels

Step three:

Start watching for outward signs of relaxation. For example:

- Blinking
- A deep breath
- Shifting onto one hip
- Putting head down
- Soft eyes
- Sighing

In the beginning it may be very small increments of the above signs, more likely just a blink and shift onto the dog's side. Mark quietly and reward. Continue doing so for ten minutes or so. End exercise by getting up and doing something else leaving dog to choose what they will do next. Practice once or twice a day if you can.

Step four:

Notice when your dog starts "hanging out" on the mat by choice. When you do, mark it quietly and place a treat on the mat or just give them a calm "good dog". When you sit and watch TV or on the computer, bring the mat to the living area and do the same. Rewarding occasionally for chilling out on the mat with you. Do the same outside, in the car or at the veterinarian for example as needed where you need him to learn to be calm and relaxed.