

Meta Title: What Does Heel Mean for a Dog | Sparkpaws Tips

Meta Description: What does heel mean for a dog? Learn the meaning, method, and benefits of heel training with Sparkpaws' step-by-step guide for better walks.

What Does Heel Mean For a Dog?

'Heel' is a phrase as old as dog owning itself. You've probably heard it countless times in movies, TV shows, and real life. You may be aware that it has something to do with stopping or slowing down your dog, but what does heel *actually* mean in a dog training setting? How can you incorporate this important command into your own training?

Table of Contents

- [Understanding the Heel Command](#)
- [The Importance of Heel Training](#)
- [Preparing to Train Your Dog](#)
- [Step-by-step Training Your Dog to Heel](#)
- [Common Issues in Heel Training](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

Key Takeaways

- Heel training is one of the important basic commands in the dog training process and means to walk or sit by their owner's side.
- It is a good idea to start training young and in a non-distracting environment.

Understanding the Heel Command

The heel command means to wait patiently by your side. If you are walking or [running](#), then this means your dog is walking or running calmly by your side. If you are standing, then the heel position would be sitting by your feet. Not in front of you or behind you, but confidently by your side.

Your dog should be as close to you as possible in heel position, and stay there until you give them the command to move freely.

Traditionally, this is the left side. This comes from when dog training used to focus on hunting dogs, or dogs used in the military - their handler would have a sword or a rifle on their left side. However, nowadays it's a bit pedantic, so feel free to train your dog to heel on the right if you are left-handed, or feel more comfortable on the right.



[Comfort Control Collar Set Pastel Icing](#)

The Importance of Heel Training

Heel training can keep your dog safe in a dangerous situation by having them calm and close by. It can make walking in traffic or other crowded areas safer and less stressful for both of you. Your dog will also feel more confident if they have a clear command to follow.

There's no need for your dog to stay in the heel position the entire walk. Most dogs get more enjoyment out of going on a loose leash and being able to sniff around. However, you need to be prepared with the heel command in case something unexpected happens or you enter a risky area.

Preparing to Train Your Dog

Like most dog training, you will need treats, a leash, and a harness or collar. Positive reinforcement goes a long way to making a lasting impression.

If you have a puppy, they can start leash training and learn basic obedience commands within the safety of your home or garden at around 8 weeks old. You can begin taking them out and teaching them the heel command when they are fully vaccinated at around 12 - 16 weeks old.

It may take more time, but even [older dogs can learn heel training](#) using the same method. It's important that all dogs know how to come to the heel position responsibly.

It's normal that your dog wants to pull ahead when you go out on a walk. Something that can help your heel training by cutting down on this drive is getting a no-pull harness. This is a harness that clips on the side or front instead of the back, which means that your dog can't strain the leash and is forced to walk in the heel position.

You can find a variety of colorful, high-vis no-pull harnesses in [Sparkpaws' Comfort Control No-Pull Dog Harness Collection](#).



[Poop Bag Holder Green](#)

Step-by-step Training Your Dog to Heel

The first step in heel training is to decide on a command. Your heel command doesn't have to be the word 'heel' but it should be short and easy to understand. If anyone else in your house also does heel training, they should know which phrases to use.

Keep your training sessions short and sweet. Puppies especially have a short attention span. Consistency is more important than spending a large amount of time training.

Your training sessions should also be done somewhere without distractions, like your yard or a quiet room. Eventually, you can start doing the heel command in more challenging environments and more advanced training, as your dog progresses and is able to respond quickly.

Step 1 - Basic Commands

Your dog should already be familiar with other simple obedience commands, such as 'sit' or 'stay', before you start heel training.

You can direct them to the heel position on your left side (or right) with a treat and then command them to sit and stay, praising or giving a treat as necessary.

Step 2 - The Heel Command

Next, you will want to keep a treat visible in your hand above your dog's head on your left side - and begin to slowly walk forward. Give them the 'heel command'. Your dog should follow you to get the treat.

Praise them and reward them if your dog walks calmly next to you on your left side in the heel position. If your dog pulls ahead or slows down, then stop and repeat the heel command. Always make sure to reward good behavior.

Make sure to give them lots of praise and treats for following along and for sitting and walking by your side. It can also be useful to repeat the command several times so they become accustomed to it.



[Dog Cooling Vest Snow Cone](#)

Step 3 - Gradually Increasing the Difficulty in Different Environments

After your dog can confidently go in and out of heel position at home, you can slowly start moving into busier locations. It is a good plan to get your dog used to walking in 'heel' both on and off the leash.

Try some relaxed walks, giving the leash slack, before calling your dog to heel position. With time, it is possible to train dogs to automatically come to heel in certain situations, such as waiting to cross the road. Always back up this training with positive reinforcement.

Remember, loose leash walking is important too. [Your dog should have some leash training](#) and be able to walk without pulling, without the need to constantly be in heel position.

Common Issues in Heel Training

No matter how good your training is, you are bound to run into some challenges when your dog starts heel training. It can take a lot of time to get your desired behavior.[2]

Loose Leash vs. Tight Leash

A loose leash is better for heeling exercise. You may be tempted to get a tighter leash so that you have more control over your dog. However, they can feel restricted and frustrated, and act out as soon as they feel they are able to.

A loose leash also helps you to see where your problems lie. Ultimately, you are aiming for good behavior with a loose leash and off leash, which will only be delayed if you work with a very tight leash.

However, if you are planning to take your dog to a crowded or unfamiliar area that requires a lot of control, having a short leash may provide you with some peace of mind. Eventually, you should be able to move away from this, but it can be useful in some instances.



[Comfort Control No-Pull Dog Harness Set Black](#)

Off-leash Heeling

Always carry a collar or harness and a leash with you at all times. Even dogs that are used to off-leash heeling and have a good grasp of the command can occasionally break down and run off after a squirrel or loud noise. Always be prepared just in case.

High-value Rewards

Have a good mix of treats with you. High-value treats - tasty, smelly, or favorite treats - will motivate your dog more and can help keep them focused on the task at hand. Make sure to bring a few with you when your dog is struggling.

However, you want some low-cal, cheap rewards too for maintaining good behavior and staying with it. This can be something simple, like your dog's kibble or some broken-up pieces of treat.

You've Lost Control

You can get control back by stopping your walk immediately. If you have lost your dog's attention and they are going wild, it is best to stop walking entirely until they calm down. Dogs enjoy walking, and stopping the walk is an adequate punishment.

Only resume walking at a normal pace when your dog understands that you are no longer going to move and they need to relax. After you have walked a short while with your relaxed dog, you can resume trying to call them to heel.



[Forest Camo Dog Hoodie](#)

Conclusion

Heel training is an essential part of building a strong foundation for obedience and trust between you and your dog. By teaching your dog to walk calmly by your side, you not only create safer walking experiences but also help your dog to handle stressful or unpredictable situations.

Starting training early in low-distraction environments, using consistent commands, and rewarding good behavior with positive reinforcements are key to success.

Having a good amount of treats, a slack leash, and good equipment will help your dog focus. Try finding collars and harnesses that will prevent pulling, such as Sparkpaws' Comfort Control No-Pull Dog Harness Collection.

It can take some time to train successfully, especially if you have an older dog, but the results are well worth it. We are confident that you and your dog can move forward to a safer tomorrow, firmly by each other's sides.

Ext links

[1] <https://www.bbcmaestro.com/blog/when-can-a-puppy-go-for-a-walk>

[2] <https://www.obedienceroad.com/blog/heeling-problems>

[3] youtube.com/watch?v=X6aXldQVDLI&feature=youtu.be

Frequently Asked Questions

How do you heel a dog?

Begin by using a treat to guide your dog to your left or right side, then ask them to sit and stay, rewarding them as needed. To introduce the heel command, hold a treat in your hand above your dog's head and slowly walk forward while saying the command. Praise and reward your dog if they walk calmly beside you.

Does heel mean stop or go?

To bring a dog to heel means to stop or slow down. It encourages a dog to sit, stand or walk right next to their owner.

Is 'heel' the same as sit and stay?

No, when a dog owner asks their dog to heel, it means they want them to stay nearby. This may mean sitting at their heel, but it could also mean walking along with their owner at their side.[3]

Is teaching your dog to heel such a big deal?

Yes, teaching your dog to heel helps keep them safe and calm in a crowded or dangerous environment. It may take some time to learn the slightly complicated trick, but it is important that your dog learns to heel properly.

How to keep my dog maintaining focus while in heel?

While training, constant positive reinforcement is important to maintain focus. It helps your dog learn muscle memory and get used to stopping and starting. The 'difficulty' of the environment

should be increased slowly. If your dog is very nervous or reactive, then it can be good to keep treats or other distractions on standby, even when training is complete.

How long does it take to teach heel training?

The amount of time varies between dogs. Some dogs may have a good grasp of the basics within a few sessions, but older and more stubborn dogs can take a couple of weeks or months to get used to heeling.