



# Go To Mat for Meal Prep

The goal is for this behavior is for the dog to hold a down-stay on his mat during meal preparation for one food reward at the end. To install this, we need to teach him to hold the down-stay outside of the meal-prep context first. Follow these steps, practicing them on a mat that you only bring out during training sessions:

1. With the dog in a down on a mat, hold a tempting treat a couple of feet in front of him at nose level. He will likely get up – immediately say “Oh! Too bad!” and snatch the treat away. Signal him back into position and reward him. Repeat the treat temptation until he stays in position in spite of it for 1 second. Reward him right away for not moving (this is difficult!) – he must collect the reward in position.
2. Signal the dog into a down on his mat and reward him with a treat from your other hand. Place a treat on the floor a couple of feet away from him. When he goes for the treat, cover it! Make sure he doesn’t beat you! Repeat until he doesn’t go for the dropped treat. Then hand it to him. He has to eat the treat in a down-stay. Increase the duration between the dropped food and the reward to 3 seconds, then 5.
3. Signal the dog into a down on his mat and reward him with a treat from your other hand. Take one step to your left and then step back in front of him. If he stays, reward him. If he got out of position or “rotated” to follow you, say “Oh! Too bad!” and start over. Add one step at a time only if he has had five successful repetitions in a row. Try to get to a full circle around him in down-stay. Timing is critical: Catch him with “Oh! Too bad!” the instant he moves. Reward him in position if he stays.

Next, we will incorporate distance into the down-stay, and add in greater distractions. To teach your dog that knocks at the door mean good things are to come:

1. Signal your dog into a down on his mat and reward him with a treat from your other hand. Say the word “stay,” then give him a hand signal. Take one step back, keeping your eyes on him in case he breaks the stay. If he stays, reward her in a down. If he breaks the stay, say “Oh! Too bad!” the instant he breaks and start over. Do not reward your dog for repositioning at this point. Add one step at a time until you are across the room. Keep your eyes on the dog so your timing is good. Return to him one second after you reach the distance, as though there were a bungee cord connecting you and him. This step is to build distance, not to build duration, of the stay.

2. When the dog is consistently holding his down-stay when you walk across the room, you can start to add some duration. Put him in a down-stay on his mat, and then walk to the other end of the room, keeping your eyes on him. Now you want to wait a few seconds before returning back to him and rewarding him. Practice in the following increments:

10 seconds	1 second
3 seconds	15 seconds
15 seconds	9 seconds
4 seconds	15 seconds
4 seconds	11 seconds
7 seconds	6 seconds
15 seconds	7 seconds
12 seconds	15 seconds
8 seconds	8 seconds

3. When the dog is consistently holding the down-stay for the above durations, you can then incorporate some distractions, i.e. opening the pantry door, rustling around in the pantry, etc. Remember not to increase your duration and distractions at the same time. Stick to the increments above while adding distractions.
4. Gradually space out the amount of time between rewards until your dog can stay in position during the entire meal prep for one reward at the end. If he breaks the stay at any point, simply say “too bad” and signal him back into position. Do not reward him for resetting! If he is consistently breaking, try to stay ahead of it, rewarding after shorter/less-distracting trials.