



Muzzle Training

As well as enabling you to feel more relaxed and keeping everyone safe, muzzle training has the added benefit of helping your dog avoid situations that may worry them, as people are less likely to approach! It is very important that although your dog has a muzzle on, you should still try to avoid situations they are uncomfortable in, as being exposed to scary situations could make their behaviour worse in the long term.

Before you start – safety first!

A good choice of muzzle is one that your dog can eat, drink and pant through, and that fits comfortably without obscuring their vision or digging into their body. Aim for as much comfort as possible while ensuring security. You can wrap non-irritant fabric around the nose-piece to prevent it rubbing if necessary.

How to teach your dog to wear a muzzle happily

You will need: a large bowl, a small bowl, your muzzle, lots of extra tasty treats and some squeeze-cheese or meat-paste if possible!

Place the large bowl on the ground, or hold it in your hand, and drop a treat into it. Let your dog take the treat. Repeat this several times then replace the large bowl with the smaller bowl, and repeat several times again. By doing this you are teaching your dog that placing their face into something that has 'sides' that create a narrow space around their face is a really good thing to do! They'll also be learning that they can be confident that putting their face inside something you're holding will work out well for them! Start by making it very easy, because it will get harder!

Now you can progress to the muzzle itself – simply do the same. Treat the muzzle just like a small bowl. Cup the muzzle in your hand and drop a treat into it, so that your hand prevents it from falling out. Allow your dog to put their face into the muzzle to take the treat. Repeat this several times – your dog will be learning to really love putting their face inside the muzzle with every go! You could even feed your dog from their muzzle!

If your dog appears worried by the muzzle they might either try to avoid it altogether or stretch forward tentatively because they want the food but don't really want to approach the muzzle. They might have worn one before and not enjoyed it, or they might just be naturally cautious about something new. Don't panic – simply place the muzzle onto the floor and start by dropping really tasty treats around it, so your dog can eat them without even touching the

muzzle to begin with. You don't need to say "muzzle" at all, as you're just building up their confidence in approaching it at the moment.

You can then gradually place the treats closer to the muzzle, and then on it and under it so they have to move it with their nose to get to the treats as they gain confidence. You can be working with the bowls at the same time, but during a separate training session.

You should only progress to the next stage when your dog will eat treats from the muzzle itself, with their bodyweight forwards leaning towards the muzzle, and remain focused on the muzzle waiting for you to drop more treats into it. This shows that your dog is starting to feel differently about the muzzle, and it now means 'treats, ooh good!'

Gradually move the treats further down the muzzle, so your dog has to put their nose right inside. This may take several sessions but allowing your dog to progress at their own pace increases their confidence in the muzzle and their trust in you!

Gradually increase the length of time your dog keeps their face in the muzzle by using something they have to take time to lick off – squeazy-cheese or meat-paste should be a tasty and thoroughly enjoyable reward for them!

Now you can start to show your dog the muzzle and move it slightly away from them with a treat or the paste inside it, so that they are encouraged to actively move towards it to get their reward! This should increase their desire to get to the muzzle, showing that they now see the muzzle as something worth making an effort to interact with.

Progressing to the next level - straps!

First of all, make sure your dog is comfortable with the noise of the clip being done up, as this will eventually be right by their ears! Scatter some treats onto the floor for them and while they are eating them simply do up and undo the clip nearby, but not right next to them, so they can hear it and associate this sound with tasty treats.

Continue with the game of enabling your dog to eat treats or lick paste out of the muzzle and once they are happy and comfortably keeping their face inside for some time start to gently touch and move the straps around. Gradually build up to draping them loosely over your dog's neck, then let them go so they slip gently off without them having to worry about them being tightened or done up at this point – it helps to extend the straps so they are at their longest and therefore loosest at this stage of your training.

When your dog is happy holding their nose in the muzzle with you holding the straps, begin to fiddle with the clips, start by moving the straps around behind their ears as though you are going to do it up, however don't actually do it up yet - just get them used to the feeling of the straps tightening first! By going this slowly you are really building up a positive association with the muzzle staying on their face, without them needing to become worried at all.

You could also practice giving your dog treats while clipping and unclipping their collar (indoors only of course!) as this teaches them that our hands clipping and unclipping things around their neck are a good thing, because this means they will get an extra tasty reward!

Once your dog is able to keep their face in the muzzle while you fiddle with the straps you can progress to buckling it up – but be quick to undo it straight away to start with and always use treats!

Starting to leave the muzzle on!

Now that your dog can wear the muzzle, and have it done up, gradually leave the muzzle on for increasing periods of time. Start with just a few seconds, and then increase in small steps up to 1 minute, then 2, then 3 and so on. Keep your dog distracted while they are wearing the muzzle to begin with by either pushing more treats or squeezing the squeezey-cheese/meat-paste through the muzzle to reward them, or encouraging them to follow you around the house for just a few seconds to begin with. Then remove the muzzle and let them relax.

Always have the squeezey-cheese or meat-paste available for your dog to continue licking, even while they're walking along wearing the muzzle, as you can squeeze this into the muzzle for them as an extra reward!

As your dog gets used to the muzzle being on for longer, and moving around with it on, start to leave it on while you do brief jobs around the house. Start to introduce some times where your dog is not getting rewarded whilst wearing it – again just for a few seconds to begin with then gradually build up this time. By now your dog should see the muzzle as really nothing to worry about at all.

Continue building up the time your dog spends with the muzzle on gradually, starting to use it when you're going out for walks.

Trouble-shooting

If your dog paws at the muzzle during training you have probably moved on too quickly and they are telling you they aren't ready for this particular stage of the training – distract them if you can and then take the muzzle off. Go back to the stage at which they were doing well – this might be just eating treats from the muzzle itself for example – and continue with that stage for longer to give them time to grow in confidence and understanding before progressing again.

Go so slowly that your dog never gets worried. They should always be happy, so only move on when you are sure that they are ready! If they want to move away always allow

them to – just like us they might have some days in which they are focused and enjoying the training and others when they just aren't as engaged and are more distracted! Use those moments when they're alert and responsive to you to do your training in!

If your dog guards food or isn't interested in food then you may need a different method. Contact a qualified professional for advice.

Top Training Tip

Only start to use your muzzle out on walks once your dog is completely happy wearing it – if you need to muzzle him before this, for example at the vets, try to use a completely different type/style of muzzle so you don't risk disrupting your training!

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