

Muzzle Training Check List

There are many ways to train a dog to be comfortable wear a muzzle. The most important thing is not to force your dog into a situation they find uncomfortable. This means that training will progress at different speeds for different dogs and your dog may need longer than you expect one or more of the different stages.

Below is a check list of different stages to muzzle train your dog. It is important not to move onto the next stage before your dog is ready. To recognise some of the signs that your dog may be uncomfortable see Advice Sheet: Body Language.

However, some dogs may progress very quickly through certain stages, progress at a speed your dog is comfortable with. Please read Advice Sheet: Muzzles before completing this checklist with your dog. This list is designed to be printed and you can check off the stages as they are completed.

- Step One – Showing your dog the muzzle.** Start by just showing your dog the muzzle, as simple as that. When your dog sees the muzzle give them a treat! You can hide the muzzle behind your back and repeat so that your dog starts to associate the muzzle with a tasty treat.
TIP: A good sign that your dog is ready to move on to the next stage is that they are happy and waggy to see the muzzle when you show it to them.
- Step Two – Your dog is happy eating from the muzzle.** Your dog should approach confidently and want to put their nose inside the muzzle. If at first your dog is reluctant to put their nose in, put a tasty treat on the outer edge of the muzzle so your dog can easily reach it. Move the treat until it is right at the tip of the muzzle. Just before your dog finishes the tasty food at the tip of the muzzle push another treat through that your dog is rewarded for keeping their nose in the muzzle longer.
- Step Three – Your dog is happy to follow the muzzle for food.** Once your dog has had a taste of the food in the muzzle, draw it gently away. It is important that your dog is eager to follow the muzzle, so don't move it away too fast, your dogs nose should remain just inside as they try to eat the rest of the treat.
- Step Four – Your dog is comfortable and relaxed eating while you tickle behind their ears.** This stages help your dog get used to the sensation of something behind their head where the muzzle straps will be.

Advice Sheet

- Step Five – Your dog is relaxed and comfortable eating while you move the straps of the muzzle.** This gets your dog used to the sensation of the straps moving.
- Step Six – Your dog is comfortable eating while you hold the straps loosely behind their head.** Don't hold the straps tight at first, just let your dog get used to the sensation of the muzzle being on.
- Step Seven – Your dog is happy for you to clip up the muzzle.** Start to quickly do up the muzzle while your dog is eating and immediately undo it again.
- Step Eight – Your dog is comfortable for several seconds with the muzzle done up.** Make sure that in this stage while the muzzle is done up you are rewarding your dog. As you progress start to pause between each reward, you can extend these pauses as long as your dog knows the treat is coming and you don't let your dog become frustrated with the muzzle. This can be a difficult step for some dogs and it is worth spending extra time here even if your dog seems comfortable.
- Step Nine – Your dog is comfortable with muzzle on for up to a minute.** During this step you can start to ask for commands your dog knows e.g., sit, down or paw. An important one to add is calling the dog towards you over a very short distance at first so your dog gets used to walking with the muzzle on. TIP: If your dog seems to forget commands they know when they have the muzzle on, you may have progressed too quickly, or train the command using a lure and reward method while your dog is wearing the muzzle.
- Step Ten – Your dog is comfortable wearing the muzzle for longer periods.** Build up the time your dog is wearing the muzzle but remember to make this a fun game for your dog. If the game only gets harder every time it can become boring – to prevent this vary the length of time you are asking the dog to wear the muzzle. If you are building to to five minutes, sometimes ask for 2 minutes, then 30 seconds, then 4 minutes etc. as your dog gets closer to the target time.

TIP: A great way to keep the reward in the muzzle is use something soft and sticky! Cream cheese, peanut butter or pate can keep your dog interested for longer as they lick the tasty reward from the muzzle.