

## Muzzle Training

A muzzle is a very useful safety tool for many reasons including:

- Stopping physical harm if your dog tries to bite
- Decreases your anxiety around your dog
- Keeps unfamiliar people and dogs away from you while you are out walking
- Stops your dog from picking up and eating food and non-food items which could cause harm

A muzzle should never be used so that you can force your dog into situations where their anxiety and arousal levels increase or where they will be exposed to known triggers. Before exposing your dog to a situation with a muzzle on, stop and think - would you expose them to that situation if they did not have a muzzle on; if the answer is no, then they should not be in that situation.

Once muzzle trained, your dog should wear the muzzle randomly at home, when out walking or when doing something they like. This will help to reduce the chances of them associating the muzzle with any potential triggers. For example, if your dog only wears a muzzle at the Veterinary Practice they may learn to associate the muzzle going on with going to the Veterinary Practice. If they randomly wear the muzzle as part of their daily routine, it will reduce the chances of this association being made.

Always use a Baskerville type muzzle. A Baskerville type muzzle allows your dog to open their mouth while wearing it. This will allow them to eat, drink and pant while wearing it; it also allows you to put treats through to reward them.



### Muzzle Training Session

Each session should be 5 - 10 minutes long; the session should stop after 10 minutes, regardless of the amount of progress made. It is possible to do two sessions, however, there should be a 10 - 15 minute break between sessions where your dog is removed from the training environment and given the opportunity to rest. The training sessions can be carried out every day.

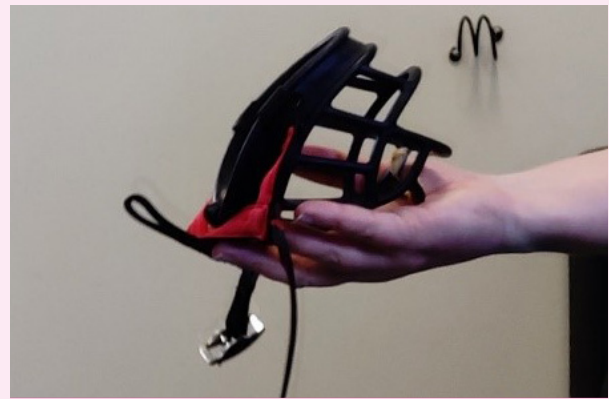
Before each session ensure your dogs needs have been met, so they are set up to succeed. This includes ensuring they have had some physical exercise, the opportunity to relieve themselves and have not been fed prior to the training session.

Prepare enough small tasty treats to last for the whole 5 - 10 minute session and have them to hand in a treat pouch or pocket. Soft food such as peanut butter, cream cheese, pâté or wet dog food should be to hand for use inside the muzzle (**NB - if using peanut butter ensure it does not contain any artificial sweeteners, especially Xylitol as these are toxic for dogs**).

## Muzzle Training

### Stage 1 - Introducing the Muzzle

1. Choose a cue word to use such as "Muzzle" which will indicate that the muzzle is going to be used.
2. Have some small tasty treats to hand which your dog will work for.
3. Find a quiet place to train away from any distractions.
4. Sit with your dog and say "Muzzle", show them the muzzle and give them a treat. Do not attempt to put it on, just show it to them.
5. Repeat this 15 - 20 times within a few minutes. During this time do not expect any specific behaviour, such as "Sit" or "Down", just show them the muzzle, say "muzzle" and give them a treat.
6. After 15 - 20 repetitions your dog should start forming an association between seeing the muzzle and getting a treat.
7. Say "Muzzle", then place the muzzle on the floor with some treats near it. Over time move the treats closer to the muzzle and eventually in the muzzle so that your dog gets used to touching the muzzle with their nose. Once your dog is comfortable approaching and touching the muzzle, progress onto the next step.
8. Smear something your dog can lick such as peanut butter, wet food or pâté onto the inside of the muzzle; hold the muzzle in a position where they can get their nose into the muzzle; as they approach say the "Muzzle" cue and allow them to lick the soft food from inside the muzzle. Do not push the muzzle onto their nose or try to do it up at this point; allow them to approach, put their nose in and move away in their own time.
9. Repeat this several times, slowly moving the food further down into the muzzle so that your dog has to put their nose further into the muzzle each time.
10. Test your dog; hold the muzzle and say the "Muzzle" cue, they should approach the muzzle and put their nose into it. If they don't do this, go back and work through steps 8 and 9 until they can respond to the Muzzle cue.



Holding the muzzle for training

**Once your dog can put their nose in the muzzle on cue, you can move onto the next stage.**



## Muzzle Training

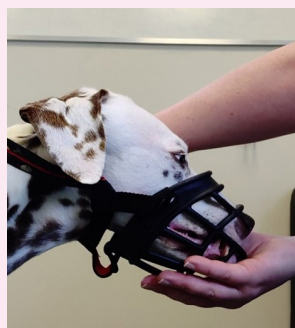
### Stage 2 - Getting Used to the Strap and Buckle

This stage is going to get your dog used to the noise of the clip or buckle on the muzzle and the strap being placed around their head.

1. Have some small, tasty treats and soft food to hand which your dog will work for.
2. Find a quiet place away from any distractions.
3. Hold the muzzle where your dog can see it but does not try to put their nose into it. Do up the clip or move the buckle so it makes a noise and reward them.
4. Repeat this until they are looking for a treat when they hear the clip or buckle being done up.
5. Hold the muzzle in a way that your dog can get their nose into it and you can move the straps. Put something in the end of the muzzle your dog can lick, say the "Muzzle" cue and while they are licking the inside of the muzzle, slowly move the straps; DO NOT try and do it up yet, just get them used to the straps being moved while they have their nose in the muzzle.
6. Over several repetitions of Step 5, slowly move the straps more until you can hold them behind your dogs head for a few seconds while they are licking the inside of the muzzle.

Always release the straps before your dog finishes the food so that they don't try to pull away from the muzzle.

**Once you can hold the straps behind their ears for a few seconds you can move on to Stage 3.**

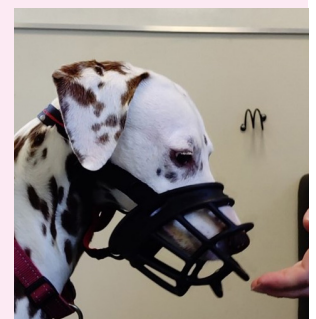


Holding the straps behind the head

### Stage 3 - Fastening the Muzzle and Increasing the Wearing Time

The most important aspect of Stage 3 is to take your time – do not rush this stage as it could undo all of the muzzle training done so far.

1. Have some small, tasty treats and soft food to hand which your dog will work for.
2. Find a quiet place away from any distractions.
3. Put something at the end of the muzzle your dog can lick, say the "Muzzle" cue and while they lick the inside of the muzzle, slowly move the straps and do the clip / buckle up. After 1 second, undo it and take it off. Repeat this several times until they are comfortable with the muzzle being done up.
4. Slowly increase the time the clip/buckle is done up; this maybe 1 second at a time until the are comfortable wearing it for a few minutes at a time.
5. At this early stage, keep feeding treats through the muzzle while it is done up. Over time, you can decrease the number of treats given.
6. When your dog is comfortable wearing the muzzle, you can introduce it to other times during their daily routine such a when out walking. Put the muzzle on for short periods of time, allow them to sniff and receive treats with it on, then remove it. Repeat this several times during the walk.



Wearing muzzle while taking treats

Taken from Small Animal Veterinary Psychiatry. S. Denenberg, CABI Publication, 2021