

FUNdamental words and cues

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Before you get too deep into agility or any sport training with your dog, you should decide which verbal cues you want to use, or are using now, and what these will eventually mean to your dog. When I pick out my verbal cues they very often are the same words I have used with all my previous dogs as I find it challenging to switch words with each new dog. But sometimes you want to name your dog something that could conflict with one of the verbals you want to use or you really like the sound of a different verbal cue and then you both adjust to that new cue. Ideally none of your verbals rhyme or are too similar to other cue words. For example- I like to use the word tunnel, but I have found that the word “come”, could sound very similar to the first syllable of TUN nel so I don’t use “come” with my dog on course other than “come in” which is my serp cue.. If my dog’s name was Bo, then trying to use the word Go could be problematic. Even just using multiple cues that start with the same letter can be confusing to your dog. Tunnel, table, tire, touch, turn can all sound a bit similar when your dog hears the beginning of the cue. I use the word down with my dogs, so I don’t use the trick verbal cue of “bow. I would not use the cue of “get in” for a tunnel as it sounds too close to “get it” my toy retrieve word.

I encourage my students to write down all the verbal cues they use around the house, and in all dogs sports and for trick training and also describe what they mean or should mean to your dog. Sound out your words that could be used in similar situations and consider changing something about the word if it sounds too much like another cue. At times you might be able to change the inflection in your voice to disassociate it with another cue.

I wrote down almost all the verbals that I use with Mockingjay. When I say “almost”, it’s because I have a variety of other words and casual communication I know she understands. She responds to her full name as well as a couple silly nicknames, and I say things like wait there, or use “no reward markers”, like ‘Uh, oh’, or ‘Excuse me’ or even the word ‘No’ if there is something dangerous she should not be doing. These were somewhat casually trained but she understands them nonetheless. I also have a tendency to teach tricks and forget I did so, or what I called those tricks, until I revisit them at some point. I find it interesting to count how many words she knows, and while many of these are situational, she understands them rather well. By situational I mean that if I am pointing at a device like a stool, mat or jump wing and say the wrong word I am sure she would oblige and approach the device. I often have cookies or toys in my hand when doing tricks, so she can pretend not to understand once in a while when rewards are not present, but none of these behaviors are dependent on luring or bribing or even hand or

body signals once they are taught to proficiency. My Border Collie Atticus has all the same agility and 'around the house' cues as Mockingjay except she does not have all the same tricks that Mjay has.

Some verbals we need to teach carefully and proof understanding, like lineup cues on one side or the other, or left and rights, and in places where two agility obstacles are very close together like a tunnel and a contact obstacle, or a jump and the weave poles. This is called verbal/obstacle discrimination. Other cues may not need quite so much testing or proofing.

So, here's my list- I can't wait to see yours!

1. Dogs' name- Come to me and stay with me till released
2. Break -Release word from a position or obstacle or start line-
3. Yes -A marker word that means "you were correct" and will be rewarded.
4. Off ya go- casual "go play" permission to leave after a recall
5. Get it- get the toy or thing I point at
6. Give- put toy in my hand and release it to me
7. Toy- get a toy or item I point at
8. Tug or gimme dat-Tugging word after retrieve-
9. Leave- drop whatever you have or leave what you are looking at
10. Put on your leash- come to me and let me attach your leash collar or harness
11. Put your head in- When I hold out a slip lead and want them to put their head in the opening
12. Sit- sit position and stay until released
13. Down- down position and down until released
14. Stand- stand position and stay until released
15. Hand- touch my hand, possibly keep nose "glued to hand".
16. Ready- hand in collar and look forward
17. Look- focus forward -look forward to a toy, target or obstacle
18. Hop up- all four feet up on something like a box or bed or table.
19. Get in- get in your crate, or a box or other device
20. Go to bed- go lie down in your bed and stay till released
21. Feet- put your front feet on something and stay till released
22. Spot- rear feet up on something, front feet on ground, stay till released
23. Close- line up on my left side and move forward with me if I move forward
24. Side- line up on my right side and move forward with me if I move forward
25. Watch- look at my eyes

Agility cues-

26. Over- Take a jump, bar first
27. D-D-D- Wrap around a jump wing in a clockwise circle- bar first
28. Quick-quick- Wrap around a jump wing in a counter clockwise circle- bar first
29. Left – go to jump and turn left- bar first, soft turn
30. Right- go to jump turn right, bar first, soft turn
31. Bye bye- Backside wrap- take a jump going around the wing first and wrap back
32. Push- backside slice
33. Scoop- threadle wrap, wing first (flick)
34. Here here- threadle slice-
35. Switch- turn away from the direction you are looking, lead change on the flat
36. Come in- Serpentine cue
37. Out- push out and away from me laterally- Also used for a push off contacts
38. Go on- keep running straight ahead
39. Tunnel- get in the tunnel cue
40. Through- opposite end of tunnel or when dog crosses over my feet to get into the tunnel
41. Run it- running dog walk or AFrame cue to get on obstacle
42. This way- come towards me after a running contact
43. Mat -hit a mat- used mostly for ground work or back chaining
44. Up-Up- get on a contact obstacle and turn around for back chaining
45. Spot- get on the seesaw – also..
46. Spot- 2 on 2 off position with front feet off of a device and rear feet on a device
47. Poles- weave pole cue
48. Turn- turn around on an obstacle- face the other direction used for contact training
49. Hoop -tire cue
50. Start line release is “break” or obstacle word

Trick type cues- **some could be used for and around agility training

51. Walk- walk backwards
52. Dog Catch- jump into my arms
53. Pretty bird -sit with your rear on the ground and your front end up in the air
54. Be a poodle- stand up on your rear legs and walk forward
55. Twirl- twirl in a circle while standing on your hind legs
56. Under- go under or between my legs- my dogs go between my legs and then end up ONLY on my right side
57. Around- go around me from my right side to my left side
58. Weave- From my left side weave figure 8's between my legs

59. Go for a walk- weave my legs while I walk forward
60. Curtsy- bow position with head on the ground and butt in the air
61. Show me your belly- roll half way over and stop with your feet and belly up
62. Roll over- roll all the way over
63. Pull- grab something and walk backwards (pulling so she can pull open a door or item)
64. Close the door- close a cupboard or house door by pushing with your front feet
65. Put it away- pick up what I ask and put it where I direct
66. Shoe- go find my shoe
67. Another one- go get obstacle we are retrieving if there are multiples
68. Tap- use one front foot to tap on a device or dog or person from a sit position
69. Give her a hug- put both front feet around another dog
70. Hug it- hold onto a device or toy with your front paws
71. High five- tap my hand with one front foot usually while sitting
72. Find it- go find a hidden toy or odor in scent work
73. Patty cake- tap both my hands with your front feet
74. Wave- wave one front foot in the air
75. Bop it- nose touch on the Wilkes bop it target
76. Nose- nose touch a target
77. Chin- put your chin on the ground
78. Hold- hold an item in mouth till released

How to introduce a new word to an existing verbal cue.

If I wanted to change the word “down” to the word “drop” I would add my new word first like this, “drop down” saying the two words together. Use both words together and reward each time your dog responds to the cue. Pretty quickly your dog will begin to anticipate that they should respond to the first part of the verbal and you can begin to randomly drop the second part of the cue and just use your new word