



## Training Plan: Muzzle Training

**Why this is useful for your dog to know:** Like a bike helmet, a muzzle is a piece of safety equipment. A muzzle protects the dog as much as the people around him. Every dog can benefit from muzzle training, since any dog may need to wear a muzzle in the case of high stress or injury. Proper training makes it much less stressful (and maybe even pleasant) for a dog to wear a muzzle.

**End behavior:** The dog will comfortably and happily wear a properly fitted muzzle for up to 30 minutes.

**Step 1:** Show the dog the muzzle from a foot away; reward him with food whenever he looks at it. Do this 2-5 times. Gradually move closer to the dog until the muzzle is within touching distance.

Tip: If the dog retreats from the muzzle, start from farther away. Hold it at a distance where he can see it but doesn't try to move away. Toss him the food while the muzzle is in view, then take the muzzle out of his view (e.g., put it behind your back) and stop feeding him. Show him the muzzle again and start feeding, then take it away and stop feeding. Gradually move the muzzle closer until it is within touching distance.

**Step 2:** Wipe some wet food, peanut butter or soft cheese around the inside edge of the muzzle. As the dog approaches, let him lick the muzzle. When he will comfortably approach the muzzle and touch it, go to Step 3.

**Step 3:** Place high-value treats in the muzzle and allow the dog to eat the treats from the muzzle. Cup your hand under the muzzle to hold in the treats. Let the dog place his nose in the muzzle to get the treats. Slowly pull the muzzle away from the dog as he eats the treats, so that he wants to follow and push his mouth into the muzzle. Do not force the muzzle on to the dog. Gently remove the muzzle before the dog has a chance to remove his nose. This step will ensure that the dog does not develop a habit of taking the food and pulling away from the muzzle. When the dog will keep his nose in the muzzle for 30 seconds, go to Step 4.

Tip: If treats fall out of the muzzle as you're working on this step, try putting some duct tape inside the bottom of the muzzle to hold them in.

**Step 4:** Gradually require the dog to keep his nose in the muzzle for longer periods. For this and all following steps, use treats (e.g., jerky and Pup-Peroni) that you can easily give the dog through the muzzle. Even better, use tasty foods with paste consistency, such as soft cheese (e.g., Cheez Whiz), Kong filler and peanut butter, to squeeze rewards through the muzzle into the dog's mouth. When the dog will wear the muzzle for 2 to 3 minutes, go to Step 5.

Tip: If your muzzle does not allow for easy delivery of treats to the dog's mouth, consider cutting out one small section of bars from the front.

**Step 5:** Allow the dog to place his nose in the muzzle and reward him with treats. Begin to fumble with the straps and clips, and attempt to touch the straps together. When you can hold the straps for 10 seconds, go to Step 6.

**Step 6:** Allow the dog to place his nose in the muzzle and reward him with treats, then clip the muzzle straps around his neck. Make sure the muzzle is snug enough that he can't pull it off, but also not too tight. Give him treats quickly and constantly for the entire time the muzzle is on. Keep the sessions short — 20 seconds to start. When you can easily place the muzzle on the dog, and clip it, go to Step 7.

Tip: If you notice that the muzzle seems to be chafing or looks uncomfortable, check to be sure that you are using the right size. If you are, then consider applying adhesive foam padding to the chafing points on the inside to make it more comfortable for the dog.

**Step 7:** Put the muzzle on the dog and immediately begin to reward him with treats while he is wearing it. Then, while he's wearing the muzzle, take the dog for a brief walk inside the run or kennel. Keep giving treats frequently (every few steps). It's helpful to have two people to do this at first: one to keep the dog moving and one to reward. Do this exercise a few times and then go to Step 8.

**Step 8:** Put the muzzle on the dog and immediately begin to reward him with treats while he is wearing it. Take the dog for a short walk (outside, this time) while he's wearing the muzzle. Click and reward at regular intervals. Do not remove the muzzle until the dog is back in his run.

Tip: If the dog starts to paw at the muzzle, keep him moving and reward more often. Do not remove the muzzle while the dog is pawing at it. If he gets very uncomfortable, wait until he stops pawing at it for a few seconds (feed him treats to distract him if necessary), and then remove it and end the session. In the next session, reduce the amount of time he wears the muzzle.

**Step 9:** Have the dog wear the muzzle for all walks. He should look forward to being muzzled at this point, because it predicts a walk. Give the dog treats frequently during walks.

## Proofing

Proofing means teaching the dog to generalize the behavior in different contexts.

**Location:** Have the dog wear the muzzle for short periods in places where he'll be likely to need it. If you are training him to wear the muzzle for grooming or medical purposes, make several visits to the vet's office or the groomer before the actual appointments. Put the muzzle on the dog and give him lots of treats. During the actual appointments, continue to reward the dog periodically while he's muzzled. Make sure he wears the muzzle for walks or other enjoyable activities more often than he wears it for medical reasons.

**Handler:** Have different people practice putting the muzzle on the dog.

## Notes

The goal of muzzle training is to make wearing the muzzle a safe, happy game that the dog loves to play. If at any time during muzzle training the dog appears anxious or unhappy about the muzzle, back up in the plan to the previous step.

**If you get stuck** on any step (e.g., the dog becomes uncomfortable and won't stop pawing at the muzzle), stop and take a break. When you try again, go back to the previous step in the plan. If necessary, create intermediate steps with intensity and duration that your dog is comfortable with. Don't rush: Take it at the dog's speed.