

Wearing a muzzle does not have to be a bad thing for a dog and wearing one certainly doesn't mean your dog is bad. Basket muzzles can be useful for a variety of different purposes, such as preventing your dog from picking up unhealthy or dangerous food items on walks. Basket muzzles should be the muzzle of choice for dogs visiting the veterinary clinic because they allow the dog to pant, eat, drink, and take treats while wearing it. This type of muzzle is also safer for a dog to wear for an extended period because it allows them to pant. Before using the basket muzzle your dog must be habituated to it in a very positive manner. Your dog should not just tolerate the muzzle, we want your dog to LOVE the muzzle, and this is not as difficult as you may think.

Preparing for Muzzle Training

- Before beginning, make sure you have a variety of treats handy, especially anything that is goeey or can be licked, such as peanut butter, baby food, canned pet food or canned cheese.
- Throughout the training process, always remember, *only good things happen when the muzzle appears!*

Training Steps

1. Remove muzzle from cabinet and hold it up for the dog to see. Prevent your dog from sticking their nose in it.
 2. Place several kibbles in the bottom of the basket muzzle.
 3. Offer the kibbles in the muzzle, when the dog finishes the kibble remove the muzzle and refill.
 4. Repeat until meal is finished.
 5. Once the dog is excited and running to you when you pull out the muzzle proceed to step 6.
 6. As dog is eating out of muzzle slowly raise the strap over the back of neck.
 - a. How far to raise the strap is determined by the dog's comfort level.
 - b. The goal is to raise the strap to the point that the dog does not move backward, stop eating or act uncomfortable or "resist" in any way.
 - c. Repeat each level several times before proceeding. Begin by just barely raising the strap, to laying it across the back of the neck.
 7. Once you have the strap laying across the back of the neck, then you will gently hold the end close to the buckle without actually buckling it. Repeat.
 8. Then slowly start to buckle the muzzle. Slip the holed edge into one side of the buckle, but do not buckle it- repeat
 9. Then put the strap through both sides of the buckle- repeat.
 10. Once the dog is comfortable allowing you to strap the muzzle on, feed squeeze cheese, kong paste, or some other squeezable treat through the basket. The treat stops when the muzzle comes off. Repeat.
- The steps above may be proceeding over days or weeks - Do not rush them!**
11. Practice putting the muzzle on at different times of the day for short periods of time.
 12. By the time you are at step 10 you should not have to put kibble in the bottom to get the dog to want to put their nose in the muzzle. However, if you are having difficulty buckling the strap, a little goo (kong paste, peanut butter, or squeeze cheese smeared on the bottom might make it easier for you and keep your dog happy).
 13. Next work on duration or the length of time the dog has the muzzle on.
 - a. Gradually increase the length of time the muzzle is on. Treat intermittently.
 - b. You do not want to keep the muzzle on until the dog fusses and tries to get it off.
 - i. If the dog fusses, ask for a different behavior (sit, down, come or some other trick the dog really enjoys) to redirect the fussing before removing the muzzle.

- c. Ideally if you can see that the dog might fuss, redirect, and treat. This should occur before fussing.
- d. If you use a clicker, this is an opportunity to click calm behavior.

14. Once your dog is able to keep the muzzle on for a longer period of time, then add some distractions and distance.

The steps above may take days to weeks. Do not rush them!

Important Considerations

During training, you should never be putting the muzzle on the dog; instead, the dog is putting its nose in the muzzle!

It is important to avoid doing things that would require your dog wearing a muzzle for unpleasant things until **after** the dog is trained to love the muzzle.

- Change your perception- think of the muzzle as a treat basket.
- When your dog is wearing a muzzle, it should be viewed as a safety measure. It is NOT a license to do things to your dog that you would not do if the muzzle was not present.
- Consider the muzzle a backup safety feature. It is there in case something goes terribly wrong, to prevent a tragic result. It is a bit like the airbag in your car, you don't drive more recklessly because you know it is there but you like having it (along with lap belts, shoulder harnesses and safety glass), just in case.
- Always respect your dog's body language. If your dog acts uncomfortable, stop what you are doing immediately, try to determine what is concerning the dog and avoid doing that again in the future.

Once your dog is well trained to wear the muzzle be sure to put it on at random times when you may not need it. Be sure to use treats

Do not only put the muzzle on for veterinary visits, nail trims, or medical treatments. You **do not** want the dog to only associate the muzzle with scary things.

For more information about teaching your dog to wear a muzzle, check out the following links:

[The Muzzle Up Project](#)

[Teaching a dog to wear a muzzle](#)

[Training to the muzzle The Battersea Way](#)