A person and dog with leashes

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**Chapter 4: Vocabulary of a Guide Dog**

This chapter will outline all of the verbal cues you may use with your new guide. These are words that your dog is familiar with, and your instructors will also teach you how to combine them with hand signals and other physical cues when appropriate. You can begin to build strong communication with your dog by utilizing language that he or she can understand. As you progress through class, you will learn how to add to their vocabulary by teaching your dog to understand new cues.

First, a couple of definitions:

**Cue**- A cue can be any signal that the dog understands. This could be a word, hand signal, sound, or other physical or visual stimulus.

**Command**- A command is a specific type of cue, typically given verbally, which indicates for the dog to perform a specific behavior.

**Event Marker**- An event marker is another specific type of cue. It is typically verbal (“yes”), or auditory (“clicker”), and lets the dog know that they have responded correctly and that a reward is forthcoming. The marker provides a “bridge” between the desirable behavior and a food reward. This will be discussed further in later chapters.

The following list of commands is broken down into a few categories:

**Working Commands** (also known as Harness Commands) are reserved for use only when working your dog in harness, holding the harness handle.

**Obedience Commands** (or Non-Harness Commands) are used primarily in non-working situations. Your dog may be wearing his or her harness, but these commands should not be given while holding the handle.

**Soft Commands and other cues.** These may be words or cues that your dog has some familiarity with but are not as strong as the primary commands, or that are used to encourage certain behaviors but are not really considered commands.

**Working Commands**

**Forward**

**Right**

**Left**

**Wait**

**Hup up**

**Steady**

**Targeting cues; To the curb, To the steps, To the door**

**Over**

**Obedience Commands**

**Sit**

**Down**

**Stay**

**Heel**

**Side**

**Close**

**Off**

**Out**

**Come**

**Soft Commands and other cues**

Get Busy

Harness up

Back

Kennel

**Leave it**

**Let’s Go**

**Place**

**Stand**

**Touch**

**Event Markers**

**Yes**

**Brief descriptions of the above cues are listed alphabetically below. Each word will be followed by a letter code: V, H, or VH. These letters indicate V for verbal signals, H for hand signals, VH for both verbal and hand signals. This section can be used as a glossary and referred back to throughout training.**

Guide dogs can understand both verbal and physical cues, however, using all signals for a particular behavior with your new dog will help ensure that the dog can understand what you are asking. As you build good communication with your dog, you should find that your dog can respond to cues separately as well.

**Back**- V: prompts dog to step backwards when required to do so; backing into a restaurant booth, train or plane seating. Usually combined with gentle physical manipulation and/or body blocking.

**Break**-V: releases the dog to a known action, usually to eat or play, or to jump into a vehicle.

**Come**- VH: dog comes to handler from a distance. No specific position. Can be combined with “Touch” to encourage dog to make physical contact with handler. Hand signal is clapping hands then holding open and low for dog to make contact.

**Close**- VH: prompts the dog to do a semi-circle turn into the handler to sit between handler’s feet. Can be done with handler seated or standing, and may also be helpful in positioning dog at handler’s side in certain situations. Hand signal is patting inside of thigh to invite the dog in.

**Down**-VH: dog lies down with its elbows and entire body making contact with the floor. Down can be utilized in many positions relative to the handler. Hand signal is a flat palm facing the floor.

**Forward** (harness only)- VH: initiates motion in the dog to lead out in front of handler. Hand signal is given as if handler is tossing a soft ball away from them in the desired direction of travel.

**Get Busy**- V: prompts the dog to begin the relieving process. Handler motions dog away from them with the leash towards the desired relieving location.

**Harness up**- V: prompts dog that harness will be placed over their head and that they should be looking in direction of the harness.

**Heel**- VH: dog comes into heel position at the handler’s left side facing the same direction. Dog should make a semi-circle turn into the handler or back up, depending on the starting position. Hand signal is with the left hand making a large C motion at the handlers left side.

**Hup up** (harness only)- V: prompts the dog to increase pace and/or pull, or to refocus on work if mildly distracted.

**Kennel**- V: prompts dog to enter a crate.

**Leave it**- V: to prompt the dog not to pick up food off the floor when on leash or in harness.

**Left** (harness only)- VH: prompts the dog to back up and turn left while giving the handler clearance of obstacles on the dog’s side. Hand signal is given with the right hand across the handler’s body to the left.

**Let’s Go**- V: to initiate motion in the dog, often used to cue the dog to get in front of the handler in certain situations such as getting out from under a chair or coming through a doorway.

**Off**- V: prompts the dog to put all four feet on the floor. Used to curb jumping behavior or remove the dog from an elevated surface.

**Out**- V: to release a toy when play retrieving, or release any item from the dog’s mouth.

**Over** (harness only)- VH: prompts the dog to move closer to the shoreline generally along a country road. Handler motions the dog towards the shoreline as the cue is given.

**Place**- VH: prompts dog to go to a specific place, carpet, dog bed etc. Hand signal is a pointing motion towards that location.

**Right** (harness only)- VH: prompts the dog to turn to the right while giving clearance around obstacles on the handler’s side. Hand signal is given with the right hand across the handler’s body to the right

**Side**- V: dog moves behind handler and to handler’s right side to prepare to exit a standard or revolving door. Leash is passed behind the body into right hand to achieve side position.

**Sit**- VH: dog sits with his haunches on the ground, head up. Hand signal is a light tapping of the handler’s left thigh to place the dog in heel position at the left side. If sit is required in other positions, the hand signal is a scooping motion with palm up.

**Stand**-VH: cues the dog into a standing position with all four paws on the ground. The hand signal is given by having the flat palm of the hand both facing the dog and near its nose followed by a brisk hand movement away from the dog. The handler’s fingers should not be pointed up or down; instead they should be perpendicular to the floor.

**Stay** -VH: dog is prompted to stay in any position or location that the handler asks. Verbal cue should be given without saying the dog’s name. Hand signal is a flat palm facing the dog, fingers pointing down if the dog is in heel position, or up if the dog is in front of the handler.

**Steady** (harness only)- V: prompts the dog to reduce pace and/or pull. Cue should always be paired with a release of tension on the harness, using a light harness check or “floating” technique.

**Targeting Cues**- V: To the curb, steps or door. The dog is prompted to work to the specific location with a verbal cue. Targets can be reinforced by having the dog “Touch” at the location. New targets can be taught in a similar manner with the use of backchaining, which will be detailed in a later chapter.

**Touch**- VH: prompts dog to make contact with the handler’s closed fist. This is an all-positive game for the dogs, though it has many practical uses as will be discussed in later chapters.

**Wait**- V: prompts the dog to stop and wait for the next command/cue.

**Yes!**- Unlike a command, this is a marker word used to mark precisely the moment of the dog’s correct behavior or choice. Should be given in a crisp, quick, enthusiastic tone. YES is not a reward, but communicates to the dog “That’s right!” and that a food reward is coming. Another common marker used in animal training is the clicker, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

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