

# When, Where and How do Dogs Sit?

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Sit is usually the first thing people teach their puppies, without thinking about the consequences or why they do it.

We wanted to know more about the sit. Many years ago, we started the sit study among my dog trainer students. It has been ongoing for 20 years now, with amazing results. Several thousand dogs have been observed, and we learned many things we did not know before. First, we learned that if dogs have the choice, they do not sit very often. They stand, lie down, and sit in some particular situations.

It is partly related to breed, age, structure, and physical health, so it can vary from dog to dog, but in general, all dogs sit much less by choice than we ask them to. It is not the preferable thing for them to do, and we need to listen to them. Nature knows best.

Looking at the reasons for that, we could clearly see what it was about.

**1.** It takes a lot of muscle and power to sit down and get up. It takes a long time for babies to have enough muscle and strength to do this. The same is true for puppies. They just don't have enough muscle to go through the sitting positions that we ask them to do. Too often and for too long, they will feel pain and put their joints at risk. Therefore, they sit crookedly, stretching legs forward, and lie down quickly. It gets too painful. During training sessions, they are sometimes asked to sit 10-20 and up to 60 times. Imagine how those muscles might ache and bother the puppy. Try to do it yourself!

**2.** The same will happen when they get old and lose muscles again. Never ask an old dog to sit! It might very well cause him great pain. Some dogs like hounds with their long thighs have a structure that is not good for sitting.

**3.** When puppies are born, they are not complete, and

X-rays show that joints are not connected to the sockets yet, they actually float around. They will slowly grow to join, but it takes many months. Making them sit means they might pop out of position because there are not muscles enough either to keep them in place. That can cause damages for life.

My students observed dogs sitting when they wanted to, and the results were overwhelming: hounds, in most cases, never sat. They lied down directly—dogs with health problems the same, old dogs too. Healthy, strong adult dogs sat, but far from as much as we ask them to. In a 3-month period, one dog sat once.

Studies like that tell us much about what is natural and right for dogs, and we should respect that.

## Reasons for sitting:

**1.** First, dogs would sit down when they needed to look at something from a distance. They have to raise their heads and bend their necks while standing, because of the position of the eyes. The neck may become sore after a few seconds, so they would sit down to straighten the curve of the neck. - This was the most common reason for sitting down.

**2.** Secondly, they sat as a mid-station between lying and standing.

**3.** Then far down on the list came sitting as a calming signal, trying to calm someone down.

We also had learned behaviour, so if you ask your dog to sit when getting food, going out the door and so on, very often they will do it by habit. But, that does not mean it is good for them.

**Should you ask your dog to sit? I advise you to observe your dog first.**

- Does he sit down easily, or does it look a bit hard, doing it slow, not willingly? Then you should not.

- Do you know that your dog has a physical problem, is it old or very young, and therefore has not built any muscles yet? Then you should not.
- Do you have a hound or dog with a hound shape? Then you should not.
- Do you have a very heavy breed? He will need so much more power to sit and get up that you should not ask him either. And absolutely never a puppy from a heavy dog breed.

**Observe your dog sitting:**

- Does he sit down straight when he sits by himself, or does he sit with one or two hind legs stretched forward, sit on one «ham», or in other awkward way? Then I would not ask my dog to sit ever. He should choose to do it by himself.

**Studies by some Veterinary high schools showed that:**

- Sitting for more than a couple of minutes disturbed the blood circulation so much that the ocular pressure could make a dog get sight problems or even get blind if they had to do it often.

**Conclusion:**

- You can ask your dog to sit if he is not a very young dog or an old dog, has physical problems or has a greyhound build, or if he is neither big nor heavy.
- Even adult, healthy, muscular dogs should not sit often and for long, so keep it to a minimum.
- Let dogs choose if they want to sit, lie down, or stand. That is their right to do so.

After having made all kinds of dogs sit in training and competitions for 30 years, I noticed the things mentioned above. I began to question the need for that exercise. So therefore stopped asking dogs to sit 22 years ago and just told myself that if I ever needed to teach a dog to sit, I could do it without any problems. I have never felt I needed it. Dogs do all I want them to, without any sit commands.

**If you want to sit, sit!**

**If you want your dog to sit, think twice!**



*Harry at 18 wks sitting & getting up*