

# Words Matter



## What if you didn't know the words?

You wake up one day realizing you don't know words? Not even one. Not good morning, or good evening, or even, why the heck can't I remember a single word. Words have suddenly lost any meaning to you. To make matters worse, today is the day you are starting a new job.

Hi there, a receptionist says, take a seat over there. You look at her and smile realizing that you have no idea what she just said. She is looking at you and making sounds so you deduce that she must want something. But what? "Please", she says pointing "have a seat". Hmm?... you can see that she is pointing her finger at something but have not idea why but you look that way. Still confused, you smile as best you can and continue to look at her. "Sir", she says a bit sterner and louder, "I really need you to SIT DOWN". You begin to get a bit worried and she does not look so happy anymore. Was it something you did? I know she wants something. She was pointing that way but now she is starting to raise her voice. I wish I knew what she wanted, you think to yourself as you stare back at her smiling. This is so hard. The receptionist thinks to herself, "Is this guy stupid or stubborn?"

So, what does this scenario have to do with dogs? Everything. The person who doesn't know words is your dog. Dogs don't use words to communicate amongst themselves and if they never met a human then words would never be a part of their lives. Watch two dogs playing if you really want to know how they talk to each other. You will see tails going up and down, ears held high, pushed forward, plastered back on the head, yips, air snaps, and mouths open or closed or even showing teeth. What you will never hear is one dog saying a word to another dog. That's just not what they do. It is as far from natural for their species as you can get. The only reason a dog needs to learn about words is to talk with us. Actually, let me rephrase that because they will never use words to talk to us. The only reason for words is so we can talk to them. To be perfectly honest we could probably never use words and be able to communicate quite well with our dogs using motions. A dog would find that easier but we use words because that's what easier for US. So, you should give your dog a break every time you tell them to sit and they just stare at you. Your dog is not ignoring you. Perhaps they just didn't hear you? Perhaps the word you think tells your dog to do something is not what the dog understands. Let's try an experiment to see what your dog understands about your words.

Take your dog into a quiet room and have them face you then ask them to "Sit". I assume that is how you tell your dog to sit but if you use a different word then go ahead and use that one. **Also, make sure that YOU ONLY SAY YOUR WORD ONCE! Say it only once and see if your dog sits. Did he, do it?**

Put your dog back in front, stand the same way but this time say the word "Sit". Did your dog sit? Don't be surprised if they did. Okay how about we put them back in front and say the word "It"? Did they sit? If they sat to any other word than Sit you can be pretty sure that it's not the word "Sit" that is telling your dog to sit. It might be the sound "IT" or the sound "SSS" or it might not be anything you say. Your dog might be watching what you DO. Maybe at the same time you tell your dog to sit you also look at the ground beside them with your eyes. Or maybe you point to the spot you want them to sit. Let's check to see if it's not the word the dog is using to understand you but something else that you are doing while saying the word. Perhaps the word means nothing?

So, let's put your dog in front again but this time I want YOU to sit on the ground. From that position tell the dog "SIT". Did they sit? If so, try laying on your back and saying "SIT". What happened? Did they sit? What if you stand up but turn your back to your dog and without looking at them say "SIT". How did that work out?

If you answer that no matter how you were standing or sitting or which way you are facing your dog sits then it's a good bet they know what the word "SIT" means. If they also sat when you said a rhyming word or something other than "SIT" then SIT is not the cue your dog understands. You might find it to be a combination of a word and a look or it may not be your word at all but some action you are making. It may be a whole host of little signals that the dog sees but you don't that tells a dog you want them to sit. They are very good at noticing things

**So, what this all means is the next time you give your dog a cue and they just sit looking at you. Don't get mad.** They are not being strong willed or trying to be your leader. WHAT IT MEANS IS THAT THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU ARE SAYING! Instead of getting upset, calm down and realize, it may be YOU that didn't teach the word right and need to teach it again. That's all they need from you. It is rare that a dog does something to spite you. That's a human thing and not a dog thing. For your dog's sake think about how you teach your dog words and check from time to time to see if the words you use are the words your dog understands.

After all, they would prefer that no one used words so if we are going to use them let's give them a break and be as clear as possible. Our dogs will thank us for it. *Stuart Hoffman*



## **AN APPLE A DAY CAN KEEP THE VETERINARIAN AWAY**

As lovers of dogs, we often want to treat our animals with an array of pre-packaged indulgences from the pet store. However, many of these "delights" contain ingredients that are not healthy for your dog.

Try giving your furry friend a healthy, whole food option like an apple! Apples are nutrient dense foods containing beneficial fiber and nutrients such as quercetin, a powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant.

Apples are a budget friendly alternative to expensive boxed cookies and can be given whole to larger dogs or cut up into smaller pieces for our little friends. If you are concerned about the seeds, simply core the apple before giving it to your dog.

Including nutrient dense foods like apples into your dog's diet is great for keeping their teeth clean as well as satisfying your dog's need to chew on something without the worry of it splintering or causing damage to the inside of their mouth.  
*Vikki Crane-Small*