



## Muzzles: 10 Steps to Get Your Dog Comfortable

Muzzles can be a very useful accessory in your life with your dog. Their use has many advantages, whether helping during veterinary care, teaching them to play safely with fellow dogs or preventing them from eating anything and everything along their walk.

However, having an unfamiliar object on their snout can enervate and even frighten some dogs at first. This is why it's useful to desensitize your pup. **After all, you want the accessory to work when you need it, not to be a source of stress for your animal. When they have accepted the muzzle, they'll be happy to wear it and will even gladly come and slip it on!**

For successful muzzle training, be sure to follow the following steps in order, without skipping any. However, you can spread them out over a few days or even weeks, depending on your dog's comfort level.

### Tools:

- A **basket-type muzzle**, which allows your dog to breathe, drink and eat.
- Your dog's **favourite treats**.

### 10 easy steps

#### — Step 1

**Present the muzzle to your dog without placing it too close and then give them a tempting treat. Don't ask for anything more just yet.** All your pup needs to do is see the muzzle, get a treat and then it disappears. Repeat this step several times, each time presenting the muzzle differently (from the left, the right, the floor, etc.) for very short periods.

Observe your dog's reaction when the muzzle appears. If they are happy (e.g., wagging their tail playfully), they associate the accessory with something positive! Proceed to Step 2 only once your dog is happy to see this new object.

## — Step 2

**Present the muzzle to your dog and reward them when they look at it or move their snout in its direction.** The goal is for your faithful companion to get acquainted with the muzzle at their own pace and understand that the closer they get the more treats they'll enjoy!

To find out if your dog is ready to move on to Step 3, present the muzzle five times from a variety of angles. If your pooch comes up close each time, you've done a great job and can move on to the next step!

## — Step 3

**Present the muzzle to your dog and reward them when they touch it.** For you to proceed to Step 4, your dog should touch the muzzle enthusiastically at least five times in a row. It may take dozens of repetitions get to this result. Be sure to respect your dog's pace!

## — Step 4

**Present your dog with the muzzle with a treat placed inside. This way, they have to put their nose in the muzzle to get the treat out. Remove the muzzle as soon as they have had their treat.** From this point on, only reward your pup in the muzzle.

**Pro tip:** Don't move the muzzle towards your dog. Instead, wait for them to insert their head by themselves. If you force them, they may not enjoy the experience as much.

## — Step 5

**Present your dog with the muzzle, wait for them to put it on, then feed them for three seconds with their snout in the muzzle.** Remove the muzzle as soon as you stop feeding them and before they remove their head.

At this stage, your dog must voluntarily place their nose in the muzzle. Once they do, you want them to leave the muzzle on longer and find it pleasant. Repeat the exercise several times, very gradually increasing the length of time your animal keeps the muzzle on its nose. Go from 3 to 5 seconds, then to 7 and even 10!

**Pro tip:** Use a tube or a syringe to feed your dog cheese or kibble softened with water without having to stop for treats in a pouch.

## — Step 6

**Now that your dog is comfortable leaving their nose in the muzzle, it's time to desensitize them to the straps that attach the accessory to their head.**

To do this, repeat Step 5 and handle the straps while you feed your dog, but do not attach the muzzle completely. Your dog simply needs to associate the straps around their head with the pleasant experience of eating.

— Step 7

**Repeat Step 6. While your dog is eating, loosely tie the straps so that your dog gets used to them and forges pleasant associations.** Continue feeding them, but loosen and remove the muzzle.

— Step 8

**Repeat Step 7, leaving the muzzle attached for a longer and longer length of time as you feed your dog.** This should be done very gradually.

— Step 9

**Repeat Step 8. This time, tighten the straps until the muzzle fits snugly around your dog's head.**

— Step 10

**Now that your dog has voluntarily put their muzzle on and agrees to having it attached in exchange for treats, you can gradually space out the treats while leaving the muzzle on.**

**Keep training sessions very short so your animal doesn't start scratching to remove the muzzle. Your faithful companion should be completely comfortable in the muzzle before wearing it for extended periods of time.**

Once your dog agrees to wear it for several seconds, start putting it on during activities he enjoys, like walks or playtime. They will continue to associate the muzzle with positive experiences. This way, even in situations that are less pleasant for him, such as a trip to the vet's, they'll still slip the muzzle on easily.

Amélie Martel, CPDT-KA

The Montreal SPCA reminds you that, under section 27 of the Regulation respecting the safety and welfare of cats and dogs, it is illegal to leave a muzzle on an unattended dog.