



Leash Handling: Isometrics, Balance & Control

VIDEO SCRIPT

This video has 7 sections, each is a separate lesson.

- How to Hold the Leash
- Isometrics : including Locking & Freezing
- Body mechanics : Proper Alignment & Balance
- Body mechanics : Balance & Alignment (Practicing with your dog)
- Shortening the Leash
- Shortening the Leash for Little Dogs
- Leash Handling Practice with Dogs (Practicing with your dog)

What you will need: A flat 6 ft nylon or fabric leash $\frac{3}{4}$ " or 1" wide. For little dogs, the leash can be $\frac{1}{2}$ " or $\frac{5}{8}$ ". The leash should be smooth, soft, and light on your hands. Lots of little pieces of food or treats. And your dog. Your dog should be wearing a flat collar or a harness.

At first, you will only need the leash. For two of the lessons, you will want to practice with your dog. When you practice with your dog, it is important you have an abundance of treats or food for your dog. This helps you and your dog as you practice.

Stop, pause, rewind and replay the video for each lesson as many times as you like until you perfect the techniques. Go slow. Reward your dog. And you will have more fun practicing.

How to Hold the Leash

Slide your thumb into the handle of the leash, instead of your fingers. Your thumb is simply a hook on which to hold the leash. Don't raise your thumb. Keep it parallel and resting on your hand as you close your fingers. With your other hand, jerk the leash a few times. You should not feel any pressure on your thumb. You should just feel a stop. Holding the leash this way frees up your fingers so you can use them as you need to. Be mindful not to open your hand fully as the leash can slip out. Always keep some

fingers on the leash. You can now use this hand to multitask, pick up and grab items, or give treats to your dog. With the same hand I hold the leash, I pick up one of Lucy's bones, pass it to Candace, who gives it to Lucy, but I still have control of the leash.

Here's how to hold the leash shown from a different angle. Keep your thumb parallel and resting against your fingers. Don't raise your thumb or 'hitchhike.' Close your fingers to secure the leash. This will give you more control. Then yank the leash with your other hand. You should feel a 'stop' or a 'dead end.' This is what you want your dog to feel if he pulls against the leash. Move your fingers so you can use them, remembering not to open your hand fully as the leash can slip out. Keep at least some fingers closed to maintain control. You can pick up an item while holding the leash. In this case, I pick up one of Lucy's bones. I pass it to Candace. She takes it and gives it to Lucy, yet she still has a grip on the leash.

Holding the Leash : Mistakes & Corrections

It's common to make this mistake. Notice Candace's hand. She slips her fingers into the handle instead of her thumb. This is the way most of us hold the leash or we wrap it around the wrist. She correctly then slips her thumb into the handle and closes her fingers.

Isometrics : Locking & Freezing

Now you can learn how to lock up or freeze if your dog suddenly pulls or lunges so he comes to a stop or dead-end. We tend to pull up or back on the dog which sends a conflicting message. It can make pulling worse and is uncomfortable for your dog.

It will be beneficial to have a helper. Make a right angle with your arm. Then, lower your forearm slightly. Initially, keep your upper arm and elbow against your body. Your forearm should be in line with the leash and angled or pointing towards your dog.

When there is a tug at the leash, instead of pulling up or back on it with your hand, freeze or lock at your elbow. Candace holds the leash a little too high which causes her arm to bounce. When she lowers her forearm so it aligns with the leash, she has more control. When she tries to pull back, she loses control. Once she self-corrects, she regains it.

Seen from a different angle, I initially hold Candace's arm as I pull at the leash. This makes it easier for her. Her hand and forearm need to be in line with the leash and in the direction of the dog for her to stop or lock effectively. If she pulls back, we get into a tug of war. When she realigns her forearm, she regains control.

Isometrics: Locking/Freezing – Mistakes & Corrections

Catch yourself on this mistake. Initially, Candace is holding the leash correctly. She then slips her hand or fingers into the loop handle instead of her thumb and I jerk on the leash.

Once she holds it properly, she has better control. She can relax her arm, but if I yank on the leash she can easily lock up.

Body-Mechanics : Proper Alignment & Balance

Keep your arm relaxed when your dog is on the leash. Let it float with the dog. Wherever the leash is, your hand follows. Your arm is an extension of the leash. We tend to turn and face the direction our dog is in, as Candace does here. Your shoulders don't have to face the same direction. If you have a helper, have them hold the end of the leash as they walk in a semi-circle around you. Don't change your body-position. Let your arm follow the leash. Close your eyes if you have to. If you feel a pull, shift your body-weight to keep your balance instead of using your hand or arm to pull back on the dog.

Shown from a different angle, Candace relaxes her arm. I gently pull on the leash as I walk in a semi-circle around her. By keeping her hand and arm in line with the leash, when I pull on it, I get little resistance but I can't go any further. Regardless of where I stand, if I pull on the leash, I am pulling against her entire body weight.

When Candace's arm is in line and in the same direction as the leash, if I pull on it, she has more stability. If Candace puts her arm at a different angle to the leash, when I pull on it, she falls forward. If your hand is at a different angle to the leash, you will lose your balance when your dog pulls and you'll pull back on him. This can make his pulling worse, is uncomfortable for your dog, and sends a conflicting message. By letting your hand float with the dog and keeping it in line with the leash, and shifting your body weight when → your dog pulls against you, you are less likely to injure yourself and your dog will be more relaxed and attentive.

For balance, when you're facing your dog and your dog pulls hard against you, put one leg in front of the other and shift your weight to your back leg. Don't use your arms, use your bodyweight. The front leg stays straight and can brace. Bend the knee slightly on your back leg. Think of sitting down on a chair or a one-legged yoga squat. Your back leg controls your body and keeps you balanced. Keep your back straight.

If the dog strongly pulls, use your body weight to meet her resistance, instead of trying to pull her back to you. You simply want your dog to feel a stop when she gets to the end of the leash.

When the dog is to your side and lunges, relax your arm. Separate your legs and shift your weight in the opposite direction. You may have to bend your outside leg. The leg that bends is the leg that takes your weight and controls your balance. Don't try to pull back on your dog. The dog should feel a dead end at the end of the leash, not a pull back. By positioning yourself this way, you have a lot of strength and control and are less likely to injure yourself or fall forward.

Body-Mechanics with Your Dog : Balance & Alignment

With your dog on the leash, if you have a helper, have them hold treats in front of your dog's nose as they lure or guide your dog in a semi-circle around you. Your arm should be relaxed the entire time and follow the dog and the leash.

Your helper can lure your dog beyond the length of the leash so you feel a pull. When you feel tension, shift your weight to stay in position so your dog comes to a stop. Try to get your dog's attention verbally so she turns back to look at you. She does not have to sit. If she turns to look at you, give her a bunch of treats.

Practice while standing in different positions. Turn so you are sideways to your dog. As the helper lures your dog to pull against you, stay where you are. Don't pull back on the leash with your arm. The helper should give your dog treats any time there is a pull or after any tension on the collar. Get your dog's attention verbally and give her treats immediately when she turns to look at you.

Shown here, I lure Lucy to the end of the leash. When she feels a tug, I give her treats so she doesn't develop a negative association of the exercise. Candace can practice from different angles. When she stands sideways to Lucy, even when Lucy pulls strongly, she can stay relaxed. The tension on the leash is from me luring Lucy beyond the length of it. Candace gets Lucy's attention and rewards her. Your dog doesn't have to sit. Lucy sits whenever she sees treats.

Body Mechanics with Your Dog : Balance & Alignment – Mistakes and Corrections

Notice when I lure Lucy to pull, initially Candace does it correctly, but then she starts to pull back on Lucy with her arm when she can't get her attention. The next time she does better. If your dog doesn't look at you, keep trying and simply wait until she does. I give Lucy extra treats so she doesn't have a negative association of the exercise.

Shortening the Leash

Most of us shorten the leash by holding it in our hand or on our wrist and then wrapping it around our hand multiple times. The other is by grabbing the leash and pulling on it, over and over again, alternating hands. This puts us off balance, makes us fall forward, and the dog can take off.

Shown from a different angle, by wrapping the leash around our hand multiple times or by overreaching, we repeatedly jerk on the dog's collar or harness. Since we fall forward, we can easily fall over and seriously injure ourselves.

Instead, start by having your thumb in the leash handle. Your free hand helps you shorten the leash and give treats to your dog. We are going to be making multiple handles and, within 2 or 3 large loops, you can be right next to the dog's collar. Start with your free hand facing palm down.

Picture 1:

With your thumb in the leash handle, your free hand decides how much leash you want to take in. The hand holding the leash replaces your free hand to make another handle.

Picture 2 & 3:

The thumb of the hand holding the leash simply replaces the thumb of your free hand.

Picture 4:

Close your fingers after every loop to secure the leash.

Picture 5:

You have shortened the leash, but it can still be relaxed where it is attached to the dog's collar.

Picture 6:

Your free hand can now give treats to your dog.

Picture 7:

The leash can be short, yet relaxed at the dog's neck.

Practice again with me and Candace shown from a different angle.

With your free hand facing down and hands facing away from you, decide how much leash you want to take in. The thumb of the hand holding the leash slides in and replaces thumb of your free hand. Close the fingers after each loop to make a handle. The leash can be short, yet relaxed at the dog's collar or harness and your hands are still free.

Seen again, with your free hand facing palm down, decide how much leash you want to take. The thumb of the hand holding the leash replaces the thumb of your free hand to make a handle. Shorten it again and you can be next to the dog's collar.

Shortening the Leash for Little Dogs

For little dogs, the leash handling principles are the same. Because little dogs are low to the ground, you will have to bend down or take multiple loops to shorten the leash. Whereas with medium to large sized dogs, taking 2 large loops can shorten the leash to the collar, for little dogs, you will have to take 3 or 4. If the loops are too large, little dogs can easily jump through them or get tangled. Even if the leash is short, it's important to keep it relaxed where it attaches to your dog's harness or collar. This will help your dog to transfer any on-leash behaviors to off-leash.

Leash Handling Practice with Dogs

Practice shortening and lengthening the leash with your dog on the other end. Put the leash on your dog and give her a treat. Use your free hand as you need it. Ideally, hold treats in your free hand as you practice. Take one large loop and give your dog a treat, or two loops and give your dog a treat. For little dogs, you can take 3. When you get close to your dog's collar you will have to turn your palm up and open those fingers to make sure you made a secure handle.

Once you are comfortable, shorten and lengthen the leash while walking and moving with your dog. With every loop or handle you create, give your dog treats. Your dog will begin to look at you whenever you shorten the leash. Step in or closer to your dog to shorten the leash and then step or move your arm away to lengthen it. --Notice how when I shorten the leash, Lucy looks at me when I get close to her collar.

When you've practiced holding the leash in one hand, you can switch to practice with the other. Remember, the hand that holds the leash is the arm that takes all the dog's weight if she pulls. When the dog is close to you, to let the leash unravel, roll a treat away from you so your dog follows it. Then step closer to your dog to shorten the leash or shorten it as your dog comes back to you. Remember to step in to shorten the leash and to step or move your arm away to lengthen it. Here I roll the treat away from Lucy and let the leash lengthen as she follows it. As she comes back to me,

I shorten it. Once you're comfortable, you can then practice while moving with your dog and shorten and lengthen the leash at the same time.

When we handle the leash this way, we are turning it into a flexi-leash. I can go to Lucy or she can come to me. I don't want to pull Lucy to me because she's a big weight at the end of the leash. We tend to want to pull the dog. Instead, the hand that holds the leash goes to the dog and away from her. Once you start getting the feel of it, you can start doing it in motion, and then you can practice it with different hands.

Now Candace practices. Remember that Lucy sits automatically when there are treats. Your dog does not have to sit as you practice. The goal is for you to practice shortening the leash and letting it go, regardless of what your dog is doing.

Candace does a very good job here at securing the leash when she gets right at Lucy's collar. Go slow as you practice. I've instructed Candace to focus on her skill and technique so she does it correctly. As she gets better, it will be easier for her and speed will naturally come. Candace takes two large loops making and securing a handle each time. After she shortens the leash, she gives Lucy a treat. Practice walking slowly with your dog, shortening and lengthening the leash as you need to. Remember to treat your dog anytime you shorten the leash so she continues to look at you when you do. To let the leash unravel, roll a treat away from your dog so she follows it. As she comes back to you, shorten it. If she stays where she is, make a sound for her to come closer to you or shorten the leash as you step closer to her.

Here is Candace practicing from a different angle. Notice again, when she gets close to Lucy's collar, she correctly secures the leash and makes a handle. Candace gets better and better as she practices. She ideally should be holding treats in her free hand as she shortens the leash so she can easily give them to Lucy without going into her pocket. This comes with practice, but is important when training your dog so you have good timing. Candace is becoming much more comfortable at shortening the leash and she's getting faster as she progresses. Your dog will become more responsive, the better you get.

Remember to initially go slowly and focus on skill. At first, you may have to pause or stand still when you shorten and work with the leash, but with practice you will be able to work with the leash while both you and your dog are moving.

Remember to keep the leash relaxed or loose at your dog's collar as you work with her. You can step closer to your dog or lower your arm to relax the leash.

You did it. Good job and well-done!

Once you feel comfortable, you can practice and learn positioning techniques.



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