

Teaching Your Cat to Come When Called

Why Should You Do It?

Teaching your cat to come when called is both fun and practical. Once he masters this skill, you'll be able to quickly summon him for petting, feeding and playtime. Not only will this make your life easier—your cat will benefit, too. Training can give him a great mental workout and strengthen your bond. Learning to come when called might even save his life one day if he dashes out of your house.

How Can You Do It?

Many people don't realize how trainable cats are. This is a shame because cats are just as smart as dogs. They just need a reason to show off their ability to learn! The key to training cats is to figure out how to motivate them. It may take some time, but he'll be eager to learn new things once you identify what he's willing to work for.

Chow-Time Training

Many cats love mealtime, so one of the easiest ways to teach a cat to come when called is to make a consistent noise—such as a whistle or tongue click—or call his name ("Max, come!") right before you start preparing his food each day. The sound you make will become your command or cue. Make sure you give the cue before you crinkle a bag of cat food or use a can opener. If your cat hears food-preparing sounds first, he'll come in response to them rather than your cue. (In fact, those enticing sounds will likely excite him so much that he won't even hear you!) After a week or so of mealtime training, you can move on to the exercises below.

Training throughout the House

Identify exciting rewards.

First, you'll need to figure out what your cat likes most in the world. For many cats, this might be a flake of tuna, a tiny piece of chicken or a bit of meat-flavored baby food on a spoon. For others, it might be playing with a laser light or a special fluttering wand toy. Experiment and choose two or three of your cat's favorite things. Each time you call your cat, you'll surprise him with one of these things. Be sure to mix it up so that your cat never knows which wonderful reward he's going to get. The element of surprise will make him more motivated to come to you.

Start training.

Train at a time when your cat is motivated to work. For example, if you're going to reward him with treats, have sessions right before dinnertime. If you plan to use toys instead, train when you know he'll be energetic and ready to play.

- Choose a good spot. It's best to start your training in a quiet room with no distractions.
- Say your cue. Standing just a foot or two away from your cat, make the special sound you've chosen or say a verbal cue, like "Max, come!"
- Reward your cat. Immediately give your cat his reward. If your cat is the playful sort, you can reward him with a few seconds of playtime. However, because you'll need to repeat this exercise, it may be easier to use a food reward if you can find one that your cat adores. Many cats don't like to take treats from people's hands, so you may need to drop each treat on the floor in front of your cat or deliver his reward on a spoon if you're using something wet like baby food.

Walk a step or two away, and then repeat the exercise above. Eventually, your cat will start to orient toward you when he hears you say the cue. (This may take just a few repetitions or it may take a few training sessions.) At this point, you can start to gradually increase the distance your cat must come to reach you and earn his reward.

Increase difficulty.

Over the next few weeks, continue to ask your cat to come from greater and greater distances. Eventually, you should be able to call him anytime and from anywhere in your house and see him come running.

- Aim for at least one or two short training sessions per day. Sessions should last five minutes or less. During each one, call and reward your cat 10 to 20 times.
- Practice in every room of your house. If your cat is allowed to go outside, you can practice there, too, after your cat masters the skill indoors.
- If you have more than one person in your household, you can try calling your cat back and forth between you. Remember to reward him every time he comes to either person.
- When your cat will reliably come from all the way across a room, start calling him from one room into another.

It's important to keep rewarding your cat every time he comes to you. It's fine to vary the rewards—you can engage him in play with toys, give him treats and even scratch him in his favorite spots. However, if you stop rewarding your cat altogether, his new skill will likely fall apart. Cats need a good reason to do what you ask, but if you provide that reason, they're happy to listen!

Additional Tips and Troubleshooting

- If your cat is shy or fearful and has no training experience, it might be best to start his training career by teaching him a few easy behaviors. For example, try using a clicker to teach him to touch his nose to your finger, sit or lie down. (Please see our article on [Clicker Training Your Pet](#) for more information.) After your cat has mastered a few simple skills, you can move on to more difficult ones like coming when called.
- If your cat has a hard time learning to come when called, he may not be able to hear you. White cats are often deaf, especially those with blue eyes. If you suspect that your cat has a hearing problem, you can take him to a vet for an examination. If your cat is hearing impaired, that doesn't mean he can't be trained. It just means that instead of a verbal cue, you'll need to use a visual signal such as a waving hand. The only disadvantage is that you won't be able to "call" your deaf cat when he can't see you.
- Most housecats stay home alone all day, stuck indoors, while their pet parents work long hours. Regular training sessions can give bored cats a great mental workout—and the more you exercise your cat's brain while you're home, the more he'll rest peacefully when you're away. In addition to coming when called, you can teach your cat a variety of entertaining and practical behaviors, like Sit, High Five and Roll Over. He can even learn to use the toilet! Please see our article on [Training Your Cat](#) to learn more about enriching your cat's life through training.