



# YOU'RE SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE

Hand gestures and body language will communicate your commands to your dog

Lez Graham reveals how to 'talk' to your dog, through body language and gestures, making them a more effective retriever

It's far easier to communicate with someone when you speak their language. Dogs will never be able to talk, but we can find common ground by conveying our desires and commands through gaze, weight distribution and body language, all of which can be incorporated as part of our training drills and handling routines.

## Get On

I spend a long time working at close quarters with dogs so they have confidence in their abilities when working at distance.

When we send our dogs for a retrieve, regardless of whether it is marked, a memory or a blind, we owe it to them to be precise in what we want them to do and to always set them up to succeed. That way, they'll become confident in their abilities. What we don't want is to be waving our arms about, constantly sending the dog out as it stops and



Focus on the target, point to it, with your weight over your front leg to indicate where the retrieve is located

checks in. We want our dogs to be focused on the retrieve, whether they can actually see it or not, and that means locking on to the target.

The easiest way to achieve this is be focused on the target yourself. Use your body as an arrow pointing to where it is, from your toes, hand and arm, to making sure your weight is over your front leg.

Everything about you should indicate to your dog where the retrieve item is.

If it makes it easier, think of the times when your gamekeeper has pointed down a pathway to a runner or where a bird is down; you'll both be leaning forwards and looking in the area. It is this energy that your dog will pick up on, but before you send it, look down and check it's focused as well.

When you do send it, keep focused (especially your arm) until your dog is well on their way. If you bring your weight back (and your arm) too soon your dog might turn around to see what the movement is about.

## Get out (left and rights)

I spend a long time training left and right retrieves and do everything I can to make sure the dog knows what is expected. This is, after all, the first time it will be working away from the leg, so I want it to be confident in its response. I always start with putting food down rather than a dummy as this is a great incentive for the dog to get



When you and your keeper look into an area where a runner may be, it's the same principle as focusing on where you want your dog to go

it right first time and I always incorporate using the gaze from the beginning.

If at this point you want to combine the gaze with your other training techniques, then before you send your dog out to retrieve the dummy, let it know what's

**“When someone keeps peering over your shoulder, you're going to want to look behind you – and your dog is going to want to do the same”**

expected of it. Use weight distribution and the gaze and then bring in the hand signal and verbal command.

For left and rights, use the hand you're sending the dog out with to give a wait signal, turn your head to look at the dummy (the gaze), put your weight on the leg nearest to it, check your dog is still paying attention and send it with a hand signal.

## Go back

I always teach a dog to 'go back' for a retrieve by having them first turn either to the right or left. When you and your dog are facing each other and your dog has a dummy behind it, first decide whether it is more to one side or the



Teach a dog to 'go back' for a retrieve by first having them turn either to the right or left

to want to look behind you - and your dog is going to want to do the same. Use this to your advantage and in time you will be able to send your dog for a retrieve just using weight distribution, body language and gaze.

## Stop and go back

Try to get into the habit of always stopping your dog with the hand that is



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### Got a question for Lez?

Contact her by emailing [sportinggun@timeinc.com](mailto:sportinggun@timeinc.com) or write to Lez Graham, Time Inc (UK) Ltd, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU.



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going to give the next direction, and putting your weight down the leg at the same time so you're almost leaning into the leg. Your dog will very quickly pick up on the fact that when you raise your right hand it's going to be working that side of the field, but when you raise your left it's going to be working the other. As the dog stops, it will prepare its body to turn to the right or to the left, which will not only make its responses much quicker, but help protect its ligaments and joints from excessive strain. **SG >>**

### NEXT MONTH:

Lez Graham will look at voice control in training and how it works for, or against us, in training our dogs.



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