



## How to Muzzle Condition

Muzzle conditioning is the process you use to make the muzzle a normal part of your dog's life. Muzzles are a great tool to allow your dog to train for tenuous and possibly dangerous situations while being completely safe.

Any dog has the potential to bite, and preparing for situations when your dog may be more likely to bite, even if they have never bitten before can prevent an extremely serious situation. Some situations that may cause a dog to bite for the first time would be if they were injured and someone was trying to provide aid or transport your dog to receive medical care. If your dog developed a medical condition that changed their tolerance or irritability, they may be suddenly inclined to bite.

### Choosing the Proper Muzzle for Your Dog

There are many different types and styles of muzzles to choose from and it can be difficult to decide which muzzle is right for your dog.

#### 1. Muzzles are needed for stressful situations, but should not create more stress.

This is important because in an emergency situation where your dog may be injured or in a stressful situation where they have the potential to bite, you don't want the muzzle to create more stress. You want a muzzle that allows your dog to breathe and pant. When dogs are stressed out, they pant. Panting is their way of cooling down and how to relax themselves. If a dog needs to pant, but cannot because of an improper muzzle or a poorly fitted muzzle, the dog may panic and injure themselves more.

The Muzzle should be comfortable to wear for extended periods of time and should give the dog enough room to open their mouth and pant.

#### 2. Muzzles are intended to prevent bites.

So, we discussed that your dog should be comfortable and not create more stress, but it also needs to fit securely and be sturdy enough that your dog is not able to slip out of it or bite through the muzzle.

Testing the muzzle's fit:

While your dog is wearing the muzzle, pull upwards on the front of the muzzle until your dog's front feet barely come off the ground. This may be slightly uncomfortable, but it is very important to ensure the muzzle won't come off.

#### 3. How *breathable* do you need it to be.

Depending on when and where you will need the muzzle the most, the dog's ability to breathe easily will become a factor. For example, if you will be using the muzzle while your dog is completing a long duration, physically demanding exercise in a very hot climate, you want to use a muzzle that allows for the most air flow, like a wire or basket type muzzle. If you will generally use the muzzle in an indoor situation like the vet or in close proximity to people in a store that is climate controlled, a more enclosed type of muzzle will give you more protection.

## Types of Muzzles

### Basket Muzzles

**Baskerville:** \*Ideal for first time muzzle training. One of the most popular basket muzzles is the Baskerville Ultra Muzzle. This muzzle comes in 6 sizes (1-6) and when fitted properly is comfortable for wearing for long periods of time. It is made of a semi-flexible hard rubber.

Pros: Inexpensive, commonly found at most pet supply stores, very breathable, basket design allows for the dog to eat and drink while wearing the muzzle, you can adjust the shape of the muzzle.

Cons: The flexible material and basket style may allow for large or stronger dogs to bite through the muzzle.



### Wire Muzzle

Wire muzzles are similar to the Baskerville's design but use metal wires to create the shape of the muzzle. If you choose a wire muzzle, be sure to find a good quality manufacturer as a poorly fitted muzzle or a muzzle that breaks could cause injuries to your dog.

Pros: Very breathable, the dog can eat and drink while wearing the muzzle.

Cons: More expensive, generally need to be custom ordered, not available at most pet supply stores, extremely strong dogs may be able to bite through the muzzle, the metal can become extremely hot or cold in extreme temperatures.



### Jafco Muzzles

Jafco Muzzles are made from a variety of materials to choose from and are designed for the greatest bite prevention. The enclosed design prevents even the strongest dog from being able to bite through the muzzle.

Pros: Best bite prevention, designed to be very comfortable, very secure fitting.

Cons: Expensive, need to be custom ordered, the enclosed design increases the risk of overheating.



### **Other types of Muzzles**

Finding a muzzle that meets all of your needs may be challenging, but always remember you get what you pay for. When first introducing your dog to a muzzle, like we will discuss in the muzzle condition portion of this program, it may be important for your dog to be able to take treats while in the muzzle. If you use food to train, it may also be necessary for your dog to be able to receive treats if you plan to use the muzzle while training.



### **Brachycephalic Breeds (flat-faced)**

If you have a brachycephalic (flat-faced) dog they may need a special type of muzzle. There are several designs to choose from, most are made with a type of fabric or mesh. The key to remember is that a soft flexible material may allow the dog to bite through the muzzle.



We have listed just a few of the many many different types of muzzles available. This muzzle conditioning guide will refer to basket type muzzles such as the wire muzzles or Baskerville muzzles listed above.

## Muzzle Conditioning

### Step 1: Putting on the muzzle

If your dog allows you to easily put the muzzle on and adjust the straps to the appropriate fit, then you are now complete with step one!

If your dog fights you when you attempt to place the muzzle on him, then step one will include familiarizing your dog with the muzzle. If your dog is clicker conditioned (see the Alpha K9 Clicker Training Guide), you can use a clicker during this process each time you reward.

Begin by presenting the muzzle to your dog and rewarding your dog. Allow your dog to sniff the muzzle and reward your dog. Repeat this multiple times.

Next, place some treats inside the muzzle so that your dog must put his face in the muzzle to get the treats. (You may need to place the treats in your hand and have your dog eat the treats through the muzzle). Repeat until your dog is comfortable placing his face in the muzzle.

Do not rush this step!

### Step 2: Conditioning

For 1-2 weeks, have your dog wear the muzzle for **at least** three 20-minute sessions per day. During these sessions vary what you do with your dog during those sessions. Keep the activities limited to things you would normally do during those times, such as relaxing and watching T.V. or have him wear his muzzle while you cook dinner. If you already engage in regular training sessions, have him wear the muzzle during a training session, or let him wear the muzzle while you go for a walk (be cautious of overheating if using an enclosed muzzle).

If your dog can eat and drink through the muzzle you can leave it on for extended periods of time. If the dog cannot eat or drink through the muzzle, be sure to allow for food and water breaks as needed.

Purpose: The purpose of this process is to prevent the wearing of the muzzle from signally any specific event or situation.

Many people who use muzzles will only put the muzzle on right before they go to the vet, or before entering a stressful situation where they need the muzzle. When the dog realizes the pattern, the muzzle becomes a cue that something stressful is about to happen. Through the process of conditioning, we are teaching the dog that the muzzle doesn't mean anything, and you can even reward the dog while wearing the muzzle to create a positive association with wearing the muzzle.

**Step 3: Using the muzzle when you need it.**

You can continue the conditioning process indefinitely, but we recommend 1-2 weeks of conditioning before any type of training or stressful situation in which the muzzle is a safety requirement.

In step three, this is when you may decide to use the muzzle in a situation that will likely cause your dog stress or may cause your dog to react to a certain situation.

Put the muzzle on your dog at least 15-20 minutes prior to the training or situation. Complete the activity or training that required the muzzle. Leave the muzzle on your dog for at least 15-20 minutes after the event.

Purpose: By having the dog wear the muzzle well before and well after the activity, it prevents the association of the muzzle to that specific event. This combined with the conditioning will prevent the dog from understanding that the muzzle is intended for that specific situation.

**Continue the conditioning steps for at least several days following the event.**

**Emergency Situations**

If you continue to regularly muzzle condition your dog, in the event of an emergency, you should have little to no issues placing a muzzle on your dog without increasing their stress levels. This is also why it is recommended that all dogs undergo some level of muzzle conditioning.