

Teaching the “Go to Place” command  
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The place command can be useful in several ways. It helps to teach discipline on a finer level, increases the communication between you and your animal, and gives your animal clear objectives and goals for training. I believe that too often in our training, we neglect to be specific when we ask our animals to do something. Creating a tangible goal allows our animals to grasp what we are asking much faster, therefore avoiding confusion and frustration on both our parts.

There are several things you will need for this lesson:

- A round pen or similar area that allows freedom of movement, but controls that movement
- A training whip is optional, this can be any type of whip or stick that you are comfortable using
- A halter and lead rope are optional and not at all necessary. They can be helpful however!
- Some sort of reward, whether you choose to use treats or attention or simply a release of pressure, you know your animal best and what works best for them!
- A piece of thin rubber or similar material, about 18 inches square. I like to use rubber because it doesn't make sounds when animals step on it, it is durable and it doesn't tend to move around. My “place mats” are remnants of stall mats, but you may also use a piece of carpet with similar results.

First, let's talk a little about pressure. When I refer to pressure, I am not necessarily talking about physical contact. I am talking about pressuring an animal's space. It can be described as pushing the air. Pretend as if you are trying to compact the air around the body part that you would like to move. Think small. Try to move one hoof from 6 feet away. You might be surprised at how perceptive your animal is when it comes to pressure. Some animals definitely require more pressure and physical contact. The goal is to see how fine we can tune the communication between you and your animal. Begin your lesson by directing your animal around the round pen, but only go 1 or 2 laps in either direction before having them change directions. The goal isn't to make them tired, it is to tell them “Listen up! We are having a conversation here!” Once your animal is responding nicely to your commands, place your mat along the normal path that your animal will take on one end of the pen, preferably not right at the gate. Now, as you direct your animal around as before, pressure them constantly as they go around, then immediately ask them to “Whoa!” near the mat and release all pressure. If they drop their head to check out the mat, perfect! You want them to acknowledge that it is there. Allow them to rest for a few moments there, look for them to relax visibly. After a few minutes, send them around the pen again, asking them slowly to leave the mat, then increasing pressure as they leave it. Make your release of pressure obvious and drastic.

Within a short time, your animal should start automatically slowing to a stop near the mat. Now you add your command. Whether you say “Place” or “Fritos,” it doesn't really matter, as long as it is consistent. I usually end up saying “Get on it!” out of habit. When your animal is starting to really get the picture, use your body language and assistance with the whip to continue pressure until one foot touches the mat. Immediately reward, if your animal likes treats, give a treat, if they are wild, just back off and release pressure while rewarding with your voice. I enjoy scratching and petting my animals for good behavior, no danger of running out of love!

As your animal consistently places one foot on the mat, start asking for the second. Pretty soon, you can stand anywhere in the pen and say your command and your animal should run directly to the mat, place both feet on it and wait for your command. Remember to always allow your animal to rest on the mat, this will reinforce the command and make it a “happy place.” Please note that this lesson may take several sessions, be patient!

This is a great exercise for any animal, trained or wild. It is useful in many situations, for example, I like to tell my animal to “place” while I feed them. This eliminates crowding the grain bucket without confrontation. Let us know what creative ways you use this command, we love to hear from you!