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Clicker Training Guide



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Always read and follow the Operating Guide that accompanies your training product.

Introduction

We all want well-behaved pets and wonderful relationships with them. Clicker training is an effective, safe and humane way to reach these goals. When your pet learns to offer behaviours you like in exchange for a reward, and you clearly communicate why they are receiving the reward, it is a win-win situation. Training will become a fun activity you both enjoy! Behaviour that gets rewarded gets repeated.

With clicker training, a sound is used to mark the exact behaviour we like, and then followed immediately with a reward. The reward is often a tasty food treat but may be anything your pet wants or needs. Soon, the sound predicts the reward – your pet begins to understand when he hears that sound, it will be followed with a reward.

While this training guide focuses on clicker training with dogs, clicker training can be an effective way to train desired behaviours with many different species of pets.

Why Use a Click Sound Instead of Your Voice?

Using a consistent sound has several benefits over a spoken word when teaching your dog a new behaviour.

The sound is unique. It is only made when your dog does something you like, unlike your voice which may be used to communicate a variety of things. The sound is consistent. It sounds the same every time and has the same meaning - you've made the right choice and are about to be rewarded - every time. Our voice can say the same word in very different ways and often does due to our emotions and meaning.

The sound is clear. We often string many words together like, "Oh, what a good doggie!" making it difficult or impossible for an animal to know exactly what behaviour you liked.

The sound is precise. The accuracy of the click improves our timing and marks the exact moment your dog does something you like. It can mark the smallest and most subtle behaviours like a glance or turn of the head.

All About Rewards

With clicker training, we often use a small, tasty food treat as the reward promised by the clicker sound. However, each animal will determine what is rewarding to them. One animal may find a liver treat a very high-value reward, while another may prefer a bit of cheese. The reward you use must be reinforcing to the animal you are working with, and each animal will have a hierarchy of rewards. As the trainer, experiment and find several things your dog likes and determine which he or she likes best and least.

Always prepare for a training session by gathering a few different types of rewards. Small, semi-moist bites of cheese, liver, etc., are good choices to try because many dogs desire them and they don't require much chewing. Consider your dog's diet, calorie count and any allergies when choosing food rewards. Plan the food as part of their daily allowance to maintain a balanced diet.

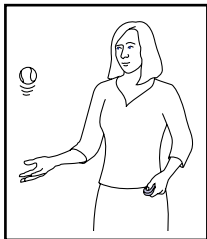
Don't forget other types of rewards such as attention, petting, praise and access to friends. These can be very valuable and useful as part of your training. While the tasty treat is often easiest and the best choice for clicker training, don't rule out the life rewards!

Practice Your Timing

If you are new to clicker training you will want to practice your timing away from your dog before you attempt any training. If you want your dog to understand the click, your timing of the click needs to be precisely at the moment he is performing the wanted behaviour.

You will need your Clicker and a tennis ball (or similar ball) to practice.

- Hold the Clicker in one hand and the ball in the other.
- Toss the ball and click at the exact moment it hits the floor.
- As your timing improves, try to click the first bounce and the second bounce, etc.



- The next step is to toss the ball and click when the ball is at the highest point in the air. This is more difficult as there is no sound of the ball hitting a surface to help you.

How is your timing? Practice until your timing is precise. Some people prefer to hold their Clicker in one hand versus the other, but it is helpful to practice with the device in each hand. Becoming ambidextrous with the training tool will make it easier to accommodate different exercises as you train.

Tip: Keep your movement to a minimum and your voice quiet. Your dog should focus on the click. Extra movement and noise by you, the trainer, will be distracting.

Before You Begin

Start by setting everyone up for success:

- If necessary, restrict your dog's movement with a lead.
- Train when your dog is somewhat hungry.
- Ensure any toileting needs have already been met.
- Work in a space that is not too exciting or over-stimulating.

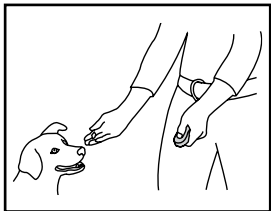
If your dog is not interested in interacting with you, be patient and take it slow. If progress doesn't pick up within a few minutes, take a break and come back to work again later.

Give the Click Meaning

We need to make an association between the click and the treat reward for your dog. Once your dog learns the click predicts a reward you will have a powerful training tool.

Note: don't wave the Clicker around or point it at your dog.

The sound is the marker and your dog does not need to see it to hear it. Hold the Clicker by your side and don't draw attention to the training tool.



To make this association, along with your dog, you will need:

- The Clicker
- Some tiny, very tasty treats (consider daily caloric intake and allergies)
- A space free of distractions

This exercise is only to make the association, not to train a specific behaviour. However, you don't want to inadvertently reward a behaviour you don't like, so wait until your dog is simply standing or sitting near you.

To begin, click and immediately give your dog one treat. The treat should follow the click within a second. Repeat this six to ten times, one click followed by one treat.

Your dog will quickly start to understand the click predicts a reward. You may notice your dog becomes excited just from hearing the sound. It is important to remember the click is a promise. If you click, you should reward. Don't worry if you make a mistake. Your timing and skill will improve quickly.

Keep the Sessions Short

The best training sessions are only three to five minutes in length. Take breaks in between the sessions. During the breaks relax and play with your dog. You can string a few short sessions together with short breaks in between.

You can train a longer session if your dog is still focused and enjoying the session. However you don't want your dog to become uninterested or full of treats. Stop training while your dog is still interested in doing more.

One marker – one reward. Three rules to keep in mind:

- If you make the click sound, you must reward. Always.
- Make only one click sound per appropriate behaviour. In other words, do not use multiple sounds to try to convey your excitement at a particularly good behaviour.
- If you make a mistake, forgive yourself. Reward your dog (following the first rule), and move on. Either take a break to collect yourself or refocus and continue with the training.

To Capture or to Shape?

If your dog already does a cute behaviour you would like to practice so you can get him to perform “on cue,” you are “capturing” the behaviour. Put your dog in a situation where he is likely to perform the behaviour. Then click at the moment the behaviour happens to “mark” that behaviour. As always, follow the click with a treat. Because behaviour that gets rewarded gets repeated, your dog is likely to offer that behaviour again.

Once you can get the behaviour reliably, start to add a word or hand cue just before the behaviour is likely to happen.

Before long, that cue will indicate to your dog that you are willing to “pay” for the behaviour. Practicing the cue and behaviour followed by the click and treat will solidify the behaviour.

If you want to instill a new behaviour in your dog, you may need to “shape” the behaviour if your dog is not already offering it. When “shaping” a behaviour, you will reward your dog for increasingly better attempts (also called “successive approximations”) of the desired behaviour. Choose small or preliminary steps toward your end goal, then little by little, reward better and better attempts. Your dog should learn quickly if you repeat a few sessions each day.

One example of shaping behaviour would be to invite your dog to lie on a mat. At first, you could click/treat when your dog looks at the mat, then steps on it, then sits on it, then lies down.

Set Criteria When Shaping

When shaping new behaviours you will need to set criteria for each of the small steps on the way to the final behaviour you will reward. Don't be intimidated! You make these kinds of choices every day as you drive, cook dinner or multi-task at your desk. You want to move through the process at a good pace so don't worry about perfecting each step along the way. Each step is a temporary criterion and if your dog is getting it right seven or eight times out of ten, move on to the next step. You don't want your dog to get stuck performing the intermediate steps because they have been rewarded so highly for doing so.

You also don't want to move too fast. If you up your criteria and your dog gets too frustrated or loses interest, back up a step. Sometimes a dog will leap

ahead and perform the final behaviour early in the training. Go ahead and click and treat! Don't be so set on your plan that you don't recognize a breakthrough like this. Save a jackpot for those special moments.

Jackpot!

Many trainers use a jackpot to reward an especially well done behaviour or a training breakthrough.

A jackpot can be applied as follows:

- Give a small handful of treats at one time.
- Give a higher value treat, like a small piece of cheese, instead of the dry kibble you are using.
- A slightly larger piece of a treat can be a jackpot.
- Have a party – toss a few treats and add some play, favourite toy or a belly rub.

Many people like to end the training session if a jackpot moment happens. It ensures the session was successful and keeps your dog eager to keep training.

Teaching “Look at Me”

Training your dog to focus on you is not only easy to do with the Clicker but is very helpful in training other skills later on. This simple skill will enforce the association with the Clicker sound and give you a chance to practice your timing.

Now that you are ready, watch your dog. If he looks at you, click and treat. He may not understand what he did to earn the reward yet.

When he makes eye contact again, click and treat. After a few repetitions, he will start thinking that maybe just looking at you earns a treat. He will probably like that and start looking at you more often.

Keep rewarding every time he makes eye contact. Eye contact = click = reward!

Once your dog is performing the look behaviour consistently you can add a cue.

A cue can be a hand signal or a verbal signal to perform the behaviour. For example, the cue for a dog to place their bottom on the floor is usually “Sit.”

Your cue for eye contact could be “Look” or “Watch Me.” The choice is yours – because dogs don’t speak, you can call it anything you want. Another option is to use a hand signal or movement.

Teaching to Target

We will start by teaching the dog a nose touch to your hand that can later be used for a variety of behaviours where you need the dog in a certain position.

To teach this target, place your hand about ten to thirteen centimetres in front of your dog’s nose. Most dogs will sniff your hand. When your dog’s nose touches your hand, click and treat. Repeat this several times. If your dog shows little interest in touching your hand, practice a couple times with a treat in the target hand to get the game started.

As the dog begins to quickly touch your hand for the click and treat, begin moving your hand slightly farther away and to different heights and sides. Each time the dog touches the hand target, click and treat. If the dog is slow to respond (more than three to four seconds), remove your hand target for a couple seconds and offer it again a little closer. Focus on getting several quick repetitions in a training session.

You will quickly see how establishing a target behaviour will aid in teaching recall, loose lead walking and much more.

Loose Lead Walking

No one enjoys walking with a dog who pulls constantly on the lead. Teaching your dog to walk beside you on a loose lead can be accomplished with your new clicker skills. If you have worked on the two previous sections you can use these skills to help you with loose lead walking. Having your dog’s attention like during “Look at Me” and/or using a target to keep your dog beside you during the walk will keep the lead loose for a pleasant walk.

You can also use the Clicker to click the dog when he is walking beside you and give a treat reward by your side. If the lead is pulled tight, simply stop walking until your dog turns to you or returns to your side, then click and reward. For most dogs a treat reward works best. With some dogs the chance to continue walking is enough. We suggest you start with a treat reward and fade it out as the dog performs the behaviour consistently.

Teaching “Sit”

Dogs sit naturally so all we need to do is teach them to sit when asked. You have some options on how to teach “sit”.

Consider both options and decide which will work for you.

Because dogs already know how to sit, you may just catch them doing it. In this case, watch your dog closely and when he sits, click and reward with a treat. After you have rewarded him a couple times he may start offering a sit because it paid off with a yummy treat. Now you can add the cue, “Sit” with the action of sitting. Say “Sit,” wait for him to do it and click as soon as it happens! Follow the click with the treat reward. Soon he will associate the verbal cue, “Sit.” As you practice, remember, you only need to say the cue once. Do not repeat the word, “sit, sit, sit...” If he doesn’t sit when you say the word, step back for a few seconds and calmly try again or try the method below.

Another way to teach “sit” is with the help of a food lure. Do not use a verbal cue until the dog is performing the behaviour easily. Begin with three or four small pieces of food in your hand. Lure your dog’s nose up and slightly back. This usually encourages them to put their bottom on the floor. When he does, click and reward with one piece of the food. Repeat this with the remaining food you are holding. Then try one with an empty hand. When he sits, click and reward with a treat from your pocket. Your hand motion is actually becoming the cue for sit. Once your dog is performing the sit consistently with the empty hand you may begin adding the verbal cue “Sit” and fading out the hand motion. To add the verbal cue say “Sit,” then quickly follow it with the hand motion. Continue to click and reward the behaviour. When the dog is responding quickly to the word “sit” before you even start the hand motion you can simply stop using the motion.

Train No Jumping/Lunging

Dogs often develop unwanted behaviours such as jumping, lunging, and barking. These behaviours can be due to excitement, anxiety or frustration in relation to people, other dogs, and events. These behaviours can often be eliminated with the use of clicker training. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to train the dog to do behaviours you like, such as sit and/or stay. A dog that is sitting cannot be jumping and a dog that is performing stay cannot be lunging and barking at other dogs, people, wildlife, cars, etc.

We recommend starting this training in a quiet place with minimal distractions. Start by teaching your dog to sit on cue as we explained in the section called "Teaching "Sit"." To add "Stay" to this, you would cue the sit then wait a few seconds before clicking/rewarding. Once your dog can hold the position for several seconds you can add a verbal cue, "Stay" and wait a few more seconds before click/reward. During the early training of stay, your dog may pop up early. Try to always click/reward before this happens. But if it does, just cue the sit again and click and reward a short stay before moving to a longer one. Once your dog can stay for at least five seconds, begin to add the cue, "Stay" after he sits. Increase the length of the stay slowly so your dog will continue to be successful. As this training progresses, increase the length of the stay until the dog can hold the stay 30-40 seconds before the click and reward. Once the dog can do this you will want to start adding some distractions, such as training near a park or having friends walk by. Start with these distractions at a distance which allows your dog to continue being successful at holding the stay. Gradually move closer or have the distractions move closer to you. Click and reward the moment your dog looks at a distraction without leaving his stay. This will teach your dog he can hold "stay" with a variety of things going on around him, and that not reacting to them is more rewarding than chasing, jumping, and lunging at them. This type of training may take several short sessions but will give your dog skills and manners that last a lifetime and make him a more pleasant, well-behaved dog.

Some dogs may have more serious reactivity issues and require the help of a training and behaviour professional. If your dog continues to have serious problems with lunging and reacting to anyone or anything, please seek the advice of a training professional near you.

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