

CLICKER TRAINING (OR SAY "YES!")

What is clicker training?

Clicker training means using a sound (a click) to communicate with your dog. It marks your dog's correct behavior the moment he does it. Essentially the moment your dog does what you want him to do—like a sit or a down—you immediately click and give him a treat. This gives your dog *instant, specific* feedback. Dogs learn much faster with a clicker (up to 40% faster). (Have you chosen a verbal marker instead? Please see the note at the end of this handout.)

How does it work?

It is fabulously simple. First we teach the dog that the click means he has won a treat. Then we use the click to tell the dog when he has done something we like. The click becomes a predictor of a reward.

Charging the clicker.

This means teaching that click means treat. To do this we will classically condition the dog to associate the sound of the click with him receiving a treat.

Step 1. Grab a handful of really yummy treats cut into small pieces.

Step 2. Every time you click, give your dog a treat (be careful not to click and treat at the same time; the treat must follow the click, not precede or coincide with it). To begin, repeat this 20 times in a row.

Step 3. Do this standing up, sitting down, while moving about, indoors, outdoors. Basically, make sure your dog understands that the click means treat in all situations.

Step 4. Do the exercise a few times a day for a few minutes at a time until, when you click you notice that your dog is eagerly anticipating the treat.

Don't give away that a treat is coming except with the click. For example, be careful not to reach for a treat, point the clicker toward the dog, or reach toward him with the treat before you click. After you treat, always bring your hand up to a neutral position (at your navel or behind your back) and keep it still so your dog does not get distracted and can learn quicker. Train yourself to insert a count or a word before you hand over the treat: Click. Count to yourself, one-one-thousand. Treat.

Clicker rules.

Click only once.

If you click you *must* treat even if you have clicked in error (we call that a freebie!).

The clicker is not a remote control. Don't use it to call your dog to you.

Click during the desired behavior, not after it is completed. The timing of the click is crucial. Give the treat after the click; the timing of the treat is not as important. If you're not sure when to click, think of it like taking a picture of your dog at the exact moment he does the behavior you want. Snap! You got it.

Click when your dog does something you like. Practice with something easy that the dog is likely to do on his own.





CLICKER TRAINING continued

(Ideas: sit; come toward you; touch your hand with his nose.)

Only click once for each desired behavior. Multiple clicks will be confusing to your dog. If you want to express special enthusiasm, increase the number of treats, not the number of clicks.

Fix bad behavior by clicking good behavior. Click a puppy for relieving itself in the proper spot. Click for paws on the ground, not on the visitors. Instead of scolding for barking, click for silence.

Keep raising your goal. As soon as you have a good response, start asking for more. Wait until your dog goes into a down a little faster, comes a little further, or whips around to look at you when you say his name. Click and treat.

When your pet is showing you the behavior spontaneously, trying to get you to click, you can begin offering a cue, such as a word or a hand signal. Start clicking for that behavior if it happens during or after the cue. Start ignoring that behavior when the cue wasn't given.

Don't order your dog around; clicker training is not command-based. If your pet does not respond to a cue, it is not disobeying, it just hasn't learned the cue completely. Try working in a quieter place. If you have more than one pet, separate them for training.

If you are not making progress with a particular behavior, you are probably clicking too late. Accurate timing is important.

Split, don't lump. Build the behaviors you want to teach in a step-by-step manner. Break down each behavior (split it) into the smallest possible parts and teach, click and reward each part separately.

Once your pet fully understands a behavior, it is no longer necessary to use the clicker. Continue to use it for teaching new behaviors and tricks.

Training Tip: Don't click near your dog's hearing-sensitive ears. Some dogs are startled by the sound of the clicker. If your dog shows any signs of discomfort (shies away, leaves the room) wrap the clicker in a towel or a sock to muffle the noise. Try again, and when your dog clearly shows he enjoys the exercise, unwrap it a little at a time. You can also try placing it in your pocket or behind your back.

Note: Another conditioned reinforcer can be the word, "Yes!" (or a word your dog won't hear very often). You may have found it difficult to use the clicker (keep trying; it's worth it!), or sometimes you may not have the clicker with you. "Yes!" can be used in the same way as the clicker, just substitute this word every time you read "click" in this handout. It's not quite as effective but will still provide your dog with crucial information that will speed the training process.