



Clicker Training

What is it?

Dog trainers started to use clickers because they were copying dolphin trainers. If you have ever seen a dolphin show, you may have noticed that we use a whistle to communicate to the dolphin when they do something correctly. You can use a clicker to communicate to your dog precisely and accurately any time he does something right.

Why should I use it?

I can just say, “good boy” and it will mean the same, right?

Using a clicker is the most effective way to train your dog. You have probably told your dog he’s a “good boy” a hundred times today, but how many of those times has he gotten a treat? The ratio is too low for it to be effective. When your dog hears a click, 100% of the time he will get a treat, and he knows it! Now you can communicate clearly.

I’ll always have to carry a clicker with me.

Yes. And no. The clicker is only used to *train* your dog. Once he knows the behavior, you can fade out the clicker. If you are working on your dog not barking and he barks at everything, then you will need to carry your clicker with you. When he no longer barks, you may leave your clicker at home. Just remember where you put it because when you decide that you want to train him something new, you’ll need it again!

My dog will only work for food.

You may notice at the beginning that your dog is MUCH more likely to do the correct behavior when you are holding the clicker (and therefore the treats are near). That’s good news! He’s catching on to the system. You just need to repeat it enough times that he knows it, has received a lot of treats for getting it right, and likes to do it. That’s when he will start to do it whether you have food, or not.

How do I start?

Hold on to your hats. Here’s where it gets tricky.... You click and then give your dog a treat! It’s straight out of the text books where Pavlov conditioned dogs with a bell followed by food. His dogs started salivating after the bell but before they saw the food



because an association between the bell and the food had been made by the dog. That's what you want. It generally takes about 20 repetitions of click = treat before your dog will make an association. After that, let the games begin!

How does it work?

Here is the most important part for you to remember:

The moment you click it is as if you have taken a photograph of your dog and whatever he is doing at that exact moment. Then, it's as if you can hand the photograph to your dog and say, "I love it when you do this."

So, timing really matters when you click. You have to click when your dog is doing something right. You have anywhere from 2-30 seconds to get your dog a treat after you have clicked. The timing does not matter when he gets the treat. It matters when you click. Technically speaking, any time you use positive reinforcement, you are increasing the probability that he will do that (whatever he was doing when you clicked) again in the future.

Watch out!

A very common mistake that people make is this:

Your dog is doing something wrong and you click to get him to stop and come to you.

Think about this example- Your dog is outside and won't come in. You click and he comes running. You *think* all is good because your dog is inside. You think you won. You did not win. Your dog did. What was he doing the *moment* you clicked? NOT coming in? Remember you just said to your dog, "I love it when you do this." Please be careful that the moment you click your dog is actually doing something that you want!

Something else to keep in mind. Be interesting and creative! Vary when you work your dog, for how long, and what kind of treats you give him. You want to keep him on his toes... um, I mean, his paws. And don't forget to HAVE FUN!

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