



WHY

CLICKER TRAIN?

Clicker training is a method for training animals that uses positive reinforcement in conjunction with a clicker to mark the behavior being reinforced. The clicker is used during the learning phase of training a new behavior, to allow the animal to rapidly identify what behaviour is wanted from the trainer.

WHY DO I NEED A CLICKER? WHY CAN'T I JUST USE MY VOICE AND TREATS?

Food rewards and praise are usually given after the behaviour has occurred. Verbal praise can mean many things such as I like you, I am happy, I like that etc etc. The clicker is a unique sound in the dog's environment. When you only use a treat it can be a distraction to the learning process. Using the clicker means that the dog is working for the click and not just for the food. As it is sounded exactly at the time the desired behaviour was performed it leaves no doubt in the dog's mind exactly what earned it the reward. The clicker is like a camera in that it takes a snap shot of the behaviour exactly at a particular time, something we are unable to do consistently alone. As we control the clicker the dog pays more attention to us too....brilliant!

HOW TO CLICKER TRAIN.

Golden rules:

- If you click you treat (initially the treat must arrive quickly however as this is not always practical it is important to teach your dog that a reward will be given but not always instantly. You do this by varying the time between the click and the reward. You should build up to an occasional 5 second delay)
- Do not point the clicker at the dog it is not a remote control
- Do not click by the dog's ears
- Click only once. If your dog has done something you are astounded at still click once but give them a Jackpot - many treats (see later)
- Be patient and creative
- Hands off your dog - no force is to be used at all

WHEN AND HOW TO TRAIN A BEHAVIOUR

Capture - the dog performs the behaviour spontaneously e.g the dog lies down when tired so click the DOWN

Lure - lure the dog into position with a reward - remember hands off

Shape - If you want the dog to push a box for example. Place a box in a room, click and treat the dog for looking at it, then investigating it, then nudging it, pushing it etc etc upping the criteria when the dog has understood the current requirement.

You must allow your dog time to work it out. Do not be too hasty, patience is the key.

GSPCA -Pet Behaviour and Training - Created by Lorna Prince

WHAT IS A CUE AND WHEN AND HOW DO I ADD THE CUE?

The cue you will add is the word the dog will associate with something that he does. When your dog is reliably performing the desired behaviour i.e. he is offering you the behaviour within five seconds of you offering him the treat you can start to associate a word with the behaviour. Start to introduce a cue immediately before the behaviour occurs. This will require that you are observant and able to predict your dog's movement. If the behaviour is reliable this will not be too difficult.

If you are unable to predict it then I would suggest that you are not ready to add the cue. Remember it can take a few repetitions before the word is understood/associated with the behaviour so be patient.

Now only Click and treat the dog when they perform the behaviour after you have given them the cue. If they offer it without the cue ignore it, move them from position and offer the cue again. This also teaches your dog to watch and listen to you - brilliant.

Do not say a cue/command over and over again. If your dog does not understand the command the first time you issue it then they do not know the command. (And saying it louder and more slowly does not work either!!!!)

Once you are sure that the dog responds to your command you should generalise the behaviour by repeating the above procedure in new environments. Remember you will need to start at the beginning!

WHAT ARE JACKPOTS REWARDS?

When your dog makes a huge leap or carries out the desired final behaviour then click once but give them more than one treat. This is a jackpot reward. This indicates his highest achievement much like a certificate at school. For example lets say you have taught your dog to COME. During a walk while he usually responds to a cue he is sometimes is a bit slow and makes his way back to you 'in his own time' but sometimes he shoots back to you like a rocket. Well it is the time when he shoots straight back to you like a rocket that he deserves the Jackpot reward. He will soon learn that coming straight back to you when called gains a higher reward.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF VARIABLE REWARDS OR A RANDOM REWARD SCHEDULE?

The random rewards or variable rewards are one of the most important ingredients in the success of any training. A behaviour is made stronger and retained better if the dog is randomly rewarded for doing it on command.

The behaviour must be reliable before you introduce variable rewards/reinforcement. What this means is that your dog is not rewarded in the same way every time the behaviour is performed. On occasion they may be verbally rewarded, rewarded with a game or given a food treat. The reward is unpredictable and keeps them guessing. It is the possibility of the best reward that keeps them focused and motivated.... The illusive **Jackpot!**

Random rewarding insures that your dog will offer maximum effort in the hope that they will win the **jackpot**. But they must also realise that sometimes you don't win anything, maybe just a verbal reward.

WHAT IF HE GETS IT WRONG?

You don't say anything. If you want him to keep trying then it is important that he is not corrected for getting it wrong. If he gives a paw when you want a down just simply turn your back and walk away. When he comes over to you to see what you are doing try again. He will soon realise that you are not angry just that he should try something else. Alternatively if you could use a phrase such as 'try again' while moving away from him.

WHAT ABOUT REMOVING THE TREATS/LURE?

When your dog knows something really well the treats should not be on display or used as a bribe, but only as a reward. Most dogs find the feeling of getting it right rewarding in itself.

Remember it is you who decides when your dog gets rewarded. It is up to you to teach your dog that demanding a reward gets him nowhere. For example lets consider teaching a down stay.

The dog should know a **DOWN** on cue before you attempt this. Place the treats on a windowsill or table in view of your dog. Take two steps away from them. Cue your dog to 'DOWN' without a treat in your hand. When he responds say nothing at all, just move towards the table and pick up a treat. Walk back to him calmly and then wait a second or two before clicking and rewarding him. If your dog should move a muscle at *any time* before you click even if you are standing next to him, just turn away, and put the treat back on the table and start again. Do not be in a rush it is important to be resolute, patient and take your time.

Once your dog realises that moving from position, having a tantrum or being demanding means no reward he will pay more attention to you and not the food. Once you have cracked the treats being on a table and not on you they can be put inside a cupboard. You will have to allow your dog to see them in there at first, but then you can close the door and simply retrieve them when necessary. It will not be long

before your dog has the confidence that just because he cannot see the treat does not mean he will not be rewarded.

WHEN TO REMOVE THE CLICKER?

The clicker is simply a training aid so you will not need to carry it around with you forever. Once the behaviour has been taught and the dog **fully** understands the cue (which mean no mistakes or use of phrases such as 'he sometimes does it!') you can phase out the clicker and use verbal praise instead. Once your dog is reliably responding to your cue you can introduce a verbal marker such as 'Good girl' or 'Good boy' then click and reward. Begin to put the emphasis on the verbal praise until that replaces the click...easy!

SO WHY IS MY DOG SO GOOD AT HOME BUT WHEN WE ARE OUT HE DOESN'T LISTEN?

With all training when you raise the criteria i.e. change environment and increase distraction you need to go back to basics and give your dog more clues. You must literally start again as if he has never done the exercise before. Do not expect him to be able to generalise a command, there are many sit cues in a dog's mind for example; there is one for sit in the house, one for sit in the garden, one for sit in the park etc etc. If you do not train your dog in the different situations how can he be expected to know what to do?

New environments mean that there are new and exciting things to look at, investigate and play with.

Training tips:

- Introduce the clicker in a relaxed environment
- Prepare tasty soft treats that your dog will really work for. If your dog doesn't seem to want to work then your reward is not high enough. You must choose something that REALLY motivates your dog.
- Use a high rate of reinforcement when training a new behaviour. This keeps their focus on you and aids learning.
- When you click - reward.
- Don't expect your final aim immediately you may be setting you both up for failure. If your dog doesn't offer the desired behaviour immediately then reinforce steps in the right direction i.e. shape the behaviour. Then reward only that step and anything beyond that step giving your dog a clue while upping your expectations.
- Be sure that your dog really knows what you want before you try to add a cue or you may confuse him and you may become frustrated. Ask yourself if your

dog automatically performs the behaviour you are trying to teach when a treat is offered. If the answer is yes yes yes then add the cue...NOT before.

- Keep sessions short e.g. 5-10 mins then a break then 5-10 more minutes etc and FUN!
- Decide what you want before you start, do not switch your requirements half way through or you will confuse the dog and yourself. Keep your training of a particular behaviour organised into the following:
 1. Shape or capture the behaviour.
 2. Is the behaviour offered without a cue? Yes!
 3. Put behaviour on cue.
 4. Is the behaviour performed only with the Cue? Yes!
 5. Then brilliant try a new one.
- Expect behaviours to fall apart in new environments. In every new setting you must take your dog back to the beginning, as they do not generalise very well.
- Keep a training journal as this may help you keep track of your success or problems.
- Vary the rewards to keep your dog surprised and thus focused on you (see random reward schedule).
- Exercise your dog before training.
- Ensure your dog is hungry before training.
- Do not train if you are stressed or frustrated.
- Set yourselves up to succeed or you will become demotivated by failures
- Don't forget Jackpot rewards (see Jackpot rewards)
- Always end on a good note.

There are several common objections posed to clicker training. Proponents assert that while most of these can be a problem for the unskilled clicker trainer, these are all avoidable.

1. "The dog will never perform the behavior without the clicker." The clicker should be used to identify correct behavior during training, not to maintain behavior once the behavior has been learned. Once a behavior is performed each time the animal hears a specific cue (known as a command in traditional training), the clicker is discontinued.
2. "Dogs will become distracted by the clicks of other trainers in a class or public setting." This is very short-lived problem. Participants in clicker classes find that dogs are easily able to discriminate that only the clicks from their handler pay off. Clicks that don't pay off are soon ignored by animals in learning situations.
3. "Dogs become fat with clicker training because they get too many treats." Part 1 of the solution to this problem is either to use a portion of the dog's regular diet as the training treats or to use reinforcers other than food. Part 2 is to

remember that a training treat for a dog the size of a Labrador Retriever should be about the size of a pea. Smaller dogs get even smaller treats. Food is not the only reinforcer that can be used in training. A "reinforcer" is anything the animal is willing to work for in the current situation. Common non-food reinforcers include toys, attention, and the opportunity to do something the dog wants.

4. "You can't clicker train in noisy environments." The influence of environmental reinforcers is a challenge sometimes. Training for distractions is done by first training without distractions and then gradually adding complexity to the training environment.
5. "A dog may grow into adulthood and only listen and obey if the owner is carrying treats. If the owner does not have treats, often is the case that the dog is distracted and paying attention to whoever may have treats and food rewards available." In clicker training the food should not be visible to the animals until the behavior is completed.
6. "There are some situations where a clicker may not be loud enough, such as in hunting or retrieving when the dog is 'working away' from the handler." The clicker is not magic; it is just one type of marker. If the dog can't hear the click, use a different marker such as a whistle or a tone on a collar. Deaf dogs are frequently trained with a flash of light or a hand signal. "Some dogs are sensitive to noise and frightened by a clicker, so clicker training won't work for them." If your dog is afraid of the clicker, then simply choose a different marker—perhaps even just a word, the clicking of a retractable pen, or a juice cap.

GOOD LUCK