

## Clicker Training

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### How dogs learn

Dogs learn by reinforcement and association. Every time a behavior is reinforced it gets stronger, and if a behavior never gets reinforced it will cease to exist. Reinforcement is anything that makes a behavior stronger, and a behavior can be reinforced many different ways. The dog's environment can reinforce certain behaviors, the people in a dog's life can reinforce certain behaviors, and some of your dog's behaviors are self reinforcing.

We can make changes to a dog's environment to change reinforcement, but we have greatest control over our own actions. Good Clicker Trainers will use a variety of rewards to reinforce behavior, but the most common and usually the most effect reward is food or treats, as most dogs are highly motivated by food. As with people, if you want your dog to do something you need to motivate him.

### Why a clicker?

Dogs don't speak English, so we need to communicate with them in another way. A clicker allows us to tell our dogs when they are doing something right. To start with you need to teach your dog that every time he hears the clicker he is going to get a treat. Once he understands that basic principal you can start using the clicker as a training tool.

Without getting into too much detail about the training process, basically when your dog is doing something right you will click the clicker and give him a treat. The treat is the reinforcement for doing the behavior. The more you click and treat for the same behavior the stronger that behavior becomes.

So why the clicker? It is a unique sound that your dog will quickly identify. It is consistent, always sounding the same no matter who clicks it. It is precise; you are able to click much faster than any verbal praise, which allows you to 'mark' the behavior when it happens, so your timing is exact.

When your dog is doing something that you like, click the clicker and toss him a treat. To start with he won't know why he got the treat, he is just happy to get one. When you continue clicking and treating for the same behavior, he will make an association between the behavior and the click. When he has that figured out he will try to get you to click by offering you the behavior. The greatest thing about clicker training is that it gets your dog using his brain, you can actually see your dog thinking and trying to solve the puzzle of 'how do I get the click'.

With the basic principles of reinforcement, association, and motivation you can teach your dog anything you can think of, and it will be fun, humane and effective.

