

Why use the click? Why not just a word?

By Karen Pryor

A click is more powerful for training than a spoken word because it is not a sound heard by the animal in other circumstances. It means one thing only: a reward is coming because of what you did when you heard the click. It can be produced instantly and at the exact moment a behavior occurs. Even a very quick and subtle behavior, the twitch of an ear for example, can be clicked.

Unlike our voices, which can say the same word in different ways, and so express different emotions or meanings each time, the click sounds the same every time it is heard; its meaning never varies. Humans are highly verbal creatures, but our pets are not. It can be difficult for them to pick out a single word from the stream of meaningless words they hear us speak every day. The click's meaning, however, is always clear. It is always directed at the animal, and it is always good news.

The clarity with which a click enables trainers to communicate with their animals has a profound effect on their relationships. Their level of interaction increases, and trainer and animal become more interesting and fun for each other.