



An Introduction to Clicker Training

Rewarding our dogs for good behaviour is the most effective way to train our dogs. Giving a reward for a correct behaviour (ie, treating your dog with a cookie for a nice “Sit”) increases the likelihood that your dog will perform this behaviour for you. This is called this **positive reinforcement**. The key to positive reinforcement training is that the reward must be delivered roughly within ½ of a second of the behaviour for your dog to make the connection. When you are trying to reward your dog for a quick glance at you, or a dog that sits then immediately stands up, it can be very difficult to get the timing right. If your dog is far away from you and does a correct behaviour, you can’t deliver a treat in time either. **This is where our clicker comes in.**

The clicker serves as a “bridge” that allows us to reward the dog the very moment the behaviour happens by ‘clicking’ on our device. Of course, for a dog unfamiliar with clicker training, if you press down on your clicker now, it will have no effect. You need to “charge” your clicker first. By clicking and then immediately presenting a small treat to our dog, they will learn that the clicker is a predictor of food. **Whenever your dog hears the clicker, they will know a reward is coming, and you will have reinforced the behaviour at the very moment it happens – greatly improving your training results.**

Clickers are much more effective than verbal dialogue. The clicker sound is distinctive, loud, and consistent. There is science to suggest the click noise registers faster because the brain will react quicker to a noise than a spoken word.

You must always pair your click with a reward, usually a small piece of food or a piece of the dog’s kibble. The click translates to, “that behaviour was correct, a treat is now on the way!”

Don't worry – you won't always need your clicker or a bag of treats for your dog to listen to you. However, when teaching new behaviours, the clicker and rewards help communicate to your dog what you want them to do, then rewards can be slowly phased out once the dog understands the command.

Here are some practical applications for using your clicker

With your dog beside you, deliver 15-20 small yummy treats, but click your clicker just before delivering each one. Your dog doesn't need to do anything, just hear the click and get a treat. To begin with, the treat must be delivered almost immediately after hearing the click. Do this a few times per day (you can use the dogs kibble as well). When you 'click' and your dog looks expectantly at you for a reward – the clicker is charged. Try to fake your dog out – pretend to give him a treat but have nothing in your hand, touch your pocket where the treats are, then present an empty hand, then click and present the treat.

Building Attention:

Having your dog's attention is the most important part of training! If your dog is ignoring you, there isn't much chance of him listening to any other commands. This is where a clicker is very helpful because a dog may only glance at you for a moment.

- 1) Start with your dog on leash in your home, just stand there with him. If he glances up at you, click and reward. Click and reward each glance, then only click and reward for longer gazes, increasing only a couple of seconds each time. If you find your dog is looking away, go back to rewarding the shorter glances.

- 2) Hold a piece of food in your hand straight out from your side. Your dog will likely follow and stare at the food in your hand. Wait him out and click the moment he looks back at you then deliver the reward. This teaches the dog to focus on the handler instead of just following food. Try to increase your duration on this as well. You can add a cue word such as 'watch' at this point however I prefer to just reinforce lots of attention so it becomes a natural behaviour.

Loose Leash Walking:

No one likes a dog that pulls on leash! Dogs pull on leash simply because we allow them to! Use your clicker to help teach your dog to stop pulling.

- 1) If your dog is pulling on leash, just before he hits the end of the leash say "AH" and then stop. Do not jerk his leash, simply stop moving. The "AH" sound will serve as a "reverse clicker" that signals something negative is coming!

- 2) Encourage your dog to come back beside you and deliver a reward when he gets there. Then take one step forward and click/reward just as your dog is walking beside you. Changing directions can also help to bring your dog moving pass you so you can click/reward as he walks by. The key is to click/reward whenever your dog is walking on a loose leash. The position of the dog is irrelevant, he can be behind, beside or in front – as long as the leash stays loose.

If he pulls, simply say “AH” and stop again, and encourage him back to you. Walk and click/reward for loose leash. If you did the attention exercises above, this should be much easier since often dogs that pull on leash also pay no attention to their handlers.

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