

CLICKING WITH CANINES

SIX STEPS OF CLICKER TRAINING

Step #1: “CHARGING” THE CLICKER

At first, the clicker means nothing to your dog. We want your dog to know that when he/she hears the “click” a nice treat immediately follows. Start by simply clicking and follow with a treat as quickly as possible. This should get your dog’s attention. About a dozen click/treats (C/Ts) should do it for most dogs. C/T for any desired behavior (the dog just giving attention, for instance).

To test whether the clicker is charged, simply click when your dog is not paying attention. If his head snaps in your direction, he/she knows what it means and the clicker is ‘charged’. This is the ONLY time we use the clicker to get attention. From now on, only click AFTER the dog gives his attention.

It is best to begin without the clicker in your dog’s sight. Do not point the clicker at your dog. If your dog is fearful of the sound, muffle the clicker by putting it in your pocket or wrapping it with tape.

Step #2: GET THE BEHAVIOR: two ways to get behavior

Shaping: Dissect the ultimate behavior into small parts. Click and reward when the dog performs each part. Raise the bar for the dog to be “clicked” and reward each time the dog succeeds with the previous part. Set realistic goals so the dog is ALWAYS successful. It takes time and practice to develop good shaping skills, but very complex behaviors can be taught and shaping can be a lot of fun for you and your dog.

Capturing: Wait for the dog to offer a behavior...then click and reward. Clicker “savvy” dogs can learn behaviors with just a few clicks.

Step #3: MARK THE BEHAVIOR

The timing of the “click” is most crucial: “you get what you click.” Timing of the reward is NOT as crucial. It should be delivered soon (within 2-3 seconds when working on new behaviors) after the click, but MUST be delivered.

At first, the dog will only recognize the clicker as an “announcement” that a treat is coming. Eventually, the dog will become aware that HIS behavior makes the “click” happen.

The clicker becomes a means of communication between you and your dog that you never had before.

Step #4: REINFORCE THE BEHAVIOR

The reinforcement must be rewarding to the dog. Experiment with different kinds of treats. As a rule, they should be small, no more than a quarter inch square, or size of a pea, very tasty, and easily chewed and swallowed. Vary the treats and save ones that the dog particularly is crazy about for behaviors that are more difficult for the dog to accomplish.

Reduce the dog's regular meal according to the amount of treats it is getting during training sessions.

Treats are REWARDS ("paychecks") for doing a behavior or part of a behavior. They are NOT bribes. Do not show the food, unless being used in a limited way to lure a behavior.

Step #5: INTRODUCE THE CUE/PHASE OUT THE CLICKER

Once the dog is performing a behavior reliably (80% of the time is the rule of thumb), begin introducing the verbal cue for the behavior. Use any word you want (the dog does not care), but be sure the word (or short phrase) will only be given for that behavior. As you phase in the cue, you may phase out the clicker. Now the dog is rewarded only when it responds to the cue.

Step #6: GENERALIZE THE CUE/PHASE OUT THE TREAT

Once the dog is performing a behavior on cue, you may begin phasing out the food reward. Do not stop the treats suddenly, but intermittently. If the dog stops the behavior, it means it does not find it rewarding anymore and you need to back up a couple of steps. Most likely, the food reward was phased out too quickly. To keep the behavior fluent, reward successful responses to the cue on a random basis and in different environments.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- 1) IN CLICKER TRAINING, THE DOG DOES ALL THE WORK!
- 2) PROCEED AT THE DOG'S PACE, NOT YOURS. PROGRESS IS DIFFERENT FOR EACH DOG.

3) ALWAYS SET THE DOG UP TO SUCCEED AND ALWAYS END ON A SUCCESS

4) **Keep a clicker handy.** Buy several and leave them around the house. However, remember, it is just a training tool. Once your dog is trained to your satisfaction, the clickers are no longer needed.

5) **Have treats readily available.** Get a pouch that you can hook on a belt loop. Use treats that you can put in your pocket. Again, they are for training. You will not have to treat your dog for each behavior forever.