



## Clicker training

Clicker training is a method of positive reinforcement dog training. You use a small device called a clicker which you press to make a clicking sound. The clicking sound is used to mark a behavior that you like. For instance, if you tell your dog "sit," you click the clicker the minute his rear end hits the floor. Then you give him a treat.

If you are just getting started with clicker training, or if you are not getting the results you hoped for from clicker training, the following tips can help:

### 1. A Click Equals a Treat

When you click your clicker to mark a behavior, you must give your dog a treat. You need to teach your dog that the sound of the click is an extremely reliable predictor that he is about to get a treat. If you don't always give a treat after you click, the clicker begins to lose some of its effectiveness. You don't always have to use a clicker when you train your dog, but if you click, you must give a treat.

### 2. Give the Treat as Quickly as Possible After You Click

If you click your clicker and then take more than a second or two to give your dog a treat, your dog may not understand that there is any connection between the sound of the click and getting a treat. When this happens, the click loses its meaning, and your dog can become confused about what you are asking him to do.

### 3. Timing is everything

It's important that you click the clicker at the exact moment your dog performs a behavior. If you aren't precise with your clicker, you might end up reinforcing the wrong behavior. For instance, if you ask your dog to sit, and he does it, you should click the minute his rear end hits the floor. If you wait even a few seconds too long, your dog might start getting up, and the behavior you mark is him raising his bottom a few inches from the floor. You are not reinforcing the behavior you want. Be sure that you are clicking to mark the exact behavior you want.

### 4. Keep Your Clicker Handy to Capture Behaviors

Capturing behaviors is a great way to teach your dog new behaviors with very little effort on your part. Keep your clicker and a handful of treats handy, and whenever you catch your dog doing something you like, simply click and treat. You will be amazed at how quickly your dog can learn new behaviors this way.

### 5. Go Back a Step

It can be frustrating when your dog seems to know a command, and then begins to make repeated mistakes. Your dog is not misbehaving. You probably moved ahead a little too quickly, and now your dog is confused about what you want him to do. Instead of scolding him, go back a step or two in the training process, and then begin to move ahead more slowly. For example, if you are teaching your dog to stay, he may do fine when you have him hold the stay for 5 seconds, but when you try to get him to stay for 20 seconds, he just can't do it. Try going back to having him hold the stay for 5 seconds, and

then click and treat. Practice a few times, and then add a few more seconds to the stay. If your dog is making mistakes, chances are you moved ahead too quickly for him.

#### 6. Keep it Clicker Training Positive

Remember that clicker training is supposed to be fun for you and your dog. If you find yourself getting frustrated, end the training sessions. You can go back later and start fresh. Keep training sessions short (no more than 10 minutes), and try to end each one on a positive note!