

Clicker Training

The purpose of the clicker is to signal that a desired behavior has occurred. This marker is a communication tool that gives your dog feedback on his behavior. It tells him “The thing you were doing at the moment you heard the mark is something I want you to repeat.” It also tells him that a reward is coming.

Another term for a clicker is a secondary reinforcer (because it is paired with positive reinforcement such as food and play) or bridge. Another secondary reinforcer you can use in place of the clicker is a word such as *Yes!* Whether you use a clicker or a word, it is important to remember that it must be followed as closely in time as possible by the positive reinforcer (food or play). This will definitely speed up training because your dog is given clear information.

The timing of the click is critical. If you ask your dog for a sit and he complies, but then he gets up as you are clicking, he will assume that the standing is what you wanted. Be attentive and work on your timing of the click and the reward after the click.

Important Steps For Clicker Success

1. Charge up the clicker by pairing it with a treat.

Don't ask for any specific behaviors at first, just click-treat, click-treat, click-treat, click-treat as fast as possible about 20 times. Be sure your dog isn't doing anything you don't like when you click.

2. Don't click too close to your dog's ear!

It hurts! If your dog seems a little worried about the sound of the click, keep the clicker in your pocket or behind your back. You can also try to purchase a soft clicker that can vary the sharpness and volume.

3. Pair the clicker with toys and games in the same way you charged it up with treats.

Click and play for short period, then repeat. It helps add variety to your reinforcers by pairing the clicker with all the things your dog loves.

4. Always follow the click with a reinforcer. This needs to be a one-to-one relationship.

Clicking without offering a reinforcer lowers the value of the click as a signal that good things are coming and thus makes the meaning of the click inconsistent.

5. Use the click as a behavioral marker.

The purpose of using the clicker is to mark the *exact* moment you dog performs a behavior you like. It is actually much more precise than the human voice.

6. Only click for each desired behavior. Multiple clicks will be confusing to your dog.

7. Practice your timing. Most people click much too late.

8. Split, don't lump.

Build the behaviors you want to teach in a step-by-step manner. Break down each behavior (split it) into the smallest possible parts and teach each part separately.