

Train Quicker Using A Clicker

Clicker training is a fun, science-based way to communicate with your pet. It's easier for dogs to learn than with standard command-based training. You can clicker train any kind of animal, of any age. Puppies love it. Old dogs learn new tricks. You can clicker-train cats, birds, and other pets as well. In essence, a clicker is an abbreviated way of saying "good dog". It identifies for the animal exactly which behavior "caused" reinforcement. Behavioral psychologists, who first used this tool for shaping behavior, call it a secondary reinforcer because it is paired with positive reinforcement such as food and play. It is also called a marker 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.

Primary reinforcers are the actual things that animals work for -- food, physical affection or fetching a ball. The clicker accurately identifies correct behavior. Because the clicker is faster than verbal praise, it is more precise. In the time it takes to say "good boy" your pet may perform the desired behavior and then move to an unwanted response, before the praise has time to register. In this scenario, your pet can't tell if the trainer liked the "sit" or the "jumping up on the trainer" that occurred a split second later.

Charging up your clicker

The first step in "powering up" your clicker is to associate it with positive reinforcers. If your dog already knows some obedience behaviors, merely replace your use of verbal praise with the clicker.

Example:

1. Say "Sit"
2. Fido sits
3. Click during the sit and treat. (The sequence of "click then treat" is important.)

If your dog does not yet know any formal behaviors, simply click the clicker and give the dog a treat. Do this about 20-30 in a row times until your dog visibly responds to the sound of the click.

Quick Start Guide

- Push and release the button or springy end of the clicker making a two-toned click. Then treat. Keep the treats small. Use a delicious treat at first: for a dog or cat, little cubes of roast chicken, not a lump of kibble.
- If you click, even if it's a mistake, you must treat. I like to call these "freebies"! 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.
- Click during the desired behavior, not after it is completed. The timing of the click is crucial. Give the treat after the click; the timing of the treat is not so important.
- Click when your dog or other pet does something you like. Practice with something easy that the pet is likely to do on its own. (Ideas: sit; come toward you; touch your hand with its nose.)
- Only click once for each desired behavior. Multiple clicks will be confusing to your dog. If you want to express special enthusiasm, increase the number of treats, not the number of clicks.
- Fix bad behavior by clicking good behavior. Click a puppy for relieving itself in the proper spot. Click for paws on the ground, not on the visitors. Instead of scolding for barking, click for silence.

- Keep raising your goal. As soon as you have a good response, start asking for more. Wait until the dog stays down a little longer, comes a little further, sits a little faster. Then click and treat.
- When your pet is showing you the behavior spontaneously, trying to get you to click, you can begin offering a cue, such as a word or a hand signal. Start clicking for that behavior if it happens during or after the cue. Start ignoring that behavior when the cue wasn't given.
- Don't order your dog around; clicker training is not command-based. If your pet does not respond to a cue, it is not disobeying, it just hasn't learned the cue completely. Try working in a quieter place. If you have more than one pet, separate them for training.
- If you are not making progress with a particular behavior, you are probably clicking too late. Accurate timing is important.
- 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.
- 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.
- Once your pet fully understands a behavior, it is no longer necessary to use the clicker. Continue to use it for teaching new behaviors and tricks.

Train "Come" in 8 easy steps!

1. Grab your clicker, some treats, and your pooch.
2. Sit on the floor and try to coax your dog over to you. When she comes, click and treat. (Don't try to coax the dog with treats. Hide the treats until she's completed each task- then click and treat.)
3. Get up, move, and try again. Click and treat. Repeat several times.
4. Next, call your dog by her name when she is in another room. Try this at unexpected times during the day. Always click and treat when your dog responds. If she doesn't respond, don't give her a second chance. Let your dog see you put away the clicker and treats.
5. Next, try using helpers sitting in different areas of a room. Have your helpers call your dog's name one at a time. When she reaches the helper, you click and the helper treats. This activity can be a lot of fun for children.
6. Practice calling your dog back and forth between two people outdoors. If your dog loves to bolt, put her on a long leash for safety while you click and treat.
7. If your dog has been ignoring "come" for years, a reliable recall may take weeks to learn. For a puppy, it might just take a couple of days. Be patient. If you find that your dog is not responding at all, try ignoring her. If that fails, put away your clicker, catch the dog and go home. She'll get the message that the fun is over.
8. To maintain the behavior over time, you don't always need to click and treat. Sometimes if you call to your dog and she responds, letting her off the leash to chase squirrels can be a great reward!

For lots more information from Karen Pryor, go to www.clickertraining.com.

This handy "Come" exercise came from Karen Pryor's *Click-a-Trick*. Order your *Click-a-Trick* cards and teach your dog useful manners and cool tricks while you both have fun. To order your cards and to get lots more information about clicker training go to <http://clickerpets.stores.yahoo.net/clca.html>.