

Clicker training for your dog

What does a clicker do?

The audible 'click' of a clicker acts as a reward marker to tell your dog that what they just did was the correct response. The click is always followed by a reward (a tasty treat, a toy, or anything the animal enjoys).

Clicker training takes a little practice for both you and your dogs. For the trainer, the moment the clicker is activated is critical, so you need to practice the timing mechanics, and for your dog, they need to learn the significance of the click and the consequence once it is heard. Once both of you understand the game, you can use a clicker in your training in many different ways.

The benefit of clicker training is that it is a great way to teach our dogs to think and solve problems. It reduces our reliance on talking and using too many words, which can confuse our dogs, and the click is a great way to communicate to our dogs exactly what they just did that earned the treat.

Getting started

First, practice clicking the clicker to make a consistent sound, then grab a handful of treats and your dog and simply click and then give your dog a treat, click and treat. Repeat a few times. This is what we call 'charging the clicker', which simply means we are giving the click sound meaning to our dogs by pairing the click with a tasty treat. In no time, our dogs will have formed a positive association with the click sound, so the click now predicts a treat is coming. Once that association has formed, you are ready to start training.



Markers

What is a marker? **A marker is a sound, word or action that a trainer uses to mark the moment a dog performs a desired behaviour.** The marker provides feedback at the moment a good choice is made, and is followed with a reward, e.g. mark then give food, mark then play with a toy, mark then release to greet a friend, and so on. The sequence goes like this:

Marking the Right Choice



A marker will tell your dog that they have made the correct choice and will be rewarded for it.

Another marker you can use is your voice. A word such as '**YES**' given at the moment your dog makes the right choice will tell your dog that their behaviour is correct. You can use various marker words for to convey responses and impart different energy levels to your dog.

Markers help your dog understand what you want them to do by marking the correct choice. Whichever marker you use it needs to be consistent, fast and always followed by a reward.

Training with a clicker

So, what can be trained using the clicker? Well, the only real limit is your imagination. The clicker can teach basic skills like sit, drop, stay, come, leave, give or more complex behaviours such as loose lead walking, trick training or agility. Furthermore, any animal can be trained this way – including your pet bird, cat or horse.

When learning clicker training, you can begin with a simple behaviour like teaching your dog to touch their nose to your hand. This simple targeting exercise is great to help you with the click timing and is a great way to teach your dog how to think and solve problems. To teach nose touch, simply hold your hand up with your palm facing your dog. If your dog sniffs your hand, click and treat.

Repeat this exercise several times, aiming for your dog to touch your hand with their nose. If your dog looks blankly at you, make your hand smell good by wiping a yummy treat on your palm and then presenting your hand to your dog again. Click and treat when your dog sniffs your hand and then build up to a nose touch. There, you have trained a simple targeting behaviour. Talk to your positive reinforcement trainer about more ways to use the clicker.

Where to learn more about clicker training

Search for a trainer in your area that uses force-free training methods and uses clickers in their training classes.

Teach yourself – There are several great books and online courses, or learn from examples of YouTube video clips. Also, check out Karen Pryor's website www.clickertraining.com and a range of books/DVDs on the subject.

Purchase a clicker and support the APDT

The APDT sells two types of clickers to suit all trainers.



Loud Box Clicker



Soft iClicker

Clickers – \$4.00 each

