TRAINING TIPS

Basics of Clicker Training

Clicker training your dog can be a really good way to get them to focus on what you're asking them to do. Using a clicker can help your dog recognize when they've carried out a behaviour they will be rewarded for.

Using a clicker can be more predictable for your dog than using a specific marker word (like Yes), and they will likely more strongly associate the sound with getting a treat. Marker words can be words we use in everyday conversations, which can be confusing for your pup. Our voices also naturally vary in tone, pitch and volume, but the clicker sound is consistent and your dog will easily recognise it.

If your dog is noise sensitive and the clicker sound is worrying them, you can muffle the sound by clicking the clicker from inside your pocket. If they are still scared of the sound, you should use a marker word instead.

Time your clicker correctly

The timing of when you click the clicker is very important. Think of the click like you're taking a photo of the behaviour that you want. You must only click when your dog is doing the exact action you've asked for.

For example, if you ask your dog to sit, but they also bark when they do so, if you click and reward them at this point you will also be encouraging them to bark too. In this instance, you would need to click before they bark, or only click and reward sits when they don't bark.

The click must come exactly when the desired behaviour occurs and it's important that you reward your dog within 3 seconds of the click. Try dropping a ball and clicking at the exact moment it touches the floor to practice! It's harder than it sounds. If you don't click at right time to reward your dog, this could frustrate them and reduce the effectiveness of the click.

Step 1. Show your dog how the clicker works and what it does

Before you start using a clicker, you will need to associate the 'click' with something positive - the reward.

Do this in a calm environment, without any distractions. If your dog is food motivated, you can use some of your dog's usual food to avoid using too many treats.

Step 2. Start introducing the clicker when your dog does something good

Once you can see that your dog is anticipating the food when they hear the click, you can start introducing the clicker to reward good behaviour.

Ask your dog to carry out a skill they already know, such as ‘sit’ or ‘down’. As soon your dog sits, click and reward them. Practice this regularly over a few, short sessions so that you can improve your timing and your dog can get used to using the clicker.

When you’re satisfied that your dog understands what the click means (they should immediately look to where the treats have been coming from), you can then move on to using the clicker to teach new behaviours.

Step 3. Use the clicker as part of dog training

Clicker training is a useful way to get a dog to do what you want them to do of their own accord. This uses quite a bit of brain power for your dog so is also a great way to mentally stimulate them.

To use the clicker, first decide what the final behaviour is that you would like your dog to do, and then break it down into small steps. These should be progressive steps that if all clicked, rewarded, and built on in sequence will eventually get you to the final desired behaviour.

For example, if you are training your dog to sit on a mat, first reward any interest in the mat – click when your dog looks at the mat and then reward. Once they are doing this consistently, wait a few seconds for them to take a step towards the mat, and click and reward the step. Continue until eventually you hold out for a paw on the mat.

From there, then build up from two to three paws, until eventually you are only clicking and rewarding when all four paws on the mat.

The last step would be to ask your dog to sit on the mat, and then to click and reward when they successfully do that. Next you can ask your dog to lie down when then they are on the mat, and only click to reward this when the dog is fully lying down on the mat.

Step 4. Be consistent

The key to any dog training is consistency. While it’s important that you only click on the desired behaviour that you are looking for at each step, if you do accidentally click then you should still follow up with a reward. This will make sure that your dog continues to associate the click with being rewarded and won’t undo all your hard work.

It’s also important to be consistent in how you click. We would advise holding your clicker in the palm of your hand to the side of your body. Don’t hold your clicker like a remote and point it at your dog, as this can be intimidating.