

CLICKER TRAINING

Why Clicker?

Understanding the principles of learning will give you a greater understanding of how the clicker works and will enable you to use it to its full potential. Some basic rules of learning (for all animals including us) understanding how learning works will enable you to use the clicker more effectively.

1. A behavior that is rewarded is likely to increase. E.g. if you are rewarded for jumping up at your owner by being given attention, you have learned that it is a good thing to do and will do it again.
2. A behavior which is unrewarding is likely to decrease. E.g. if you are ignored when you jump up at your owner you are less likely to try it again as it did not gain the desired effect.
3. A behavior that has a history of being rewarded is less likely to decrease if it is then intermittently rewarded. E.g. a small puppy may be rewarded often for jumping up by being given attention for being small and sweet, but once he gets bigger some people may reject him. Because he knows that a reward is available (i.e. attention) he is likely to keep trying to get the attention rather than give up. The intermittent reward rule is very effective in maintaining and improving on a behavior that has already been learned. By selecting the best performances the dog will learn to try harder in order to be rewarded. It works against us in that it also maintains inappropriate behaviors such as jumping up, pulling on the lead, or taking human food. Taking these rules into account it is easy to see why clicker training works. Behavior that you want to encourage is reinforced using the click & treat. Behavior that you don't want to reinforce is simply ignored. Once a behavior is learned you don't need to click & treat any longer - you can just praise each time and reward with a treat and toy when you want to - i.e. for particularly good performances or executing the behavior in a very distracting environment.

What is a clicker?

A clicker is simply a signal to your dog (cat/rabbit/horse) that he will be rewarded for his current behavior. It is a noise that becomes connected to an imminent reward. (A reward is anything that your dog wants. When it is given at the same time as a behavior it increases the probability that the behavior will occur again.) Dogs learn to work for a clicker because of its connection to the reward. Other examples of such connections are: In the case of school children the school bell is similar to a clicker. Although we are not born finding bells extremely exciting and rewarding things, we quickly learn to associate the sound with freedom, playtime and the end of lessons. We therefore look forward to the bell itself, because of the associated events it represents. At Christmas, our presents are usually wrapped in fancy paper. Although fancy paper itself is not exciting it does provoke a reaction of excitement and anticipation in many of us, due to the fact it is connected with us receiving something we want. We therefore react to the sight of the paper. So, the clicker is used to indicate to your dog - 'well done, you will be rewarded for that'. It is almost always followed by a reward, usually a food treat. Where did it come from The principles used in clicker training were first applied in the training of marine mammals such as dolphins. It is also useful for training many other species and is widely used by animal trainers for film work and teaching complex tasks.

Why clicker training for dogs?

Clicker training has only relatively recently come to the attention of the dog-training world. Dog training as a whole moved on in leaps and bounds over the eighties and nineties. Training dogs used to be strongly based in the principle of making the dog do it. It relied very much on aid such as the choke chain, a loud firm voice and physical strength. Dog trainers used to believe that the only way to teach a dog to obey was to physically make the dog comply. In recent years dog training has moved over to using motivation and reward to achieve aims. Dogs are shown what to do with a food treat or toy and then rewarded for doing the correct thing. This relies far more on the dog paying attention and using his brain to figure out what is required and how to get the reward. When training dogs in this way praise is very important and plays a large part in letting the dog know when he has done well. Clicker training is a way of bringing more precision to this kind of training. One thing that trainers noticed is that it is sometimes very difficult to get across to the dog when he is doing right and when he has made a mistake. What handlers shouldn't do when training dogs is tell them off for making mistakes. This will only teach the dog that training is no fun and that he may get into trouble at certain times. With this attitude a dog is likely to give up trying to learn

for fear of getting it wrong. It can however be a slow process if we sometimes miss the opportunity to reward a dog for the right thing. The reason this may happen is because our main method of communicating to the dog that he has done the right thing is to tell him so and then get a reward to him. Try this simple experiment: Take a tennis ball and throw it into the air. Ask five people (at the same time) to say 'good boy' when the ball reaches the highest point before coming back down to you. See how long it takes, the difference in when people begin to praise, and stop - imprecise isn't it. Now try it again, telling them to be more precise. You will probably find they say 'good boy' more quickly. Now try it again, but get them to clap their hands instead - better? The reason it is difficult when using our voices is because they are slow, and are not ideal for pinpointing a precise moment in time. The other disadvantage of using a voice, as a marker for the correct behavior is that dogs hear our voices all the time and may not necessarily pick up when we are praising them, telling them they got something wrong or not actually talking to them at all. Many dogs have found the best option is to ignore voices at all times, as a voice never indicates anything of any benefit to them anyway. So the clicker is a very precise and to the point way of saying 'good boy', at exactly the time you want the dog to know he has got it right.

How does it work?

One big difference between traditional lure reward training and clicker training is the use of initiative. Dogs who have been trained with a clicker learn to try things out, in order to get their trainer to click and reward. Lure trained dogs will often wait to be shown what to do, because they always have been. Lure training is very effective but once a dog has learned to do something with a lure it is necessary to change the lure to a signal and be sure that a dog does not continue to rely on the lure. It also has some limitations especially with distance work. This is due to the fact that the dog may rely heavily on the trainer for cues, and loses confidence when away from the trainer, having to work on his own. With clicker training, much of the learning is done through waiting for the dog to offer a behavior, catching that moment and rewarding it, although luring may sometimes be necessary to get the dog thinking in the right direction. Luring refers to the act of showing a dog what is required, by leading it with a piece of food or a toy. For example, to lure a dog into the sitting position a trainer would raise a piece of food from the dogs' nose back over his head causing the dog to look up. Because of the way dogs are designed, looking straight up usually causes them to sit. The dog would then be rewarded for this.

What can you teach a dog to do with a clicker?

Anything you like. Clicker training is useful for teaching basic and complex behaviors alike. It comes in to its own when training distance work as it no longer becomes necessary to get the reward to the dog the instant they show the correct behavior. When using lure and reward training you should always reward the dog while it is doing the behavior that you are rewarding. The reason for this is that the reward is also the signal that the dog has got it right. With the clicker, because the sound of the clicker quickly becomes the indication to the dog that he is doing the right thing, and that he can now stop, it is unimportant if there is a small delay in the dog receiving his reward. The clicker indicates that the dog has done the right thing and ends the behavior. The clicker is not a magical noise. It does not in itself, have any kind of fundamental meaning to a dog. It is not a remote control! It means, "You will be rewarded for that behavior" It is almost always followed by a reward anything that is rewarded is likely to be repeated

Getting Started

Clicker training is quite a relaxed and flexible form of training. It is not for the impatient, as it allows the dog to use his brain and figure out what is required as opposed to being shown. The best way to use a clicker is to have some rewards on hand and then just watch your dog. When he does something that you like, click & treat and then wait to see if he does it again. It is easiest to start with, if you have a few things in mind that you would like to teach your dog but simply click whatever happens first and then go from there. Inexperienced dogs will take more time to figure out what is happening, as they will not yet have learned to connect the correct behavior with hearing the click. Dogs that have learned a lot of behaviors with clicker training tend to begin experimenting as soon as they realize that rewards are on offer and quickly repeat what you reward. The important thing to remember about rewards is if the dog doesn't want it, it's not a reward. It would be like trying to reward your children with treats of cabbage and peas, when they prefer chocolate and crisps.

Which rewards?

What you use to reward your dog is up to you and should depend entirely on what your dog likes. Small pieces of food are best when first shaping a behavior, as many repetitions are required. If you reward your dog with large treats he will soon become full up and will not want to play anymore. You may need to vary your rewards according to where you are. You may find that the treats your dog likes to eat at home won't quite hold his interest out in the park where there are many other exciting things to do. Most dogs being trained with a clicker however see the clicker itself as a signal that great fun is about to be had and so want to stick around for that reason. Toys can also be used but may not be as useful in the early stages of training as you would need to keep getting the toy back. Having the same reward again and again can for some dogs lose its appeal after a while. Chase or retrieve motivated dogs (such as Border Collies or Springer Spaniels) however will probably work very happily for a toy once the behavior has been learned, or even in the learning stages. Introducing the clicker Opinion varies on how the clicker should be introduced to a dog. If your dog is at all sound sensitive, it may be wise to muffle the sound initially by holding the clicker in your pocket. Once the dog has heard the sound followed by a reward numerous times, the sound will not have any bad associations. You can introduce training with a clicker in two ways.

1. Simply teach the dog that a click is always followed by a treat, without aiming to shape any behavior. Do this by just randomly clicking and then treating your dog. Don't always hand the treat to your dog; sometimes throw it away from you so that the dog associates the click with food, not the click with being near you. Once you can see that the dog is responding to the sound by looking for a treat, you can then move on to training a behavior.
2. Go straight ahead and begin to shape a behavior. Progress will probably be a little slow for the first few clicks as your dog will not know what the click means. Once you have rewarded your dog several times he will soon get the idea. The disadvantage of no. 2 is that you may not have as many opportunities to click, as your dog may not be offering the behavior that you want. Always go for a very simple task to start with so that your dog can achieve success. How you introduce the clicker really depends on your dog. If you have a dog that is highly motivated and active then it is probably best to get them thinking right away. With a distracted or less motivated dog, the first way will work best. To start with go for very simple tasks and click & reward these. You can change your mind once you have started reinforcing one thing if your dog then does something you like better. Be careful not to do this too often however as you run the risk of confusing your dog and ending up with him learning nothing much at all. When you are teaching your dog a new behavior it is important to have some level of success early on in order that your dog may be rewarded and so will continue to want to learn. The reason many people have trouble in teaching new things to their dog, is, that they aim too high initially. If you ask too much of a dog in the beginning he will have no chance to be successful and so will not see the point of continuing to try hard. Whenever you teach any animal (humans included) something new you should break the task down in to small stages, progressing through each stage after achieving success. Of course, some things are relatively easy for dogs to learn and so only require one or two stages. Others will need far more.

Rewarding

It is very important to reward your dog every time when you first begin to teach him something new. The reason for this is that the beginning of training is when your dog is trying to figure out what it is you want. We can't tell our dogs verbally when they are doing things right as they don't understand English and as far as they are concerned we may be telling them they are doing it wrong. The most effective way to let them know we like what they are doing is to reward them.

Let's look at this from the dog's point of view.

1 Fido is jumping about - nothing happens

2 Fido is staring at you standing up - nothing happens

3 Fido sits and looks at you - click and treat. "Wow! Why did that happen?" thinks Fido - "lets experiment."

4 Fido walks around - nothing

5 Fido sits - click and treat. "Ahah" - thinks Fido -could it be when I stick my bottom on the floor she likes it?"

6 Fido sits - nothing happens. Confused Fido - "can't be that, what does she want?"

So we have gone from a dog going in the right direction to a dog that no longer knows what is required. This is why, when we develop a new behavior, it is important to reward every time. Once a dog has learned a behavior and understands what is required we can improve on the performance by not rewarding every

time. This will also help to prepare the dog for times when you are not able or do not want to reward and will teach him not to give up. Again let's go back to Fido to get his view of the situation. Fido has now learned the behavior 'sit' on command

1 You say sit - Fido sits - you reward

2 You say sit - Fido sits - no reward. Fido thinks 'huh, why no reward, I know that was right'

3 You say sit - Fido thinks 'better do it quicker this time, she might reward me' - Fido sits - you reward - Fido thinks 'ah ah, I must have to do it quicker'

This will work if you reward in a random fashion, picking out the best performances and importantly rewarding before your dog gets totally fed up. To start with you should still reward quite often. If however you have been rewarding your dog every time and you suddenly stop, he will quite quickly stop sitting for you. If you have taught him that there will always be a reward eventually, he will keep doing it just in case this is the time the reward is given. By rewarding like this we can refine the behaviors that we have taught. For example, if we want to teach our dog to sit more quickly we would only reward a sit within 2 seconds of asking, and then only within 1 second of asking and so on. In this way we can steadily improve the dog's responses as he tries harder in order to get the rewards. It is not by any means vital to reward your dog intermittently. If you choose, you can go on rewarding your dog for sitting every time for the rest of his life and he will still sit happily for you.

Something for you to reward:

To start you off with clicker training try the following: To start your dog on something completely new and very simple begin by teaching him to touch your hand with his nose. This is a task that is very easy for you to click & treat because it is clear whether your dog is, or isn't touching your hand. With such a black-and-white behavior, with no gray areas, it should be easy for your dog to understand exactly why the click is occurring. Begin by holding out your empty hand near to your dog. If he looks towards it click & treat. Next wait for him to go towards it - click & treat. Then aim for him to nudge your hand - click & treat. If you want to you can teach him to nudge your hand quite hard, by not clicking the moment he nudges and waiting to see if he is more persistent. Don't rush through this task; try to get several repetitions of each stage before moving on and expecting a little more from your dog. Once he starts to get the idea then increase the difficulty gradually. Once your dog has learned to touch your hand in an easy position, begin to move your hand around and teach him to touch it regardless of where it is. Again, take it slowly so that you do not knock your dog's confidence. If your dog is finding things difficult and begins to give up, make things very easy for him again and then build back up to the level you had previously achieved. As a general rule only accept the same or better behavior than you have clicked before except if your dog is losing confidence in which case you should make things easy again for a while.

Choose simple tasks first.

A reward is only a reward if your dog wants it.

Reward every time when teaching a new behavior.

Your dog should now be looking for the reward on hearing the clicker.

He should not yet have been asked to do anything - the command comes next!

Using the Clicker

Shaping

Much of clicker training, with the exception of very basic tasks, is achieved through shaping. When we shape a behavior we are doing much the same as when we physically shape something - in pottery or dress making for example. Stage by stage the behavior (or item) we are trying to create takes shape. Shaping does not involve forcing the dog to do anything, it simply involves picking out the behavior, however small, which is heading in the right direction and rewarding it, whilst ignoring and therefore not reinforcing any unwanted behavior. When shaping a behavior you should first know what you are ultimately trying to achieve. Once you know this you can have a good idea of stages that you will be able to reinforce along the way, although you do need to be flexible with this. For example - when shaping the behavior 'down', looking towards the floor would be a good thing to click initially, bending down would be an interim stage and belly touching the floor would be the ultimate goal. You should progress only as quickly as your dog is ready to do so. If he is really happy and working hard, then push on for achieving more, but if he begins to look fed up and stops trying, you have gone on for too long. Dogs, like people, learn better when they are having fun, so you should always try to stop when your dog wants to do more. When shaping behavior, if

you have not seen any progress for a long while you are probably aiming too high. Try making the next step a little easier, or completely changing tack and trying a different way of getting what you want. Some luring may be required when shaping behavior, to get your dog thinking in the right direction. Try to only lure something a few times and then allow your dog to figure it out from there. If you get stuck and your dog is giving up, take it back a stage so that he can be rewarded a few times for the correct behavior. This will help him to build confidence and begin trying harder again.

Back chaining

Back chaining is a method of teaching/learning, which is very useful to know about, and employ when training your dog. When developing a more complex behavior or a behavior that involves a string of events it is often far simpler to teach the last part of the sequence first. This is a method sometimes employed by actors learning lines or dancers learning routines. The theory behind this is that you are always moving from territory in which you are less confident, into an area you know, therefore making learning more rewarding. For example, when learning a poem, learn the last verse first. This way you can then have a try at the penultimate verse, swiftly moving on towards a verse you know. Traditionally you would know the first verse and then get less and less confident as the poem went along. This is very unrewarding for the person trying to learn the poem and saps confidence and keenness. In the case of dog training a good example is the recall. In obedience this exercise consists of three parts. Sit and wait, run to owner, sit in front of owner. If you teach the dog the sit & wait part, walk away from the dog and then are nagging the dog because he runs in the wrong direction, doesn't sit straight, etc it not only saps the dogs confidence in the last part, but also in the first. If however you teach the last bit first i.e. the sit in front, the dog is always moving towards something that he has practiced and knows will be rewarding. You can then teach the wait with a very short run to the sit in front, and then gradually build up the distance. Retrieve is another good example. First teach the dog to take something from you and give it back to you. Next ask him to pick it up from the floor at your feet and give it to you. You can then ask him to go and get something, bring it back and give it to you.

Introducing the 'command'

With clicker training the command (or signal) is always added once the behavior has been established. This is something that many people find difficult at first. This is because we rely so strongly on verbal communication. If we want somebody to do something we tell them verbally what to do and if necessary, how to do it. If we need to we may then show them how. With dogs it is impossible to explain verbally what we want, as they do not understand, so offering a verbal cue is of no help to our dogs whatsoever. Because of the way we communicate with each other it seems obvious to us that saying a word should somehow make our dogs understand what we want. Since this is not the case, it makes sense to first get our dogs doing the thing that we want and then add the command - telling the dog what it is that they are now doing. We are then sure that we connect the correct word and behavior together.

When should I add the command?

This should not be done until you are happy with the behavior that you are getting from your dog. What you don't want is to ask your dog to lie down and then have the dog sit, look confused, lean towards the floor etc after hearing the word 'down'. This will result in the dog learning the wrong meaning of the word down. The time to add the command is when after each reward your dog quickly lies down again. You can then be sure that you can say the word 'down' and because your dog is about to do it anyway the command is then followed by the behavior. The dog will soon learn that when he hears that particular sound and he lies down, he is rewarded for it. You should at this point ignore any downs that you don't ask for; to help the dog to realize what word he should be listening out for.

There are two different types of command that dogs can learn - visual and verbal. It is always useful to have a visual and a verbal command for each behavior, as they both have different applications. For example - with your hands full of shopping it would be very difficult to ask your dog to lie down with a hand signal, so the word would be very useful. On the other hand if you lost your voice, or your dog was some distance away from you a verbal signal would be useless but a physical cue would be ideal. To have very good control of your dog and ensure they offer behaviors as and when you ask for them, it is important to properly establish the signals for behaviors. Dogs tend to offer the behavior they have most recently learned most frequently and it is in this situation that you can end up with the same behavior, regardless of what you ask for. For example, if you have just taught the down to your dog, he may become so caught up in being reward for the down that when you ask for the sit he offers the down. In this case you should ignore the down and try again. Whenever your dog offers a behavior that you haven't asked for and that

already has a signal attached to it, you should simply ignore this and perhaps turn your back so that he knows you aren't going to give him attention for it. This is also the correct place to use the "wrong" command.

Praise

Although the click & treat is the signal to your dog that he has done the right thing it is necessary to have a way of letting him know that he is heading in the right direction, a 'keep going' signal. This is especially important when you begin to teach your dog more complex behaviors. As with all kinds of training, telling your dog that he is doing well is important not only because he likes the encouragement from you but also because if you cut out the click & treat once the behavior has been learned, it will be the praise that continues to let your dog know he has done it right. The praise should mean to your dog 'yes you're doing well, keep trying', followed by click and treat when he achieves what you want.

'You got it wrong' command

Some people when clicker training like to use a word to let their dog know that they are on the wrong track. This is a word such as 'wrong' or 'uh-uh' said in a neutral tone. 'No' is not a good idea because of the previous associations it may have had for the dog and because we find it hard not to put a negative tone into it. The word is simply meant to give the dog some extra guidance and to let him know that whatever he is trying is not going to get him a reward and so to try something else. This word is useful when teaching the dog to offer the correct behavior for the correct signal. If you ask for a sit and get a down, you can say 'wrong' and then try again.

Proofing

This is the term for ensuring your dog will offer the behavior you has taught in many different situations. Your dog needs to learn that the command applies wherever you are and whatever else is going on. Once you have taught the behavior in your initial training area you can go to different places. In each new place you should begin as you did in the first place - allowing your dog to offer the behavior and clicking & treating for them without a verbal signal. In each new place you do this, you will find you need less repetitions before your dog knows what game you are playing. You can begin to the verbal signal more and more quickly. This is because dogs tend to learn to associate their training with a specific situation to start with but once their learning is varied they will begin to generalize and respond wherever they are. Depending on your dog, after three or more places you should be able to go straight along, ask for the behavior and get an immediate response. Proofing applies not only to places, but also to situations. For example - are there other dogs around, is the environment very noisy, is it raining. It also applies to the trainer and their behavior. Many experienced dog trainers develop their own way of luring a dog and motivating a dog for certain things. They can get a dog to sit more quickly than the novice dog owner simply because they have done it a lot and have developed the knack. However because they give the dogs lots of physical cues, which they may, themselves, not be aware of, the dog may learn to rely on these rather than listen to the command. E.g. when teaching a sit, they may keep their hands at a certain level and not lean over the dog. Proofing a dog means that whatever positions the trainer may be in, the dog will still respond to the verbal signal. So, you ask the dog to offer the behavior whilst you are standing, sitting, lying on the floor, stood on one leg etc. Again, as when you are proofing in new places, first of all go back to waiting for the behavior and then using a verbal signal only when the dog is happily offering it. This avoids the need for the dog to hear the command at the wrong time - i.e. when he is not going to respond.

Improving performance

When trying to improve on a new behavior it is important that we reward the dog in such a way that he can understand exactly why he is being rewarded. For this reason it is important to work on improving one aspect of the behavior at a time. If we are teaching a dog to lie down and we are asking him to lie down more quickly AND refine the position he lies in simultaneously it may be very difficult to be successful as it will be unlikely that the speed and the position will improve together. If a dog keeps trying and not succeeding for too long a period he will give up. This is why it is important to keep steps small and manageable. It is far easier to first refine the position and then, once he understands where he is supposed to lie, speed up the behavior. When you are asking for a better performance you should try to keep improvements small but once an improvement has been made, reward only the improved or better than the improved performance. If you accept less than you know the dog is capable of, as a matter of course, he will not see the point of trying harder. Dogs are not stupid and they will go for the easiest option. (Why go over a jump if you can go under, or walk around?) If he realizes that it is the improved performance that has earned him the reward and that you now expect that each time he will try hard to earn what is on offer. It is important however, that if a dog is giving up or just not offering that behavior again, that you drop

your standards a little. This will help to keep the dog wanting to work with you.

Release command

It is useful to introduce a release command, such as 'OK' which will replace the clicker as your dog's signal to stop offering the behavior you have asked for. The clicker has the same purpose when you are using it but the OK can take over from that once a behavior has been established. As with the clicker the OK to your dog should mean - well done, you've got it right, now you can stop. Instead of signal, praise, click & treat the sequence becomes signal, praise, release word (& treat.) If you are only going to praise your dog, and not reward this time, then follow the praise with the 'OK'. If you are using a toy as a reward then follow the same sequence, only give the toy instead of food. It is important to use a release word to make sure that you can maintain behavior for a length of time. This is something that you should have ensured, before you stop using the clicker.

First shape the behavior that you want.

When your dog is trying to figure out what you want, use praise to help him to keep trying.

Use a different word to let him know if he is on the wrong track.

When the dog is proficient at the entire behavior, add the command.

To improve the behavior, select only the best performances to reward.

It is important to proof the behavior.

When you dog has learned exactly what you want, fade the clicker, and use a release command instead.

Teaching the Basics

"Sit", "down" and "stand" are three positions, which are easy to clicker train. The reason for this is that our dogs are always in one of these three positions and often change from one to another in our company. They are the kind of things that you could work on whilst relaxing in the evening or similarly out on a walk.

The sit

At the beginning of a training session let your dog know that there're rewards on offer. With a dog that has already learned some things, especially with a clicker, this fact alone should start them experimenting to see how they can get you to click. With a new dog, if the reward is right, they will try to get it from you. All you have to do is wait for what you want. As soon as your dog sits, click and treat. Rather than giving him the treat whilst he is sitting, throw the treat a little way so that he has to get up to have it. This way he is up again and you should soon get the opportunity to click & treat another sit. As the click is also a release it doesn't matter that he doesn't maintain the position while being rewarded. Wait for your dog to sit again and repeat. Aim to get between 20 & 50 repetitions. At this point you should find that after each click and reward your dog would sit again for the next reward. Try to vary the situation a little while you are teaching this initially. Do not always stand in exactly the same place, or you dog will learn that sit is only rewarded in a certain place in the lounge or while you are stood with both hands behind your back. Try to make the situation a little variable, but not hugely so that your dog becomes confused. Tip when teaching sits, standing up with a piece of food in your hand will often result in your dog sitting.

Introducing the verbal signal

Once you are at the point where immediately your dog knows you have a reward he sits, you can then introduce the verbal signal or command. Show your dog that you have a treat to offer, say sit in a friendly voice and when he complies, click & treat. Do not do this unless you are sure your dog will sit immediately. Don't be tempted to repeat the command if your dog does not comply. Remember at this point you are introducing a label for the behavior your dog is showing you. He does not know what sit means. (Incidentally, you could use the word bananas or shelf and it would be just as effective, but harder for you to remember!) Try to observe your dog carefully so that you can predict when he is likely to sit. You can then time your cue so that he hears it just before he offers the behavior and you can introduce a hand signal in exactly the same way. A good hand signal for sit is a raised hand, as this generally causes the dog to look up which is likely to make him feel more comfortable if he sits anyway. However, any signal will do. Once your dog has learned one signal, you can teach the other signal by giving it immediately prior to the already learned one. This way your dog will get one signal, be given an already established signal he knows and so perform the behavior. Once the two signals have been paired together regularly the first signal will also be recognized, as the behavior will always have followed it. You can then cut out the initial signal or use either at any time. If you use the word (or hand signal) and he doesn't show the behavior immediately, help him out by using the food to show him what you wanted (luring). Then go back to a few

repetitions with out the signal. Once you have introduced the signal you can begin to teach your dog that you will only reward the sits that you ask for. Now if your dog sits and you haven't asked him to, ignore him. Only click & treat when he sits with a cue.

Maintaining the behavior

A sit is little use if it only occurs for a split second. To teach your dog to sit for longer, simply delay the click. For example - ask for a sit, dog sits, count 1 second, then click & treat. Build up the time gradually second by second until your dog will sit for 10 seconds or 20 seconds waiting for the click. Whilst your dog maintains a position be sure to use your praise as a way of letting him know that he's doing well and that he should keep going. Should he move before you click - immediately cease to praise him or give "wrong" signal. These are both good ways of getting across to him the exact moment where he made a mistake.

Proofing

When you first teach the sit it is likely that your dog will be near to you and you will be standing or sitting still. You should also be in a fairly distraction free environment. It is important that your dog learns to sit and hold the position regardless of the environment and also regardless of what you, his handler is doing. Many dogs find it difficult to sit and hold the position if his handler moves around. To teach your dog to accept this, practice as follows:

Ask your dog to sit, begin praising and then put one leg out to the side or in front of you as if to take a step. If your dog remains in the sit, click & treat. If he moves either ignore him or give him the 'you went wrong' signal. Repeat until you have successfully managed to move your leg three times without your dog moving. Do the same, only this time takes a step. If your dog remains still, click & treat. If he makes a mistake - no reward. Repeat this until you can move around as much as you like and your dog knows that he need not follow if he has been asked to sit. By doing this you will also end up with a very effective 'stay' without having taught it separately. Try the same system with bending down, jumping up and down, slapping your thigh, and singing! All of these things are small distractions to your dog but will teach him that 'sit' means sit regardless of whatever else is happening. It is also important that your dog understands the command 'sit' wherever you go with him. To ensure this happens it is important to train your dog in a variety of different places. Your initial training area should be relatively distraction free - i.e. your lounge or garden. You can then move onto the park, someone else's house, walking along the road etc. A dog training class is also a great place to practice because there will be other dogs as distractions but ones that are under control and won't interfere with your dog. It is wise to have done some clicker work at home first, before trying to teach in this environment. Whenever you train your dog somewhere new or with a new distraction, always make it easy for your dog to get it right. Make him aware that you have rewards available and then if you think he is likely to respond, ask him for the behavior. If he does not respond, help him with a lure and then go back to stage one, waiting for your dog to offer the behavior and then clicking & treating. It will be tempting to ask for the sit again, but if you do, you may well end up undoing the association you have made between the word and the behavior because your dog is not responding in the same way. Once you have trained in three or four different places you will be able to ask for the sit in a new place and your dog will be more likely to do as you ask. This is because he will now be learning to generalize and will have had experience of sitting in many places. When using distractions it is best to have them under your control at first. For example to teach your dog to sit whilst people are running about ask a friend or family member to jog about while you train your dog. This way if your dog finds it hard to concentrate you can get the person to move very slowly or leave if necessary. The other way to introduce distractions is to be far away from them at first and then gradually move closer.

Try this:

With your dog off the lead and aware you have treats ask him to sit. Click & treat. Ask your assistant to run about and you ask your dog to sit. If he does Click & treat and perhaps get your assistant to reward him as well. If he ignores you and chases the assistant, get the assistant to stop and ignore the dog, you show him the treat he could have earned and then try again - this time with the assistant moving more slowly, or further away. If your dog really can't help but be distracted, put him on the lead and try like that. Never make excuses for your dog - 'he can't do it because its raining, there's another dog, he's tired' etc. If he can't do it in a certain situation it's because he hasn't learned to yet. It is up to you to teach him in the widest range of situations possible.

DON'T COMPLAIN TRAIN!

Improving performance

When proofing you should use a reward every time in the new situation but can now reward only the best sits in the environments where your dog is confident. It is not required that you must reward your dog every

time he sits for you in the lounge but you can speed up performance by setting certain criteria. For example - only sits within 1 second of being asked will be rewarded. Only sits beside me will be rewarded. This way you can gradually improve the sit response and your dog will work harder in order to get his rewards. Always praise your dog regardless of whether you intend to give a food treat or toy. You should now be able to substitute the clicker for just a release command in this situation, as you now have a verbal signal to ask for the behavior and your dog has learned to hold the position. Now instead of signal, praise, click & treat the sequence becomes signal, praise, release word & treat (or just praise if the performance is not good enough for a treat)

Down

This is a useful position to clicker train. Initially it may be slower to train than the sit, as your dog may not go into the position as readily. To start with, begin as you did with the sit, simply waiting for the position to occur. Click and reward if it does. TIP you may find it useful to sit on the floor to begin with as this may encourage your dog to lie down. If your dog doesn't readily lie down you can break the behavior down into small stages. For example - first click when your dog looks down at the floor, then when he looks down at the floor whilst in a sit position, then if he bends his body towards the floor etc until he lies right down. Each time you have an improvement on the closeness of the behavior your dog is offering to the behavior that you want; this should become your new behavior to click. Don't go back and accept less, unless you think your dog is losing interest and will give up. It may help to use a lure to get this position to begin with if your dog really isn't showing any signs of moving towards it. Use a treat and hold it on the floor, clicking and treating when your dog moves toward it. Alternatively draw the treat underneath a low object such as a chair, or your leg (depending on your dog's size) and click and treat when your dog lies down in order to get the food. If you use a lure, try to do so for only a few repetitions and then simply show the dog the food and allow him to figure out how to get it. Once your dog is lying down in order to get you to click & treat, you can add your command or signal. Do this just before your dog lies down and don't be tempted to repeat yourself. You should proof the down in exactly the same way as the sit. Get your dog used to you moving around when he is laying down, step over him, and set up other distractions. Some dogs dislike lying down in the wet or on cold floors so it is a good idea to train in these situations as part of your proofing. A really useful exercise is to get your dog to lie down at a distance from you. You can do this by asking your dog to lie down at a pace away from you and only clicking and treating if he maintains the distance. If he moves towards you and lies down, simply ignore him and start again. Gradually build up the distance pace by pace. If your dog is interested in toys then using a toy as a reward in this situation can be very useful. Instead of clicking & giving a treat when your dog lies down at a distance, click & then throw the toy away from you past your dog. This will teach him that the reward will be disconnected from you and so discourage the tendency to come towards you and lie down.

Testing the verbal signal

As you now have two positions taught you can test out whether your dog has properly learned the correct signal for each position. A dog will tend to repeat the behavior he has just learned more strongly and in favour of other behaviors. He may therefore offer you the down when you ask for a sit, if that is what he has most recently learned. Try out the sit and the down, ignoring any wrong guesses from your dog and rewarding the correct response to a signal. By withholding the treat when he gets it wrong and perhaps turning your back on the dog, you signal that you didn't like what he just did. This is also a good point to use a 'you got it wrong command' to inform your dog when he makes the wrong decision. You can then ask him again and give him the chance to get it right. At this point it is wise to reward all correct responses so you do not confuse your dog by not rewarding wrong guesses but also not rewarding some correct ones.

Stand

The third position is the stand. This is relatively easy to get without any prior learning but may be harder once you have taught your dog a sit. This tends to be because your dog may have figured out that sit is a good thing to try on all occasions as it often earns him a reward. To get a stand initially watch your dog and click & treat whenever he is standing still. The more difficult thing with stand is getting the position for any length of time, as dogs tend to want to move around once they have stood up. Again you may wish to use a lure initially if your dog really isn't getting it, but you shouldn't have to. Try to make sure that your dog learns to stand not only from lying down and sitting, but also from moving around. This is a good way to ensure he learns that it is a static position and not just a case of changing from another position. Progress in the stand as with the sit and the down making sure that your dog learns to hold the position and not wander about. To get the position for longer simply delay the click. Move on to adding a verbal signal, proofing

and improving performance by rewarding only the best stands. You can then integrate the stand into your dog's repertoire, ensuring that he is listening to the commands and not just using guesswork. These three positions do not need to be taught in any particular order. When you begin training a dog the easiest course of action is to click the first thing he does and teach that position first, and then move on from there. If your dog is very keen and wants to do more then you may make a good amount of progress on all three positions in one training session. Don't be in a hurry and always stop while your dog is still happy to work, not when he is sick and tired of it.

Walking on a lead

This can be taught to a dog with or without the aid of the lead. The following is intended for teaching the dog not to pull. You can extend this and use the clicker to teach competition style heelwork, but this is slightly different. See targeting section. This is easiest taught to a dog that has no history of pulling on the lead. If your dog is a seasoned puller, you will probably find it easier to start without the lead. Begin by teaching this in a distraction free environment, for example around the house or garden. First decide which side you would like your dog to walk on. It is possible to teach both sides but initially easier to teach one or the other. Let your dog know there are rewards available and then move away from him. Click and treat when he comes to your side (and preferably looks at you - but this may come with time). Move away from your dog and repeat. You should aim for 50 - 100 repetitions. To get your dog moving away from you it is useful to reward him by throwing the treat away. Click while he is at your side then make him move away to get the reward. This means that he has to figure out to come back to you for the next click. Remember the click is also the release. Before you move on from this stage your dog should be trying his utmost to maintain close contact to you at your side - each time you move away or get him to move away, coming straight back.

Maintaining the behavior

Now he knows the position you can ask him to maintain it. This needs to be done straight away with leadwalking, as it is a moving position as opposed to static one. As he comes to your side move away one pace, if he is still there, stop, click & treat. Repeat. Next move two paces, click & treat, then three, then four and so on. Do not rush this stage, progress over several training sessions if necessary. Praise your dog while he is walking beside your prior to the click & treat. TIP If he finds it hard to stay beside you, you can use a lure to begin with. Hold a toy or treat in your hand in his view. Try to keep any luring to a minimum. Once your dog has learned to stay beside you for some time you can begin to reduce how often you reward him. Let him know you have a reward, begin to walk, praising him for following you, count 4 paces click and treat, then count 10 paces click & treat, then 20 paces, then back to 3. Varying the period of time between rewards helps to avoid your dog learning to 'kangaroo'. In other words, to come to your side for a treat then pull at the end of the lead for a few paces, then come back for another treat and so on. Keep him guessing and he will stay beside you more readily. Only reward him for having been beside you as opposed to simply just arriving there.

Signal

Once he has learned to maintain the position you can add a signal. Some people choose to make the fact that the lead is on the signal. This means that whenever you put the lead on your dog he is expected to stay by your side and pay attention to where you are going. It is also useful however to have a verbal signal, as this means you can request your dog to walk beside you even in the absence of a lead. As with previous behaviors do not introduce a signal until you are sure your dog has fully understood what is required and is doing it readily. Once he is, give the command "heel" (or whatever you choose to use) followed by the click and treat as he comes to your side. Go back to clicking immediately for a short while whilst introducing the signal. This helps your dog to understand what the command is connected to and listen out for it.

Proofing walking on a lead

Proofing this may be more difficult than the sit as dogs do tend to have a strong instinct to pull, particularly if they want to get towards or away from something. Try to proof this initially in easy situations i.e. not when your dog is extremely excited and wants to go for a walk. To start with practice perhaps when he knows dinner is at home and so you walk for two minutes up and down the drive. Or after a long run in the park, walking back to the car. Once your dog is happily walking along beside you on a loose lead without distractions, begin to set up distractions that are under your control. Practice walking along, with a dog approaching in the distance. If your dog pulls towards the other dog, simply stop and wait for him to return to your side, then click & treat. When you first begin to introduce distractions you can lower your criteria for success a little and go right back to clicking your dog just for coming to your side. You can then build

back up to getting him to maintain the behavior. An excellent reward when working with distractions is to allow your dog to get to the distraction should he maintain the behavior correctly. For example - if he walks towards the other dog, and the lead remains loose, you can click and then allow him to greet the dog. You may find that when you click, he looks for the treat and would rather have that than see the dog. If this is the case, reward him with the thing that he wants. Do not ask your dog to do this for long periods of time while he is learning as he may get bored and stop offering the behavior. You will then be in a position of rewarding the opposite behavior of pulling, should you find yourself in the middle of a walk with a fed up dog and you need to get home. Ideally you should not have your dog on a lead other than when you are doing short training sessions with him. You will find your progress is speedier if you work this way. Gradually build up the amount of time you ask your dog to maintain this behavior, as with the other commands.

Inappropriate rewards

Walking on a loose lead is a behavior, which has many rewards for not doing it. For example dog pulls to the park, gets let off his lead, has a good time. Dog pulls towards other dog/person gets a play/fuss. It is therefore important when clicker training this that your rewards are better than all the possible rewards for pulling. It is also important that you do not allow your dog to gain the other rewards unless they are for walking on a loose lead and not pulling. The important thing with extending the principle of walking on a loose lead, to real life situations is consistency. Make sure that you always reward your dog for getting it right and never proceed on a walk while the lead is tight. Once you have begun to reward your dog at varying points whilst walking him on the lead you are on your way to having a dog that walks nicely all the time. Gradually increase the amount of walking you do in between rewards until finally the only rewards required would be natural ones. E.g. being allowed off the lead to play on arrival at the park, or being given a treat when you get home after a walk around the block.

Targeting

This is the practice of teaching a dog to make contact with a certain, movable object which, once this has been learned can be used to teach the dog many new behaviors. The method is used a lot in clicker training and is extremely versatile. Anything can be used as a target. Many people use a simple straight piece of wood, similar to a riding crop or walking stick (although perhaps lighter), which is called a 'target stick'. You can use anything as a target however, including your own hand or foot. The exercise you were given to do in Chapter 2 was an example of targeting and should have shown you just how easy it is to train your dog in this way.

To start

What makes targeting easy to teach is that there is a definite something - item or point - that your dog can focus on? To teach your dog to target something, first wave it around near your dog. He will probably go over to sniff or even try to hold it. As soon as he shows interest, click & treat. You should aim to teach your dog to simply bump it with his nose. This way you can get him to follow the target and change positions just so that he can keep his nose near it. Some dogs will immediately sniff and so you can go straight for clicking the nose bumping. Other dogs may do different things first and so you would need to gradually build towards this. Shaping the dog to sniff a target stick may go like this:

1 Dog looks towards the stick - click & treat. Few repetitions

2 Dog moves towards the stick - click & treat. Few repetitions. Make the dog work hard by moving the stick around.

3 Dog tries to take hold of stick - click & treat

4 Dog sniffs stick. To discourage the dog from holding the stick perhaps hold it slightly out of reach, or time the click for just before he puts his teeth on it.

5 Once he is sniffing the stick for a click, you should make him work harder by holding the stick in different positions relative to him and to yourself.

He now understands that to get a click & treat he has to seek out the stick and touch it. The same process applies whatever you want the dog to target.

What can you teach using targeting? Jumping.

To teach a dog to jump something you can use the stick. Hold the stick and allow him to follow it over a low jump - using the clicker when he bumps the stick. You could also place the stick in the ground and teach the dog to jump over the jump away from you to the target. Do this by holding your dog close to a low jump on the opposite side to the target stick in the ground. Release your dog and click and treat after he has gone over the jump and bumped the target. Remember it is bumping the target stick that you are clicking at the moment - the jump is incidental. Once your dog is confidently going over the low jump to

the target you can gradually begin to raise the height of the jump. If he goes under or around, withhold the click & treat and try again. Once your dog is completing the jump to your satisfaction you can add a command. Once your dog is jumping on the command, you will no longer need the target stick and will be able to click the jumping itself. Teaching jumps in this fashion is a good basis for competition agility where dogs have to learn to work away from their handlers.

Heelwork.

A target stick can be useful when teaching walking on a loose lead - see previous section. It gives the dog a definite right / not right situation. He will learn if he touches the stick he will get a click & treat and if he doesn't he will be ignored. This is helpful to the dog because it is less general than just being near the owner. It is also a good guide for the less experienced clicker trainer of exactly when to click. Hold the stick on the side you would like your dog to walk and click when he makes contact with the stick. You can use targeting the stick as your signal to click as opposed to the dog just being beside you. Once you have started with the target stick continue as before with walking on the lead, but use touching the stick as a signal to click. Once the dog has the idea that being beside you and touching the stick is what earns a click & treat you can begin to phase out the stick. Hold the stick shorter so that as your dog is almost touching it you click. Repeat this gradually clicking the dog more for being near you and the stick and less for actually making contact. In this way the stick becomes less of a focus than the handler.

Competition style heelwork is an ideal exercise to teach using targeting. Because it is important for the dog to maintain a steady position in relation to the handler, preferably in close contact, the dog should be taught to target the owner. To teach this the first aim is to get your dog touching you, the owner's leg, or hip (depending on the size of the dog) with his nose or face. Click & treat as soon as contact is made. To get your dog really understanding that the contact is the behavior that is required, always move away from him each time he earns a click. This way he has to try hard to make the contact. You may need to encourage your dog initially by patting your leg, or pushing gently against him to get counter pressure. Once you have repeated this 50 - 100 times you should have a dog that is quite insistent about touching you. You can then go for maintaining the behavior by holding off on the click for a second. You may choose to teach this as a static exercise, or as a moving one. This will depend on your dog and how happy he is to maintain contact while you are moving. Either way, you can gradually build up the time that your dog will remain touching you. If you choose to teach it static you must then begin to introduce movement. You may find that your dog will break the contact as soon as you begin to move. Holding a lure near to your dog after the initial contact may help to get the idea through to him. Once your dog will walk with you and maintain contact you can introduce your command or signal. As with loose lead walking, you should go back to clicking the behavior immediately when you first introduce the signal, gradually building back up the time between signal and click. You can then begin to proof your new behavior and improve on it as you wish.

Send-away.

Teaching a dog to move away from the owner becomes simpler for the dog to understand if they have something to aim for. You can use the target stick for this, or teach them to target a mark on the grass or a certain object (such as their own bed). A send-away has many uses whether it be to send a dog to bed, get them to give you more space at dinner time, send them to a certain point for competition purposes or the numerous other reasons we may want our dog to go away from us. Whatever you are using for a target introduce this as explained earlier. Next build up the distance between yourself and the target gradually, waiting each time for the dog to go back to the target to get his click. Do not worry about the fact that your dog will probably instantly rush back to you for his treat. Once you have built up the distance you can then work on teaching him to stay away longer. Don't increase the distance in too large a step each time. Take it slowly and remember that if your dog loses confidence then go back a step or two. This is a behavior that when taught outside, a better reward than food may be a toy. This is because you can throw the toy after the click and the reward is gained still away from you. As long as your dog will bring the toy back, this is an alternative reward for you to consider. Once your dog is happily going to the target from various distances and angles, you can then begin to teach him to hold that position (if that is what you require). Begin to hold off on the click and gradually teach him to stay with the target longer. If you are teaching obedience send-away, for example, you will probably want the dog to lie down when he gets there. You can now incorporate that bit by now not rewarding your dog simply for touching the target but waiting and rewarding a down position. You may need to lure this once or twice to start with if your dog does not think about lying down, or perhaps lower the target stick so that your dog finds it more comfortable to lie down to touch it. At this stage you should go back to being near to the target yourself and once you have achieved this new part of the behavior, you can build distance back again. Only introduce the verbal signal when you

have the complete behavior you require. Once you have introduced the command you can begin to fade the target. In some cases this is not necessary (e.g. when teaching a dog to go to his bed, the bed is the target but is always going to be there anyway). If it is necessary then you should gradually make the target smaller and smaller, or move it farther away, until finally the dog will just keep going until the click is given (or other 'stop now' signal you may choose to introduce). Another factor to consider is whether your dog sees the target being placed. If he does then this may put you at a disadvantage if there is a time you need to ask him to send-away to an unknown target. To prepare him for this proof him to send-away to an unseen target. Vary training so that sometimes he sees it but perhaps the distance is greater, and sometimes he doesn't but perhaps it is only over a very short distance. Target sticks can also be used to teach the first stages of many behaviors. For example, it may be a useful aid to teaching "down" for a person who has a bad back and is unable to lure the down position easily. It can be used to teach a dog to turn in a circle, or change direction. It can also be used as a pointer for cats in the same way (try teaching your cat to jump from one surface to another, or over a low jump). Once you have the beginnings of a behavior you can use the target stick less & less, allowing the dog to figure out what is required from that stage onwards.

Some Tricks

Although clicker training is extremely useful in teaching many important and very useful behaviors to our dogs it is also great for teaching them other fun (and often completely useless) tasks. Dogs can learn pretty much anything your imagination can come up with from rollover to turn off the light to riding on your back. Many of these things are made immensely easier to teach by using a clicker. This chapter contains a couple of ideas to get you started - hopefully you will be able to work out how to clicker train your dog to do anything else you would like to teach him.

Rollover

This is an easy trick for many dogs and a good place to start. Some dogs will do this naturally for a fuss whereas other will find it a little uncomfortable initially. Start with your dog in a down. Do not ask them for this, wait for it to happen. This is important because you may otherwise end up with a dog who thinks that 'down' now means 'rollover', due to you asking for a down but then clicking rollover. Watch for the point when they relax over on to one haunch. Click & treat. Repeat this several times. Now wait for them to relax more in this direction, and perhaps go onto their side. Next get him to go from one side to another, or just to the middle with legs in the air! Next wait for him to go all the way over and back onto his feet. You may find that you can achieve all this in one session, or that it will take several. Take it at your dog's own pace. The stages above are fairly big leaps – you may need to break things down much more than this. Don't worry about taking your time and clicking very small stages. TIP if you are patient and your dog wants the rewards you have to offer you shouldn't have to lure your dog to achieve this trick. If you do need to, use a lure to get your dog onto his side initially, and perhaps to get him all the way over and on to his feet. Give this help with the lure only a couple of times and then let your dog know there is a reward on offer and allow him to experiment. Don't forget - don't add the verbal signal until you have the complete behavior being performed confidently. Once you have this, show the dog the reward, give the verbal signal and then simply wait for the behavior to happen before clicking and treating. As with all the behaviors in the previous sections you can then proof the behavior and refine it by rewarding only the best ones if you are not already happy with what you have got. Don't forget that when you incorporate this into your dog's repertoire he may rollover whatever you ask him. Reward only rollovers that you ask for and he will learn to listen for the correct cue.

Wave

The first stage is to get a raised paw. Most dogs will choose to raise a paw to your hand quite quickly if you show a food treat and then withhold it from him. This is a natural reaction that you can then click. If your dog does not raise his paw readily then you may need to waggle the treat around a little to get him to do so. Alternatively this would be an excellent candidate for the use of targeting - targeting the stick with a paw (or your hand) and then using the target to shape you're dog to wave. This can be broken down into small stages of lifting the paw higher and higher if necessary. Click each time the paw is lifted, gradually waiting for more and more effort as your dog's confidence grows. Try to ensure you only click when your dog is sitting and raising a paw, otherwise you may just get jumped on. If your dog is not confident raising his paw whilst sitting, you could get the wave first and then work for a sit and wave later. Once you have the paw being raised high to your hand you can then click the whole action of lifting the paw, reaching and perhaps repeating the action so you have a wave. Remember not to add the verbal signal until you have the whole behavior that you want.

Back up

This is getting your dog to move away from you, backwards. This is a fun thing to do with your dog, and made much easier with a clicker. Start by showing your dog a food reward and waiting. You will probably find that your dog will instinctively move around, with excitement or to try and figure out what you want. Click any slight backward movement and get your dog to come back towards you for the treat by making sure they have it from your hand. Start by clicking slight backward movement and once you think your dog has figured it out, hold out for more and more. TIP if your dog just won't back away from you; start them off by moving towards them, perhaps with the food treat held out in front of you. If you do this, try to only do it a few times. Otherwise your dog will learn to move backwards with you, rather than away from you. Some dogs, once they get to a certain distance from you will tend to curve around. It may be useful to practice in a long corridor, or with obstacles, to teach them to go straight. As always, wait until you have strong behavior before adding the verbal cue. This is a behavior that you can keep building on once the cue has been established, as it can be a very short or a very long behavior. There are an endless number of behaviors that you can teach your dog with a clicker. Anything you can think of and your dog can physically do, can, be taught. The important thing is to use your imagination, and have fun!!
Happy Clickering!