

Welcome to Clicker Training

Clicker training is a fun and exciting way to train your dog. This unique reward-based system will allow you to communicate with your dog more effectively, while encouraging your dog to 'offer' desirable behaviours instead of always waiting to be asked. Clicker training is especially effective for dogs that lack attention, or for easily bored dogs that require more mental stimulation than traditional training methods provide.

Clicker basics

The clicker is simply a small box that makes a 'click' sound when pressed. The click can be delivered in a split second, allowing you to mark exact behaviours or movements made by your dog. The dog soon learns that the click signals that the behaviour he is exhibiting at that moment is desirable and will earn him a reward - and so it is worth repeating. With traditional training, the dog often becomes confused because the delivery of the reward happens after the dog has finished exhibiting the behaviour, or the reward has become diluted by overuse (how many times have you told your dog 'good boy' for no reason at all?). The click is a unique sound that the dog never hears at any other time, plus it always sounds the same, thus making learning much easier.



Getting started

Firstly you need to teach your dog that the click means a reward will follow. Start in a quiet area with no distractions and have a good supply of small but very tasty treats to hand.

Press the clicker once and immediately give him a treat. Repeat this sequence until he starts to get the idea that a treat always follows the click. You can test to make sure he understands this by waiting for him to look away and once he does, click. He should immediately look back at you in anticipation of his reward. If he doesn't, then a few more repetitions are required. The Multi-Clicker has a volume adjustment; for sensitive dogs, turn the volume to the minimum setting.



Clicker training your first behaviour

The first behaviour you attempt to clicker train your dog to do should be simple. There is plenty of time to move onto more difficult behaviours once you are both confident in your training. Touching a target stick is a fun thing to teach and is perfect as a first behaviour. Once he has learnt to 'Target', you can use this as a lure for teaching other moves such as 'Spin' or 'Playbow'.

- 1). Have your clicker and treats ready.
- 2). Dab the end of your target stick with a small amount of tasty, smelly food (cream cheese or liver pâté are good).
- 3). Extend your target stick and offer the end towards your dog - he should be keen to check out the tasty smell.
- 4). As soon as his nose touches the stick, click and then give him a treat.
- 5). Offer the target stick again and repeat as above.
- 6). Once he understands that in order to get the treat he needs to touch the stick, start to move the stick further away from him so he has to step forward to touch it. As soon as his nose touches the stick, click and treat.
- 7). Gradually you can make it harder for him to reach the stick by taking it higher, lower or moving it away so he has to chase it. Remember to click and treat every time he touches it.



You are now ready to build in a short delay between the click and the delivery of the treat. This is important as you won't always be able to give the treat instantly i.e. if the dog is at a distance when you click. However, you still need him to know that whenever he hears the click, he was offering the correct behaviour and a reward is coming his way. The delay is also useful to give you time to access your treats, you don't want to always have food in your hand or your dog will soon learn to ignore you unless he can see the food. Keeping the food in your treat bag until you have clicked will help to avoid this.



- 1). Offer your dog the target stick as before and click as soon as his nose touches the stick, but wait 2 seconds before delivering the treat.
- 2). Repeat several times as above but vary the length of time before delivering the treat to anywhere between 1-5 seconds (any longer and he may lose interest). Remember you must still always click as soon as his nose touches the end of the stick.
- 3). You can now also vary the way in which you deliver the treat. Sometimes feed him from your hand, sometimes throw the treat onto the floor (near the dog at first until he gets the idea). Throwing the treat is useful for speeding up slow dogs or for encouraging the dog to move away from you - essential for distance
- 4). Once he is reliably offering the behaviour every time the stick is produced, you can start to add a 'command' or 'cue' to the behaviour such as 'touch'.

Congratulations, you have now clicker trained your first behaviour.

Training other behaviours

Now you can go on to use your clicker to train your dog to do any other behaviour you choose. You can use your clicker for all your training or just for specific parts - it's up to you!

When thinking about training a new exercise, consider how best to achieve the desired response. The two most common ways of clicker training are 'luring' and 'shaping'.

- **Luring;** You can lure the dog into the desired position by encouraging him to follow food (or the target stick, once learnt) and then clicking as soon as he exhibits the correct behaviour. This can be a fast way to train, particularly for fairly simple behaviours such as sit, down, spin, take a bow.
- **Shaping;** With shaping, you click any correct step (no matter how small) towards the behaviour you want, then click and treat every successive movement until you have the desired behaviour. This requires a little more patience but is very effective particularly for more complicated behaviours or sequences such as walk to heel, retrieve an item or send away to an object.

Further things to try

Sit

- 1). Hold a treat between your thumb and first finger and allow your dog to sniff it.
- 2). Slowly raise the treat up and back over his head so his nose follows it.
- 3). As his head goes up, his bottom should go down onto the floor. Click and treat the moment it does.
- 4). Don't worry if it takes a few attempts, be patient!
- 5). Repeat as above.
- 6). Once he is reliably offering the behaviour every time, you can start to add the command 'sit'.



- 7). As he learns the verbal cue, start to reduce the lure until he can perform the behaviour on the verbal cue only.

Troubleshooting: If your dog jumps up, you are holding the treat too high. If he walks backwards, you have taken it too far back.

Down

- 1). Start with your dog in a 'sit' position.
- 2). Hold a treat between your thumb and first finger and allow him to sniff it.
- 3). Slowly take the treat straight down towards his front paws.
- 4). As he follows the treat with his nose, he should gently slide into a down position. Click and treat the moment he does.
- 5). Don't worry if it takes a few attempts, be patient!
- 6). Repeat as above.
- 7). Once he is reliably offering the behaviour every time, you can start to add the command 'down'.
- 8). As he learns the verbal cue, start to reduce the lure until he can perform the behaviour on the verbal cue only.

Troubleshooting: If your dog gets up, you have taken the treat too far forward. With some dogs (particularly small breeds) it helps to take the treat back towards the chest rather than forward. If you use the word 'down' in other situations (like getting your dog off the furniture) then use a different command such as 'flat', 'drop' or 'rest'.

Walk on a loose lead

- 1). Put a lead on your dog and walk forward a couple of steps.
- 2). If he walks forward with you on a loose lead, click and treat.
- 3). If he pulls in front, immediately turn and walk in the opposite direction.
- 4). As he catches up to you, click and treat as he reaches your side and the lead becomes slack.
- 5). Repeat as above.
- 6). Gradually increase the number of steps you can take before clicking and treating.
- 7). Practise in increasingly distracting situations.
- 8). Once he is reliably offering the behaviour every time, you can start to add the command 'heel'.

Troubleshooting: If your dog gets very excited when you put his lead on, practise putting his lead on and off throughout the day without always taking him for a walk to desensitise him.

Recall

- 1). Hold a treat or your dog's favourite toy in front of you.
- 2). Say his name in an enthusiastic voice and show him the reward.
- 3). As he comes towards you, back off a couple of steps.
- 4). When he reaches you click and treat.
- 5). Gradually increase the distance from which you can get him to come to you.
- 6). Once he is reliably offering the behaviour every time, you can start to add the command 'come'.



- 7). As he learns the verbal cue for the behaviour, start to reduce the lure until he will come back to you on the verbal cue only.

Troubleshooting: If your dog is not interested in coming towards you, you need to be more exciting or offer a more desirable reward. Alternatively there may be too many distractions and you may need to start in a quieter area.

Fun tricks to train

Spin

- 1). Hold a lure in front of your dog's nose (this can be a food treat, a toy or target stick, once learnt).
- 2). Slowly start to take the lure away from him in a large circular movement.
- 3). As he reaches the lure, click and treat.
- 4). With each repetition aim to get him a little further before you click and treat.
- 5). Eventually he will be able to turn a full circle or 'spin'.
- 6). Once he is reliably offering the movement every time, you can start to add the command 'spin'.
- 7). As he learns the verbal cue, start to reduce the lure until he can perform the move on the verbal cue only.



Troubleshooting: If your dog is not keen to go into the spin movement, practise first just clicking and treating for following the lure in a straight line. Make sure to always teach the 'spin' in one direction so as not to confuse him.

Take a bow

- 1). Start with your dog in a stand position.
- 2). Hold a lure in front of his nose (this can be a food treat or a target stick, once learnt).
- 3). Slowly take the lure down towards the floor and back towards his chest.
- 4). As he follows the treat down, click and treat.
- 5). Repeat, aiming to click and treat as his chest touches the floor but before he lies down.
- 6). As he gets the idea, you can withhold the click for a second or two thus encouraging him to hold the position.
- 7). Once he is reliably offering the behaviour every time, you can start to add the command 'playbow'.
- 8). As he learns the verbal cue, start to reduce the lure until he can perform the behaviour on the verbal cue only.



Troubleshooting: If your dog keeps lying down, click and treat at a much earlier point a few times before trying again for the actual playbow.

Rollover

- 1). Start with your dog in a down position.
- 2). Hold a treat between your thumb and first finger and allow him to sniff it.
- 3). Slowly move the treat towards his shoulder, keeping it close to his body.
- 4). As his nose follows the treat back, click and treat.
- 5). Repeat, aiming to lure his head a little further round towards his shoulder each time.
- 6). Once you have your dog lying on his back, click and drop the treat on the other side of the dog so that he rolls over to get it.



- 7). Repeat a few times, then once you have your dog on his back, withhold the click but move your lure hand slightly. Your dog, anticipating the dropped treat, should roll right over at which point you can click and treat.
- 8). Once your dog is reliably offering the behaviour every time, you can start to add the command 'rollover'.
- 9). As your dog learns the verbal cue, start to reduce the lure until he can perform the behaviour on the verbal cue only.



Troubleshooting: If your dog is not keen to roll right over, repeat the earlier stages until he is confident. Make sure the surface he is laying on is comfortable and that he doesn't suffer from any underlying back pain.

Adding a 'cue'

With clicker training, we only add a 'cue' or 'command' once the dog has learnt the behaviour and is offering it reliably every time. This way he never fails to make the association between the cue and the desired behaviour so is much more likely to be consistent in his responses in the future.

Extending a behaviour

Once you have taught your dog a behaviour, you may want to extend it, for instance – turn a 'sit' into a 'sit-stay' or instead of one rollover you may want two. With clicker training it is easy to teach him to extend a previously learnt behaviour.

Sit-stay:

- 1). Cue your dog to sit.
- 2). As he performs the action, withhold the click for a few seconds.
- 3). Click and treat.
- 4). Repeat the behaviour gradually increasing the length of time before you click and treat.
- 5). Once he can hold the position for about ten seconds, cue him to sit, take a step away, return, click and treat.
- 6). Repeat the behaviour, gradually increasing the length of time and the distance you can wait before returning to click and treat.

Troubleshooting: If your dog keeps getting up it means you are going too far or for too long. Take your training back a step and extend gradually. Double rollover

- 1). Cue your dog to 'rollover' as previously learnt.
- 2). As he finishes the manoeuvre, withhold the click and immediately cue again.
- 3). As he finishes the second 'rollover', click and treat.
- 4). Repeat until he can perform the sequence fluently.

Troubleshooting: If your dog is not keen to perform the second behaviour, lure as you did when teaching the first roll.

Rules of clicker training

There are not many rules to clicker training – but these must be followed for the clicker to be effective.

- If you click, you must treat – even if you have clicked by accident or in the wrong place.
- Do not use the clicker for anything other than to mark desired behaviour – it must not be used to get the dog's attention, neither is it a command.

- Only click the desired behaviour once between treats, multiple clicking will only desensitise the dog to the click (even if you are excited that he got it right!).
- Some sound-sensitive dogs may find the clicker slightly startling, it is important therefore, either to reduce the sound on your multi-clicker or to put the clicker in your pocket.
- Don't try and teach multiple new behaviours in one session.
- Keep training sessions short as clicker work can be tiring for your dog.
- Have fun – if you are feeling stressed, or fraught, don't train. If you start to get frustrated, switch to an exercise your dog finds easy, and then take a break.
- Don't give a behaviour a cue word until you are convinced that your dog will do it straight away.
- As you are using a lot of food treats, reduce your dog's normal meals.

