



Clicker training? How to get started with it

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So you want to get started out on clicker training with your dog and see if it is for you?

First of all we have to create the connection between the click sound and the treat in the dog's mind, so that the dog understands what the click means i.e., 'that was the behaviour I wanted, you have earned a treat'.

Once you have 'charged the clicker' for your dog you are ready to train.

Before we get started though, a couple of rules for using the clicker. The clicker is used only to mark the behaviour you wanted, to 'take a snapshot' of that second in time. One click per behaviour, e.g. if you are training sit, use just one click to mark the sit, after your dog has sat, and then reward your dog with a food treat. Every time you click, your dog should receive a treat, even if you have clicked by accident, you don't want to 'uncharge' your clicker! The treat is given after the click, the click marks the behaviour and after that you have a good few seconds to find the treat and give it to your dog.

Get together several food treats that your dog likes. In clicker training we want to keep the 'rate of reinforcement' high, in other words, give the dog lots of opportunities to earn a treat and treat often to keep the dog interested in the learning process, so break treats into very small pieces, each about the size of your pinkie nail.

Find a quiet place where you and your dog can begin practising. If you have more than one dog, you will want to separate them so you can train one dog at a time. Put several treats in one hand and your clicker in the other.

Begin by dropping a treat on the ground, as your dog eats the treat, click once with your clicker. We are now starting off associating the click sound and the delivery of a treat in your dog's mind. Repeat this five or six times.

Then stop dropping treats on the ground. Your dog should now look at you in puzzlement, wondering why the treats have stopped. This gives you the opportunity to click your dog for looking at you. Then reward your dog with a treat and wait for your dog to look at you again. When she does this click and reward and keep repeating. Once your dog looks at you again automatically after eating each treat you are ready to add in a command word for eye contact from your dog e.g. 'watch' or 'look at me'.

You are only looking for about a second of eye contact at first, if you wait too long your dog will look away and you will lose your opportunity to reward him for looking at you. Once your dog understands what is wanted you can ask for longer periods of eye contact.

The reason for teaching this first is that if you cannot get your dog's attention you cannot do anything else with them either. A dog who is paying attention to you can then be asked to sit, stay, come to you etc.

You can click for any behaviour that your dog offers that you like and reward it to encourage your dog to do it again, or to offer the behaviour more often e.g. you can click and reward your dog for lying quietly while you are watching television.

When done with your training session be sure to give your dog a command like 'all done' so that she knows the training session is over. Otherwise she may keep offering you different behaviours in the hopes of earning a click and treat.

Visit www.clickertraining.com to find out more about clicker training and for lots more ideas on how to use your clicker.

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