

ELITE PET UNIVERSITY, LLC

Clicker Training

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

Clicker training is a form of positive reinforcement-based training that utilizes the use of a device called a "clicker" to mark correct behaviors performed by the dog and signal that a reward is coming



WHAT IS A CLICKER?

The clicker is a device that allows you to accurately mark a behavior the dog performed that will earn a reward

The clicker acts as a "bridge" to let the dog know their reward is coming and it is paired with the behavior that was clicked



WHAT IS A CLICKER?: THE CHECKBOOK OF DOG TRAINING



Predictive of a reward

A check is worth tangible money for us once deposited. One click is worth a treat or food item for the dog.

Timing & Specific to Behavior

A check will have a pay period listed so you can see what dates you performed behavior to earn the check and then money once deposited.

A correctly timed clicker will tell the dog the specific instance their behavior earned a click and the treat that will follow.

Can have varying values

A check can still hold the same value being worth money even though sometimes a check may be worth \$5 or \$500.

A clicker maintains value even though sometimes a treat or reward could be of lower value or of higher value

Benefits of Using a Clicker

1

CLEAR

It makes a specific audible noise that will not potentially change pitch. No emotional baggage will be attached.

2

CONSISTENT

It sounds the same no matter who is using the clicker and no matter what environment you are in. It also only gets used to specifically reward the dog making rewardable behaviors stronger.

3

CONCISE

The clicker allows you to quickly mark specific behaviors.

4

CONTEXTUAL

The clicker is only used in the training phase with the dog and the dog will understand they are working to earn their click and reinforcer, making behaviors stronger in the long-run

HOW TO USE THE CLICKER



Dog offers
behavior

You click the
moment dog
performs desired
behavior

Get the treat*

Deliver treat to
the dog

*Should you already be holding treat or should you have empty hands?

Common Errors When Using the Clicker

Clicking after giving the reward

Clicking multiple times

Clicking and not rewarding the dog

Clicking with hand in treat pouch

TIMING! Correct timing is a science and a skill. Work to always improve it!

ORDER OF OPERATIONS TO USE A CLICKER





THE MECHANICAL SKILL OF HOLDING A CLICKER AND DELIVERING A TREAT

REINFORCING A SHARK?

How to deal with "grabby" dogs



CLICKER HOMEWORK

Practice without the dog first

Before using the clicker with the dog, practice holding the clicker, clicking it, and dropping a treat into a cup. Make sure you know your mechanics before mixing in the dog. If clicker training worries you, you definitely need to do this step! If you want to be extra prepared, add in holding a leash.

Practice with the dog second

Now we can practice using the live model, but also condition the dog at the same time that click = food. Practice clicking and delivering a treat to your dog's mouth. Do NOT ask your dog to do anything!!! We are just making an association and practicing our mechanics!

Pair in known behaviors last

Once the dog understands that click = food and there is clearly a good association with the noise, you can now ask your dog for very simple behaviors that are well-known already such as "sit" and once the dog sits, immediately click and deliver a treat.



Frequently Asked Questions

Will I have to use the clicker forever?

No. It is a training tool and once your dog is trained, you will not need it anymore unless you want to train something new. When we start fading out the use of treats, the clicker will naturally fade out as well.

I clicked the wrong thing or clicked on accident. Should I still treat anyway?

Yes! You made the error, not the dog. If you click and don't reinforce after, the clicker loses value. Try to be more careful next time. If you keep accidentally clicking or clicking the wrong thing, we need to go back to practicing our mechanics without the dog again or re-assess the training plan to be more clear on what we should be clicking.

If my dog does a behavior really well, can I click several times?

It can be really exciting when the dog finally "gets it"! However, if we click a bunch it de-values the clicker and confuses the dog. If you are excited, you can click once and give multiple treats in a row.

What if my dog changes position after I click, but before I have treated?

You still need to give the dog the treat. The click marks the behavior that is earning reinforcement. As long as your timing is correct for marking the behavior, the dog is still learning the behavior earning reinforcement. However, we can also use reinforcement strategies to help make the next repetitions stronger and improve our timing as well.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can one person click and the other person treat?

It can be very difficult and usually confusing to have a scenario with two people set up this way for the dog. The dog usually gets confused about who to pay attention to and where reinforcement will come from, which can lead to frustration and displacement behaviors. One primary person should train a behavior at a time and that person should be controlling the clicker and treats.

I clicked and my dog didn't pay attention to me. Am I doing something wrong?

The clicker does not mean "pay attention to me". The clicker means they are earning a reward for the specific behavior they were performing when they heard the click. It is not a remote control to get your dog to pay attention to you!

I clicked and my dog didn't come to me. Am I doing something wrong?

The clicker does not mean "come" whether it be come back from running off, come over here, or come inside. The clicker means they performed a specific behavior you wanted the moment you clicked it and they will not be earning reinforcement. Don't abuse the association of the noise. It will backfire!

Can I praise my dog if I am using the clicker?

Absolutely! You can definitely be happy and cheer on your dog. Make sure to keep the order of operations where you click first and then reward with praise AND treats.