



## RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

# Clicker Training

### What is a clicker?

A clicker is a marker that lets your dog know exactly which behaviour you are asking for. Dogs need to be reinforced within a fraction of a second of completing a behaviour for them to associate the reward with the behaviour.

### Advantages of using a clicker

- It is much more precise than a verbal or physical reward
- Clickers are unemotional. They reduce the likelihood of confusion due to voice tone, they can reward behaviour at the precise moment the trainer wants to reinforce, can be used to “pinpoint” a particular part of behaviour and can be used at a distance

Although the concept of being rewarded for a desired behaviour is not a new one, clicker training only gained popularity recently through its use in dolphin training.

### Charge up your clicker

First of all we need to teach your dog what the ‘click’ means. It is important to pair the sound of your clicker to a treat. This is a very easy exercise. Press the clicker and give your dog a treat. Repeat several times. How do you know when you’ve done this enough? When you press the clicker and your dog spins their head around to get their treat. Although it seems like the clicker is a good way to get your dog's attention, remember that we intend on using this as a marker for good behaviour. If you press your clicker several times to get your dog's attention when it's barking at the door, you will teach them that barking at the door is what you want him to do.

### No punishment or corrections are required

In traditional training, you tell an animal what to do, make that behaviour happen (using force if necessary), reward good results, and punish mistakes. In clicker training you ask for the behaviour you desire, mark it the instant it happens with a click, and reward with a treat. The treat may be food, a pat, praise, or anything else the animal enjoys. If the animal doesn't do the behaviour you were wanting, or offers another behaviour instead, simply don't click and treat, then try again a few seconds later. The dog will figure out very quickly that it is worthwhile responding to your requests as this will result in this fantastic outcome ‘- the ‘click and treat’. Dogs who are usually not very interested in responding are now suddenly much more motivated.

### Why can't I just use my voice?

You can use a marker word such as “yes”, however it is not as effective as using a clicker. A clicker is much easier to hear and a clicker's tone is more consistent. If you have a dog who is fearful of sudden noises, often a marker word is more suitable. The word needs to be “charged up” just like a clicker.



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### **Do I have to continue using the clicker & treats forever?**

Clicker trainers focus on building behaviour, not stopping behaviour. Instead of yelling at the dog for jumping up, you click and reward it for sitting. Click by click, you expect longer sits before clicking. Once the behaviour is learned, this means that the dog can do it successfully 9 out of 10 times, you reward with praise and anything else the dog enjoys.

If you practice a known behaviour with your dog in a new situation or environment, you often have to teach it again as a new behaviour (with the clicker).

Every time you want to train a new behaviour, or fine-tune an old behaviour, use the clicker.

### **Why does clicker training work?**

Clicker training uses a distinct and consistent signal to mark a desired behaviour in real time and then follows that signal with a motivating reward. Because animals understand precisely which action earned the click and subsequent reward, they learn new behaviours quickly and easily.

### **My dog isn't food motivated, what do I do?**

The food rewards that you use during training should be especially yummy (for example cooked chicken, cheese or dried liver) and your dog's meals should not immediately precede a training session. If your dog is still not interested in food rewards you may use anything else your dog loves such as playing with a tennis ball or squeaky ball. If however, your dog is still not interested it may be best to stop the training session and try again later.

### **Do you require a lot of experience to clicker train successfully?**

No. Clicker training is easy to learn with the right instructions. The part of clicker training that may require a little practice is timing the clicks to mark the exact behaviour you are seeking. But don't worry if you make a mistake, clicker training is forgiving and any mistakes you may make won't interfere with your dogs training in the long run.

### **When can I expect results?**

We often talk about the "light bulb moment", the time when you and your dog connect through the sound of the clicker. Teaching fun and simple behaviours like sitting and shaking hands can often be accomplished in one or two sessions. More complex behaviours can be trained one piece at a time, shaping the action over a series of sessions.

Have fun and enjoy a new way of communicating with your dog!

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