

Clicker Basics

The Rules

Three things to understand about using the clicker –

1. You will click one time when your dog does a behavior you like.

Timing is everything! Pretend you're taking a snapshot of the desired behavior. Click at exactly the instant that the behavior is happening. This means you should start the click when you see the dog's muscles tense to sit or move. A touch early will probably mean you're clicking on time. And what you're really clicking is the dog's decision or intent to move.

2. Each click must be followed by a reward.

The reward can be a treat, or play, or a ride in the car (rather time consuming), a sniff at a tree... The goal is for the reward to be truly rewarding to the dog, not what you think should be rewarding to the dog.

3. The click ends the behavior.

As soon as he hears the click, the dog is "allowed" to get up, or change otherwise out of the position you were clicking.

Charge!

To the *dog*, the click means the following:

1. What he just did at the instant you clicked was what you will be rewarding him for.
2. The click is always followed by a reward. Every time. 100%. The dog's human must not fail!

To teach the dog these simple things, follow these steps:

1. Put 10-15 small pieces of yummy food in one hand and a clicker in your other hand. Your dog is with you. You may attach the leash to a hook, stand on it – just secure it so the dog is safe and won't wander away. Pretty soon he won't even think of wandering away!
2. Click once and give your dog a treat. Reach down and put the treat in his mouth. The dog does not have to do anything to earn the click or the treat; he just has to be there to eat it.
3. Repeat.
4. Repeat.
5. Repeat until all treats are gone.

You'll probably notice that at about click #5 or #6 the dog is looking at you sharply when he hears the click. This is good.

If the dog shows no interest in the food, he might be full from a meal, the food might not be yummy enough for him, he could be stressed by the environment, or he could be dead. You'd probably notice that. We can deal with these other issues.

You have just "charged the clicker," i.e., "classically conditioned" the dog to anticipate a food reward when he hears a click. His association with the click is a good one. You will be using this conditioned response to teach him many things.