

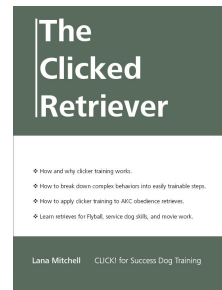
An excerpt from

The Clicked Retriever

by Lana Mitchell, Dogwise Publishing.

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1-1 Getting Started

OPERANT CONDITIONING - explained

Since time began, operant conditioning has been the basis by which all animals, man included, have learned to fend for themselves—by repeating behaviors that had favorable results and eliminating those that did not. Another term for operant conditioning could be “process of elimination.” Any behavior that does not return a benefit of some sort is eliminated and only those behaviors that give favorable results are repeated. Operant Conditioning training is the act of reinforcing any and all desired behaviors that a dog offers so that he will offer them again. Ignoring any and all undesired behaviors the dog offers so that he will not offer them again is a useful tool when using this method.

If a dog trainer eliminates everything that doesn't look like the behavior he wants, all that remains for the dog to offer is the desired behavior. In other words, if a trainer who is shaping a sit behavior extinguishes (fails to reinforce) all offered behaviors that are not a sit behavior, his dog will repeatedly offer the sit behavior—the desired behavior. Furthermore, he will stop offering all behaviors that are not sits, since they do not give favorable results. The dog will eventually extinguish non-reinforced behaviors when he is expected to sit.

For a moment think what could happen if each occurrence of undesired behavior were to be punished rather than ignored? Once acclimated to a punishment method of training, animals seldom offer behaviors. For years, competition trainers have believed the use of compulsion was required; that teaching animals to work to avoid punishment makes training go more quickly. Many of today's trainers use a gentler method like Clicker Training for simple behaviors, but then revert to punishment methods for the more advanced behaviors. They lack an understanding of how to use Clicker Training to fine-tune simple behaviors into the complex behavior chains required for competition.

Regardless of whether the behavior is a simple sit or a complex chain, marking each behavior the instant it happens will make it a memorable experience for the dog. This in turn ensures he will have a desire to repeat the experience. As a dog gives up undesired behaviors, his trainer can begin to refine each occurrence of the desired behaviors until it can be perfectly performed.

Not all behaviors that we desire from our dogs are freely offered. Those that are not offered may be induced or encouraged. They are reinforced in the same way that freely offered behaviors are reinforced, but with a little help to get them started. For instance, if a dog turns to the left because a treat was tossed in that direction and he is then reinforced for looking or moving in that direction, it is an induced behavior. There's nothing wrong with that and I recommend it to help training go faster for the dog and easier for the trainer.

THE CLICKER

The clicker is our conditioned reinforcer - our behavior marker. Its role is to mark the exact part of the behavior for which a dog will be fed a treat or given a reward of his choice. The entire action of marking and treating a behavior is what is meant by the terms “reinforce,” “reinforcement,” and “R+” throughout this book. To reinforce a dog is to click and treat him.

The clicker means a treat, a special morsel of food that the dog loves, has been earned. The clicker is the one constant in Clicker Training, and is a very powerful tool. Clicking without treating will cause the clicker to lose its power and will slow your dog's progress.

What the dog is doing when the click is heard is the most important element in Clicker Training. In teaching a dog the recall, for instance, clicking only when he is traveling at a fast gait will change the behavior from a recall to a fast recall. By clicking

him at the right time, he learns that speed is a desired element of the recall behavior. When he hears the click he will continue to come at that pace and might even speed up to get his treat. By always marking the recall when he is traveling at his fastest, and ignoring slow recalls, he develops a desire to travel fast whenever the recall command is given.

In early training, the sound of the clicker will always abort whatever behavior the dog is engaged in when he hears it. Later, however, the clicker is used to test the dog's understanding of the entire behavior – his "fluency." It becomes a proofing tool that, while being faded becomes a measuring tool of the dog's fluency.

1 - 2 THE SHAPING PROCESS

Shaping Is -

Shaping is the reinforcing of a behavior that is being offered so that it will be offered more often. All dogs naturally know how to sit, down, bark, stand and carry things. We shape them so they will perform these simple behaviors only when a particular command has been given them. That command, called the "conditioned stimulus," will one day cause the dog to perform a specific behavior. Looking at this from the dog's point of view, we could say that the dog is doing the shaping. He is learning which behavior is the stimulus control that causes the trainer to click and treat him.

Although clicker training affords the trainer much leeway, there are particular rules that, when followed, will increase the dog's reliability and understanding.

It is not always necessary to have a specific behavior in mind to start a shaping session. Just grab a clicker and some treats, allow the dog to offer some behaviors, and start clicking one you would like to see repeated. I start out with the spin, wave bye-bye, go to bed, say prayers, walk beside me, look at me, be quiet, bow, and other fun behaviors to build a learning base before going on to serious training.

Even when shaping "trick" behaviors, think of them as the training base upon which an OTCh (Obedience Trial Champion) dog may be created. Think of his early training as the foundation upon which all other training will be piled. Without a

solid foundation of knowing how to learn and respond to cues, the dog does not possess the prerequisites for becoming a reliably trained dog, and will have a difficult if not impossible time moving on to advanced work and complex behavior chains.

YOUR DOG -

You and your dog are in for a wonderful experience, as you both become familiar with the power of the clicker. Your dog, after becoming familiar with clicker training, will begin offering new behaviors for every event in his life. There are few rules to clicker training; just be ready to reinforce any cute new behaviors and build a repertoire of both tricks and functional household tasks. The more you teach your dog the faster he will learn new behaviors. The clicker also makes extinguishing unwanted behaviors go more smoothly because the dog is more willing to give them up.

Clicker training works best with food-motivated dogs. If your dog is not food motivated, you will want to find the one thing he will do just about anything to get and use that as a food substitute. Another solution is to increase your dog's food drive through the help of an experienced trainer who uses positive methods.

**Taken from *The Clicked Retriever*, \$19.95.
Available from Dogwise Publishing,
www.dogwise.com or 1-800-776-2665.**

Author **Lana Mitchell** is a pioneer in utilizing clicker training for competitive obedience, herding and conformation. Her clicker trained dogs have achieved High In Trials in both obedience and herding. After she started training with a clicker in the 1990s, Lana taught conformation and obedience workshops around the country with Karen Pryor and Gary Wilkes. Currently Lana competes in AKC obedience and herding trials, teaches clicker training classes and workshops for obedience, conformation and herding and is a regular contributor to the Clicker Journal. She lives in Louisville Kentucky with her Australian Shepherd, Nemo and her retired cutting horse, Ky.