



CLICKER BASICS & PHILOSOPHY

LESSONS FROM DOLPHIN TRAINING:

- *If you had to work in a foreign country and you didn't speak the language, would you prefer a boss who yelled at you when you did something wrong, or one who praised you when you did something right? Wouldn't it be frustrating if your boss kept trying to tell you what you should do, but you didn't understand the exact meaning of the words?*
- *What things do think you would remember the best – the things you're your boss tried to tell you how to do...or the things you figured out yourself and then were praised for?*

In this class we are going to use a technique used for years by dolphin trainers called **operant conditioning**. Since dolphins can't be forced to do things, nor scolded when they are wrong, marine trainers had to choose another method of training besides punishment. They use "**positive reinforcement**" – which means giving the animal something it likes as a reward for a desired behavior. Since dolphin trainers can't exactly throw a fish up to a dolphin as it jumps through a hoop in the air, they use what's called a "**conditioned reinforcer**" – a noise (like a whistle) to signal to the dolphin "That's an excellent jump! You earned a fish!" The dolphin knows that after he hears the whistle blow, he can swim over to collect his reward.

How do dolphin trainers begin to teach a dolphin to jump? They start by teaching the dolphin that the whistle means, "you get a fish". After that, they wait for the dolphin to jump while it is playing, or they lure the dolphin with something interesting. The instant the dolphin jumps, the whistle blows. The dolphin then comes over to get its reward. The next time the dolphin jumps the whistle blows again. It doesn't take long for the "light bulb to come on", and for the dolphin to figure out that jumping causes the whistle, which causes a fish. This is called "**operant learning**". It means the animal learns to "operate" on its environment to get what it wants.

Once the dolphin figures out himself that jumping causes a fish reward, the dolphin loves to jump. It is only then that the marine trainer introduces a signal or command for the jump, because the dolphin already knows what to do and he likes doing it. Introducing a signal or command *before* an animal knows what to do or likes doing it would only cause confusion and frustration for the animal because it doesn't speak our language. (It would be like the boss in the foreign country trying to tell you what to do. If you figured it out first, and then your boss put a word to it, you'd actually learn a new word.)

GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS: Since most people talk to their dogs a lot in a praising tone frequently during everyday life, we will use a unique sound (a clicker) as a tool in this class to teach the dog something *brand new*. This sound – like the whistle for the dolphin – will have a very clear meaning and will help the dog to understand quickly. While the clicker doesn't *have* to be used, it brings much faster results because of its distinctness and consistency. A short word like "yes!" or "great!" can be used in place of the clicker as long as that word is only used around the dog for training purposes.

VARIABLE REINFORCEMENT: When we first teach an exercise, we will always reward the dog:

one behavior = one click = one treat

This will help the dog learn quickly. However, in order to transition the clicker to verbal praise AND in order to strengthen the behavior, once the dog has learned the behavior, we will eventually ask for several behaviors before rewarding. This is called "**variable reinforcement**". Using this technique, we will eventually wean the dog away from getting a treat for every behavior.

PRAISE VS. PETTING: In "dog language" (especially for young dogs) enthusiastically petting your dog usually means "let's get up and play!". During a stationary exercise, try very hard not to absent-mindedly pet your dog, or you may be giving the dog mixed messages. **Use petting as a reward after the release word.** When your dog approaches you at home for petting in between training sessions, ask him do something to earn the petting first, such as "Sit," or "Come".

WORK-TO-EAT/WORK-TO-PLAY: Often handlers are worried about using toys or food in training; thinking the dog will only respond if the motivators are present. If used correctly, toys and treats are like a "paycheck" to the dog...they satisfy basic needs and natural drives. While praise is also a very useful tool in communicating with your dog, ask yourself how long you would go to work, day after day, doing exactly what the boss told you, without a paycheck? On the other hand, if you won the lottery, how motivated would you be to still go to work for a paycheck? The idea is for you to **make toys and food (things your dog desires) only available in return for obedient behavior.** If your dog has been leading the "good life" of a lottery winner, you must first change the rules so that your dog has to "earn a living". Only then will he be motivated to work for you -- because working for you will have real value to him.

HOUSE RULES: Unless your dog has medical problems, don't feed your dog his dinner right before class. (Let him *earn* his dinner or dinner-equivalent in class!) Allow at least fifteen minutes to exercise your dog before class and give him a chance to relieve himself. Please use the wooded areas on the side or in the rear of the building and **carry a plastic bag in your pocket** to pick up any stools your dog leaves on the grounds. PLEASE BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS. **Outside of the building, dogs must be on a leash at all times.**

CLASS RULES: While dogs are in class, they should be focused on their owners. Don't let your dog go to the end of the leash to sniff another dog while you are turned in the other direction. Becoming a "Canine Good Citizen" means you not allowing your dog to be rude to other dogs. When you are outside, and want your dog to approach another dog, **always ask the handler's permission first.** Allow the dogs three seconds to sniff and then re-direct them off to the side (don't pull back and up on the leash!) After the "three-second-sniff", you should be able to tell whether the dogs accept each other or not. If you see hackles up, ears forward, tail straight out, lips lifted, or hear a growl, do not allow the dogs to interact any more.



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PARTICIPATION: Experience shows that dogs learn best if their initial training is very consistent. Often two adult handlers can agree to train a dog consistently, and sometimes a child-adult team can do the same. **The greatest success is achieved if the dog's training class is consistently attended by the one (or two) family member(s) whom the dog "respects" the most.** This designated handler or handler team can then teach the rest of the family what they have learned. However, any family members or friends are always welcome to watch the class. Any children under the age of 16 attending class need to be under parental supervision at all times. It is not recommended for children under five to attend class without the supervision of a non-participating adult.

COMMANDS: In your homework, you will see suggested words to use as commands. Please know that you can choose *any* word in any language as a command. It is best, however, to keep a running list of the words you teach your dog. You want to avoid using any two words that sound alike or rhyme or that sound like your dog's name (i.e. using the command "Stand" for a dog named "Sandy"). You also want to give exact meaning to the words and not use the same word for different things (i.e. "down" means lay down, and not don't jump up on me).

READING LIST: If you would like to read more about this training philosophy, here are a few recommended books:



- **The Canine Good Citizen.** Jack and Wendy Volhard.
- **Don't Shoot the Dog.** Karen Pryor.
- **Clicker Training for Obedience.** Morgan Spector.
- **Clicker Fun.** Dr. Deb Jones.
- **Dogs Are From Neptune.** Jean Donaldson.
- **Toolbox for Remodeling Your Problem Dog.** Terry Ryan
- **The Dog's Mind.** Dr. Bruce Fogle.
- **Surviving Your Dog's Adolescence.** Carol Lea Benjamin.
- **Owner's Guide to Better Behavior in Dogs.** Rev. William Campbell.
- **Raising Rover.** Judith Halliburton.
- **Playtraining Your Dog.** Patricia Burnham.
- **Living With More Than One Dog.** Carol Cronan.
- **How to Teach an Old Dog New Tricks.** Ian Dunbar.

1. **MOTIVATORS:** Keeping training enjoyable is the best way for your dog to learn. In order to create a tail-wagging attitude toward learning, you will need to have "objects of attraction" to use in training your dog. These objects should **not** be things that the dog has unlimited access to. For instance, if the dog's tennis ball is always around, chances are if your neighbor's dog gets a squeaky ball, your dog will be much more interested in the squeaky ball than his tennis ball because it is new and interesting. The same goes for food rewards; everyday dog food is much less exciting than cut up pieces of beef hot dog or dog beef jerky. List your dog's favorite rewards for each category and rank them from (#1) most motivating to least motivating:

	FOOD	FOOD	TOYS	GAMES
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

TEST THESE FOOD ITEMS ON YOUR DOG

- Cut up beef hot dogs
- Chopped up cubes of cheese
- Moist dog food treats
- Cereal - like Cheerios or Kix
- Pounce cat food treats*
- Jerky sticks or strips for dogs
- Cooked chicken or turkey pieces
- Moist packaged dog food
- Sliced carrots
- Unsalted pretzels
- Unsalted oyster crackers
- Dried liver pieces
- Unsalted popcorn
- Shelled, unsalted peanuts

*Don't feed your dog too many of these because they are not a very nutritionally balanced food for dogs.

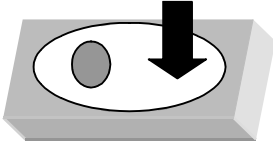


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CLICKER TIPS:

- 1) **CLICK = TREAT.** Practice using your clicker when your dog is out of earshot. Don't let children play with the clicker. Remember, the idea is for this sound to have a specific meaning to your dog.

PRESS HERE WITH YOUR THUMB



ALWAYS CLICK FIRST, AND THEN TREAT. The click means "That's correct! You earned a treat!"

- 2) **CLICK THE BEHAVIOR WHILE IT IS HAPPENING.** Keep your eyes glued to your dog and your thumb on the clicker when you are doing a training session. As the trainer, it is your job to catch the dog doing what you want it to do. If you miss an opportunity, it isn't the end of the world, but the harder you concentrate on your dog, the quicker he will learn.
- 3) **DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE FOOD REWARD.** The important part is the click. Once the dog knows click = treat, he will understand that the treat is coming.
- 4) **CLICK ONLY ONCE.** Resist the temptation to click more than once. The timing of the click tells the dog "that's it! That's what I wanted you to do!". Multiple clicks would be confusing to the dog.
- 5) **DON'T USE THE CLICK TO GET THE DOG'S ATTENTION OR JUST TO GET THE DOG TO COME TO YOU.** Again, click the behavior you want as its happening, don't use the clicker as a command.
- 6) **WHEN YOU DOG "GETS IT", GIVE HIM A JACKPOT.** When you get an especially good performance, give your dog a handful of treats and end the session with a round of play. This would be like getting a bonus at work for a job well done.
- 7) **ADD THE COMMAND ONLY WHEN THE BEHAVIOR IS RELIABLE & FUN.** When teaching a brand new behavior, stay silent and let the dog figure it out – the dog's going to understand the behavior better if he's figured it out himself. When you start to see quick responses, add a command as the dog does the behavior. After a few times, then add the command just before the dog does the behavior.

Now the behavior is "on cue" and its time to test the reliability of the behavior versus position, time, distance, and distractions.

HOMework PROGRESSION:

The next step in your homework is to introduce the clicker to your dog. From now on in the homework sheets, you will notice that each section objective is first described in *italics*. Under that, marked in **small diamonds**, are some things you should think about before doing the exercise. Then, the **arrows** tell you, step-by-step, what to do. There are occasional "Notes" sections in boxes with helpful hints or troubleshooting ideas. You will also see several "levels" for each exercise. The homework is divided into levels for several reasons:

- You should practice with your dog in **several short sessions (5-10 minutes each)** per day, rather than one long session. Try to incorporate training right into your dog's daily routine; when he gets up, before he eats, before you leave the house, when you come home, before bed, etc.
- Every dog will progress at a different rate. The "levels" will give you goals to strive for (which is what the check-boxes are for). However, **anytime your dog seems confused, ALWAYS DROP BACK ONE LEVEL. LET THE DOG SUCCEED AT THE PREVIOUS LEVEL, AND END THE SESSION THERE, ON A GOOD NOTE.** Then, the next time you practice, start with the lower level and reach towards the next level.
- It can be confusing to the dog to try to learn two different **brand new** behaviors in one session. Try to get to the level at which you **introduce a command before starting on another brand new exercise.** Its fine to work on already-learned commands in the same session as one new behavior.
- **You do NOT have to reach the highest level of one exercise before going onto the next exercise.** The levels are provided to keep each exercise challenging and fun for you and your dog and to encourage you to train in short sessions. Your homework will describe only a few exercises that have a "pre-requisite" exercise.
- We will usually practice the "level one" exercises in class and maybe demonstrate higher levels. At home, try to progress beyond what we did in class in preparation for the next week's lesson.



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3. CHARGING UP YOUR CLICKER / ATTENTION WORK:

The most important element in successful training is having your dog's attention. If your dog is looking at you, he's much more likely to obey you than if he's looking at something else. This exercise will also aid you in "charging up" your clicker and getting used to it as a training tool.



- ◆ Choose a quiet environment with no distractions for this exercise.
- ◆ First, prepare a container with some of your dog's favorite treats in it (ranked #1 or #2). Place the treats in your reach, but out of the dog's reach.
- ◆ Make sure you hold the clicker so that you can depress the end without the dimple in it.
- ◆ Sit in a chair so that you are closer to eye level with your dog.
- ◆ Show the dog that you have the treats (if he hasn't already noticed!)
- ◆ For the first couple of clicks, you're going to hold the clicker in your pocket or behind your back.
- ◆ Remember that you aren't going to *say* anything, you're going to let the dog figure this out himself.
- ◆ Also remember...its **CLICK FIRST, THEN TREAT.**

NOTES:

- If your dog tends to be afraid of noises, start with the clicker in your pocket or behind your back
- If your dog is still afraid of the clicker, you may want to use a bottle lid or a retractable pen instead for a quieter click.

☒☐ LEVEL I

- START OFF BY SIMPLY CLICKING ONCE THEN GIVING THE DOG A TREAT
- REPEAT THIS SEVERAL TIMES
- THEN CLICK THE CLICKER AND DELAY A FEW SECONDS BEFORE GIVING A TREAT
- IF YOU SEE THE DOG STARTLE AND ACTIVELY LOOK FOR THE TREAT, END WITH A JACKPOT OF SEVERAL TREATS

☒☐ LEVEL II

- WHEN YOUR DOG LOOKS AT YOU, SIMPLY CLICK AND THEN TREAT.
- REPEAT SEVERAL TIMES, MAKING SURE YOU GET DIRECT EYE CONTACT.
- AFTER YOUR DOG HAS DONE THIS SUCCESSFULLY SEVERAL TIMES, GET 3 SECONDS OF ATTENTION BEFORE CLICKING AND TREATING.
- NOW TRY FOR 5 SECONDS OF ATTENTION.

- JACKPOT (GIVE HIM A HANDFUL OF TREATS) AND END THE FIRST SESSION HERE.

NOTES:

- If your dog simply stares at you continuously, after you click, throw the treat out and away from you. This way, the dog needs to come back to you to give you eye contact.
- If your dog is not looking at you, increase the level of the food treat and/or decrease the level of distractions or try holding the clicker or the treats near your face.

☒☐ LEVEL III

- TRY TO GET 10 SECONDS OF ATTENTION.
- WORK THE EXERCISE THIS WEEK TRYING THESE VARIATIONS WITH EACH NEW SESSION. START WITH 3 SECONDS OF ATTENTION AND WORK UP TO 10 SECONDS.
 - TRY A NEW LOCATION (STILL WITHOUT DISTRACTIONS)
 - TRY A LOCATION WITH A FEW DISTRACTIONS
 - TRY ANOTHER LOCATION WITH MORE DISTRACTIONS. (For instance, if you started in the kitchen, first move to the living room. Then try the back yard, then the front porch.)

☒☐ LEVEL IV

- WHEN THE DOG WILL LOOK AT YOU RELIABLY, ITS TIME TO ADD A COMMAND. WHILE HE IS LOOKING AT YOU, SAY "WATCH", "LOOK", "ATTENTION", OR SOME OTHER COMMAND, THEN CLICK, THEN TREAT (toss it away from you so the dog has to come back to look at you)
- REPEAT SEVERAL TIMES, JACKPOT ON A REALLY GOOD NOTE AND THEN END THE SESSION.

☒☐ LEVEL V

- WHEN YOU'VE PREPARED THE DOG'S DINNER, HOLDING THE DISH, ASK FOR ATTENTION FIRST, CLICK, AND THEN LOWER THE BOWL TO GIVE THE DOG HIS DINNER.

NOTES:

- If your dog won't give you eye contact, place the bowl out of sight. Ask for attention before picking up the bowl.



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4. STATION TRAINING: *When someone comes to your door, do you wish your dog would not bark uncontrollably and then jump all over your guests? When you are eating dinner do you wish your dog's nose was not on your lap? When you need to clean up a spill on the floor, do you wish your dog wasn't in the way? How can you get your dog to do these things? You can use a technique called "Station Training".*



- ◆ Wait until you've added a command for "ATTENTION" (level III) before starting this exercise.
- ◆ Choose a quiet environment with no distractions.
- ◆ Prepare a container with some of your dog's favorite treats in it (ranked #1 or #2). Place the treats in your reach, but out of the dog's reach.
- ◆ Choose a rug or towel or thin fabric dog bed which will be your dog's "station". The station should also be portable so you can bring it with you to class each week. Choose something that folds up easily and that is durable.
- ◆ Lay the station on the floor.
- ◆ Sit in a chair next to the station.
- ◆ Show the dog that you have the treats.

LEVEL I

- **WHEN THE DOG PUTS EVEN ONE PAW ON THE "STATION", CLICK AND THEN TREAT.**
- **TOSS THE TREAT TO THE DOG, OUT AND AWAY FROM THE STATION.**
- **WHEN THE DOG COMES BACK TO THE STATION, CLICK AND TREAT.**
- **NOW WAIT UNTIL THE DOG HAS THREE OF FOUR PAWS ON THE STATION BEFORE CLICKING AND TREATING.**
- **REPEAT A FEW TIMES, JACKPOT, AND THEN END THE SESSION.**

LEVEL II

- **MOVE YOUR CHAIR SLIGHTLY AWAY FROM THE STATION.**
- **WHEN THE DOG TOUCHES THE STATION WITH THREE OF FOUR PAWS, CLICK AND TREAT.**
- **TOSS THE DOG THE TREAT AT THE STATION.**
- **MOVE YOUR CHAIR FURTHER AWAY AND REPEAT.**
- **WHEN THE DOG GOES BACK TO THE STATION, CLICK AND TREAT.**
- **REPEAT A FEW TIMES, JACKPOT, AND THEN END THE SESSION.**

LEVEL III

- **STAND UP AND REPEAT EXERCISE.**
- **MOVE THE STATION TO ANOTHER ROOM AND REPEAT.**
- **REPEAT A FEW TIMES, JACKPOT, AND THEN END THE SESSION.**

LEVEL IV

- **WHEN YOUR DOG GOES TO HIS "STATION" RELIABLY, ADD A COMMAND AS HE GETS TO THE STATION. YOU CAN USE "STATION", "BED", "MAT", OR WHATEVER COMMAND YOU LIKE.**
- **REPEAT A FEW TIMES, JACKPOT, AND THEN END THE SESSION.**

LEVEL V

- **WHEN YOU'VE PREPARED THE DOG'S DINNER, HOLDING THE DISH, ASK FOR HIM TO GO TO HIS STATION FIRST. COUNT TO TEN, AND THEN LOWER THE BOWL TO GIVE THE DOG HIS DINNER.**

LEVEL VI

- **BEFORE YOU LET THE DOG OUT THE DOOR, ASK HIM TO SIT AT HIS STATION.**
- **PLACE YOUR HAND ON THE DOOR HANDLE. TAKE YOUR HAND AWAY FROM THE HANDLE IF THE DOG GETS UP.**



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5. TARGETS: *Target plates and target sticks have been used for years to train animals for movie and television work. It's a relatively simple concept – train the dog to touch a small “target” with its nose and you can get the dog to move to location to location on command. You may want to choose either the target plate or the target stick to start with (whichever seems to suit you and your dog the best).*



- ◆ For this exercise get some level #3 or 4 treats out.
- ◆ Choose a quiet environment with no distractions.
- ◆ Sit on the floor with your dog.

☒☐ LEVEL I

- **HOLD THE TARGET PLATE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND AND HOLD IT OUT TO THE DOG –or- STAND BESIDE YOUR DOG AND HOLD THE TARGET STICK OUT SO YOUR DOG SEES THE LONG SIDE OF THE STICK IN FRONT OF HIS NOSE (DON'T POINT IT STRAIGHT AT HIS FACE)**
- **WHEN THE DOG SNIFFS THE TARGET AND TOUCHES IT WITH HIS NOSE, CLICK AND TREAT.**
- **REPEAT, JACKPOT AND END.**

NOTES:

If your dog does not seem interested in sniffing the target, you can rub your treat (hot dog or cheese) on the plate to place a scent on it.

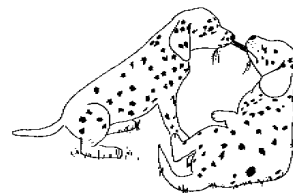
☒☐ LEVEL II

- **SAME EXERCISE WITH YOU SITTING IN A CHAIR.**
- **SAME EXERCISE WITH YOU STANDING UP.**

☒☐ LEVEL III

- **WHEN THE DOG TOUCHES THE TARGET RELIABLY, ITS TIME TO ADD A COMMAND. AS HE TOUCHES IT, SAY “TOUCH” OR “TARGET” OR “POINT” OR SOME OTHER COMMAND, THEN CLICK, THEN TREAT**
- **REPEAT, JACKPOT AND END.**

6. TWO-FERS : *After your dog understands how the clicker works, its time to introduce a concept called “Two-Fers” and “Three-fers”. The idea behind two-fers and three-fers is to start asking your dog to do something once or twice before he gets rewarded. We will use verbal praise for the first behavior and click the second behavior. This will allow you to link several behaviors together before ending with a click and treat.*



☒☐ ATTENTION / SIT

- **ASK THE DOG FOR ATTENTION, PRAISE VERBALLY**
- **ASK THE DOG TO SIT (USING VERBAL COMMAND) . CLICK AND TREAT (C/T)**

☒☐ ATTENTION / DOWN

- **ASK THE DOG FOR ATTENTION, PRAISE VERBALLY**
- **ASK THE DOG TO DOWN . (C/T)**

☒☐ SIT / DOWN

- **ASK THE DOG TO SIT, PRAISE VERBALLY**
- **ASK THE DOG TO DOWN. (C/T)**

7. VARIABLE REINFORCEMENT : *After your dog can do two-fers and three fers, its time to graduate to “variable reinforcement”. This means you must become predictably unpredictable in how many times you give just verbal praise before you treat. You may want to begin to reserve your click to reward extra effort, or to try to perfect an existing behavior. Remember that jackpots are still very powerful tools, especially when a dog makes a “break-through”. Lastly, don't be afraid to go back to clicking and treating every single behavior if you see the dog start to become confused or lose confidence. You can work your way back up to variable reinforcement again.*