



Creedons College

Adult Education in the Pet Industry

Professional Dog Training Instructor

Module 4 – Dog Training and Obedience

Lesson 3 – Clicker Training and Presenting



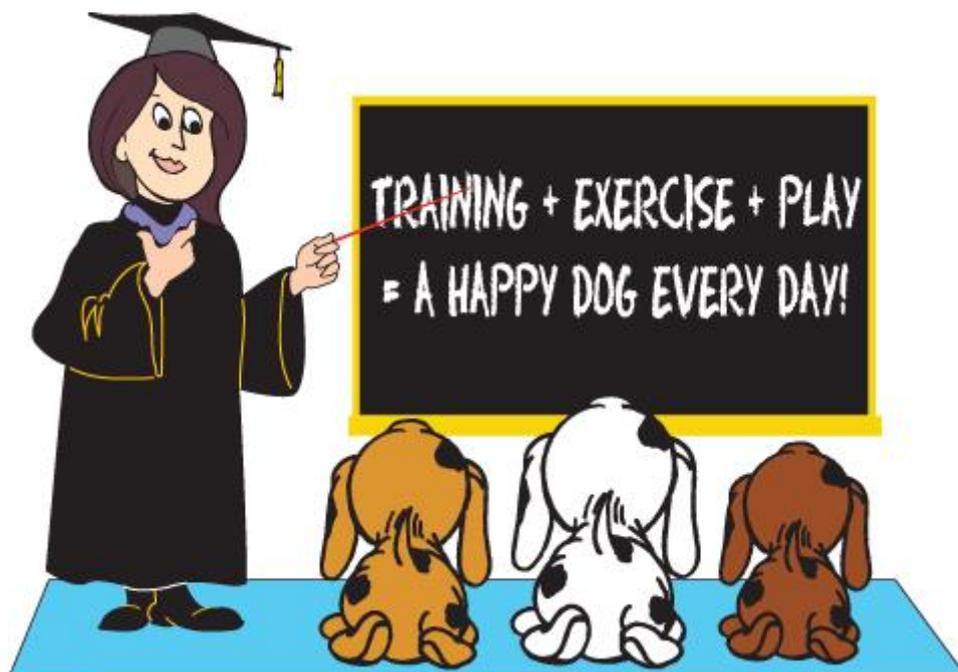
Introduction

This short lesson will explore clicker training, and give you some additional guidance on ways to boost your confidence, and present yourself efficiently when working with dog owners during training.

Goals of This Module

By the completion of this lesson you will have gained a superior understanding in how to clicker train your dog. This will help you while working on your assessment.

By the completion of this lesson you should also feel much more confident when presenting to the camera for your assessment, and the intention is to start your professional training career as you mean to go on, so this module will help to create your confident dog trainer persona.



Clicker Training

So, clicker training, what is it and why does it matter?



Many of you will be familiar with the clicker by now. It is a tool that dog trainers use to show the dog that they are doing the desired behaviour. We know from our learning theory knowledge that the clicker elicits a conditioned emotional response, causing the dog to feel good which, when paired with a behaviour, will increase the probability of the dog repeating that behaviour. Initially the dog becomes classically conditioned, and the click sound becomes a conditioned stimulus, then in applied dog training the click is used in operant conditioning as a stimulus that is used to positively reinforce a behaviour.

We use the clicker as a marker, to say to the dog, right this instant you are doing the correct thing. This is why the timing of your click is vital.

We also use the clicker as a bridge, to show the dog that if you do that behaviour something good will follow, allowing us to increase the duration between the behaviour and the reinforcement.

We use the clicker to create a variable reinforcement schedule, as some reinforcers are primary, some secondary.

Popularity of Clicker Training



Clicker training has exploded throughout the animal training industry, and is used on all species. Part of the attractiveness of clicker training is that the animal is empowered to use free choice, and to 'think' for themselves to figure out the desired behaviour.

As the animal is thinking it makes it far more effective for learning, and behaviours clicker trained are often stronger, and remembered for longer.

Benefits of Clicker Training

The benefits of the clicker above many other training tools are in reality its simplicity. The clicker is just a little sound. But it is the same sound every time allowing for clear communication. The dog does not have to think 'did my owner say something that means something', the sound is identical each time so the message is the same every time.

The clicker is quick. This allows for timing to pair between the behaviour and the reinforcement. Should you try to train a dog a quick behaviour, such as a blink on cue, if you were to say "goood doooog" it can take up to two seconds whereas the click is over in a millisecond.

The sound of the clicker is unique. The dog quickly learns that this sound is the training sound, so this stimulus is often more effective to facilitate learning than the voice.



Clicking the Impossible

Some dog owners will struggle luring different behaviours. Perhaps luring a dachshund into a 'down' is tricky, or a previously mistreated dog may be too nervous to follow a lure.

In such situations the clicker becomes the ideal way to train the dog without putting hands on the animal, or positioning yourself too close to the dog.

The clicker also comes in handy with training a behaviour that must be done at a distance from you – often used in trick training, or training dogs to do behaviours for television or film so that the trainer does not need to be on screen!



TAGTeach

TAGTeach is basically clicker training for humans! There are many benefits to clicker training, and they are not reserved to just animals. Men, women and children learn quicker with clicker training, and it's more fun! Of course, calling it clicker training isn't attractive, and also when it comes to humans, there is slight changes because we can give instructions.

With TAGTeach you give the human a tag point, this is what you want them to do, then you click when you see a performance that matches the tag point. The clear feedback when they get it right is the reinforcement that the human needs (though chocolate buttons come in handy with children).

With TAGTeach, you start off with the basics. If teaching a child to tie their shoe laces you will not tell them to 'cross the laces, then loop one under, then create bunny ears, then cross them over' etc., you break it down to the basics. Initially the tag point will be defined, such as 'your tag point is cross the **blue** lace **over** the **yellow** lace, so remember blue over yellow'. The child then has a very simple message running through its head. They are free to make mistakes, and there is no punishment. Once they get it right the parent instantly clicks. This gives the child instant feedback and the ability to learn between when they are doing a good job compared to a not so good. Once they achieve one tag point you can move on to the next (loop under) so that if the child doesn't hear the click they will know it was their loop that was incorrect. If you had given too many steps, they could get some correct yet still miss out on a click.

Remember TAGTeach when it comes to working with dog owners. We can often give too much advice, or too many steps when asking a dog owner to follow our instructions, if you can't get the message down to three tag points (blue over yellow) you are probably giving too much information. You can click the owner when they get it right, a great way to convince owners to use clicker training!



Clicker Training Programme

While there are several different ways to allow the dog learn the meaning of the clicker, and for conditioning to occur, below we have outlined a programme that is currently used. While we encourage learners to develop their own programmes and training plans, it is important to be able to justify why you believe your step by step plan is likely to be most effective in each case.

Remember, when creating step by step plans they should be to-the-point, simple to follow, broken into small steps, and easy to understand by the average pet dog owner.

Take some time to familiarise yourself with the below step by step plan.

Stage 1 – Conditioning our Clicker

We can use classical conditioning to create a conditioned stimulus. This is also called ‘charging the clicker’ and can be done briefly prior to each clicker training session to motivate the dog.

One trial learning is a great way to introduce the clicker initially, though it is important to remember that the sound may be startling.

- 1) Keep the clicker hidden, in a pocket or wrapped up in a blanket

Click the clicker – this should get the dogs attention

Toss several extremely high value food items – warm meat is usually a winner.

- 2) Next, scatter treats on the ground though ensure they are spread over a wide space

Each time your dog takes a treat, click at the same time

- 3) Finally, hide treats behind your back, regularly click then present the treat. Repeat.

By the end of exercise 1 your dog should be conditioned to the sound of the click.



Stage 2 – Positive Reinforcement Operant Conditioning

The goal of stage 2 is to familiarise your dog with the fact that the click now means that they have completed a behaviour correctly.

Ask your dog to perform a behaviour they already know

The instant they perform it, click

Reinforce with a primary reinforcer

Repeat

You can use the same behaviour repeatedly or vary depending on how many behaviours your dog understands.



Stage 3 – Training New Behaviours

When teaching a dog, a new behaviour you can lure or capture the behaviour. Remember, if capturing, that you can use a prompt.

Start off using the clicker to train a simple behaviour, often it is 'watch me'.

- 1) Scatter a few treats

Allow the dog to finish the treats

Wait for the dog to make eye contact for more

Click

- 2) Toss another treat a few feet away

Wait for your dog to make eye contact again

Click

Repeat a few times

- 3) Increase the challenge. Hold a treat in your hand, and hold your hand out to your side, shoulder height (like a person directing traffic to their left)

The dog is likely to look at the treat for a longer duration of time

Wait for the dog to make eye contact

Click

- 4) Once the dog is making eye contact within 2 seconds, you can introduce the cue

Hold out the treat

Say 'Watch'

Wait for eye contact

Click and treat

Continue to repeat until you are confident that the dog is beginning to form an association between the cue and the behaviour

Transfer to Cue

- 5) Now, cue the behaviour, click and treat

When the dog offers the behaviour without the cue coming first, ignore

Continue to move about so that the dog is paying attention to you

Randomly request the behaviour, then click and treat, though again ignoring non-cued behaviours

You can gradually fade out the clicker once you are confident that the behaviour is under stimulus control.

Stage 4 - Shaping

Dog trainers can use shaping when training more complex behaviours. It is important that the dog first understands clicker training, and both trainer and animal are confident with the process.

Next, decide on a behaviour.

Break it into smaller portions, similar to tag points.

Gradually build on the progressive tag points until the dog has built up to the final behaviour.

You can then add the cue when you are expecting the behaviour within 2 seconds or less.

For Example, training a dog to ring a bell

The presence of the bell will become a prompt, as it would encourage the dog to explore (you could shake the bell / nudge it etc. to increase the prompt).

- 1) Initially click for the dog looking at the bell
- 2) Next only click when the dog approaches the bell
- 3) Next only click when the dog approaches the bell close up
- 4) Once the dog is approaching the bell, no longer click for this and only click if the dog actually touches the bell
- 5) Once the dog is doing this regularly only click if the dog touches the bell appropriately
- 6) Now that you are happy with the behaviour, add the cue
- 7) Ask the dog to do the behaviour, only click and reward if they do the behaviour the way you want



Confidence Presenting



Confidence Building

Presenting yourself when teaching owners during dog training is a daunting experience. No matter how confident you are as a person, standing up in front of a room, or entering a stranger's home, and taking control of the room can be very overwhelming.

There are several tips to help you build your confidence during dog training.

Know your Content

If I were to ask you to stand up in front of a room and talk about all the members of your family, you may stutter or feel silly, but it's unlikely you would forget your words, because it's information you just know.

To boost your confidence and to eliminate the fear of going blank it is vital that you know your material backwards. You will get the feel for this when recording videos for your assessment, then at the workshop, during your work experience module, in the reality you need to practice, practice, practice. Teach friends and family how to train their dogs, without using notes.

Talk to colleagues about training steps without notes, then practice in front of the camera. You will find that through self-assessment you will notice which steps you skip, or where you freeze and forget the next part of the programme.

This is the best way to learn and fine tune your knowledge so when you host your first training session you will be able to recite the steps like your 7 times tables. This will very much help with your confidence when converting you retraining to the real world.

Keep Control

There is no two ways about it, people can be rude. If hosting a group class and two members start chatting while you are presenting to the room, or if delivering in home training and your client begins distracting themselves on their phone, or chatting amongst each other off topic, you need to gain control of the room to ensure the session carries on to the maximum capacity. Once you truly lose people, it can be difficult to regain control.

Stop what you are doing, focus on the 'distractor' and let them know that 'once you've finished I will carry on' or if chatting during class, again, stop make a point that the progression has been interrupted, and ask 'Did I leave something out?' this way, if the clients are lost they can fill you in, or if not you can ask them to keep an eye on what you are doing as they will be practicing in a moment.

Never make a fool of your clients, but also don't be made a fool of. A chatting class can knock your confidence no end.



Be A Trainer

Throughout this course you should be exploring other trainers on YouTube, observing other trainers during work experience, and learning from your peers. All of this experience also allows you to take parts of their presenting style to help you decide the type of dog trainer you want to be. Then, it's time to act. Initially it will feel 'weird' to introduce yourself as the dog trainer, you know that just yesterday you were the receptionist, or the accountant, or

the stay at home dad, but your clients don't. You need to play the role of a dog trainer, and very much 'fake it until you make it'. This means you should dress like a dog trainer – you decide your style, though logo'd uniforms, and a treat bag will show anyone entering the room that you are the go-to person.

Your appearance should be smart, clean, tidy, neat, and show that you have made an effort. Your clients will form an instant opinion of you, and you should aim to over impress than under. Some behaviour consultants will wear formal suits to consultations to show a level of professionalism, which will lead to instant understanding of the seriousness of the professional.

Of course a formal suit wouldn't be appropriate for a training class, but jeans, boots and logo'd top is the standard uniform. Trainers and tracksuits are a no.



Love Your Voice

Many of us swear that recording of our voices are not us. However, when teaching dog training, your voice is your instrument! The more you practice, the better you will become. What this means is that you need to practice presenting, and become familiar with your instrument. Practice speaking loud, projecting your voice, putting emphasis on certain words, keeping energy and passion in your voice.

Successful training needs clients that buy in to what you have to say. Your voice is how you can

communicate your belief in your knowledge, and energise the client in to action.

Practicing on camera is very important.

Carry Your Body with Confidence

When visiting a client's home, they will be as nervous as you are! You need to show that you will take control of the situation, and you can do this with your body, and how you carry yourself. Again, when beginning a dog training class, if you are sitting shyly in the corner, or slip into the room without anyone noticing you will subconsciously communicate to your clients that you don't know what you are doing, and that you don't believe in yourself, your knowledge nor your ability.

Carrying your body with confidence means walking with purpose. decide your behaviour then commit. At arriving at a home, you can ask, what way to the kitchen, or in your class environment march straight to your table at the top of the room.

Announcing your arrival at a training class should also include speaking loudly as you enter the arena, so that you can begin getting the classes attention instead of having to request it. Practice this.

Keep your head high, movement steady and deliberate, and focus your attention on the entire room, spending about 2-3 seconds holding eye contact with each client.

When moving, avoid pacing, avoid throwing your hands about, make deliberate, obvious hand gestures, move around the room slightly, though remember that you need to remain somewhat central so all clients can see and hear you.

Frantic movement will fluster you, so keep control, act confident, stand tall and proud, and it will become your 'normal' dog trainer persona.

Control your breathing

When you become nervous, your sympathetic system begins to gain control. While this is an involuntary change you can help to counteract this.

The only aspect of the sympathetic nervous system that you can control is your breathing. Deep, slow breathing will help to retain control over your nervous system and will help to minimise 'panic'.

Stretching prior to a training session can also help by releasing tension in your muscles, which will again help you to feel more relaxed.

Tell yourself you are excited

If all else fails, and you begin to panic, it's time to convince yourself that you are in fact excited. As you know, the SNS dominant state kicks in when excited too, so telling your body that you are in fact excited instead of in danger will help you to continue with your class without fleeing to safety!

I'm so excited.



Have your IN

Ensure that before the class begins you know exactly how you are going to introduce yourself, and what your first exercise is going to be. The opening of the session is the most daunting, so ensuring that you are in control for the 'opening scene' will see the rest of the show run smoothly.



Have your Water

Always have a bottle of water nearby in case you do become lost for words. This will help you to have an excuse to 'take a moment' so that you can allow your mind to empty to allow your knowledge to come through. Your mouth may become very dry if you do become nervous so the water will benefit to counteract this also.