



Training and Behavior

832.541.5834

[www.michaelsdogs.com](http://www.michaelsdogs.com)

---

## What is Clicker Training?

Clicker training is probably the fastest way of teaching your dog precise obedience cues. It plays on your dog's natural ability to learn. Dogs do what works. Anything your dog does that has a positive outcome (click and treat) he will be more likely to do again. The psychology behind clicker training was developed by B.F. Skinner and his students nearly a century ago. More recently, sea mammal trainers used a similar method with dolphins, killer whales and sea lions. The idea: communicate to the animal he's won a prize at the exact moment he's earned that prize. Consider a dolphin trainer trying to get 5 extra inches out of his animal's jump through a hoop. Timing is everything. In order for the dolphin to know exactly what his trainer wants she would have to give him his fish prize (the reinforcement) at the exact moment the dolphin jumps that 5 extra inches higher. That's tough to do. So, dolphin trainers use a whistle to tell the dolphin, "yes, you got it right – now come get your fish." The dolphin jumps higher through the hoop. He hears the trainer's whistle. He gets his fish. The timing problem is solved. And the positive outcome of the process makes the dolphin more likely to aim for high jumps in the future.

Now, what about your dog? The click, like the whistle, is a specific cue that tells your dog he's done something right. It predicts that a stronger reinforcement like food is soon to follow. In technical terms, the click is called a "bridge reinforcement" or "secondary reinforcement." Whenever your dog does something right (like sitting) you click and then follow up with a treat. The click is a bridge between what your dog does and what he gets for it. It's like a promise that the treat is on the way. Don't break your promise. Always treat after every click. Certainly, you can still say "good dog" and verbally praise your dog. But the click is a special sound that says "something really good is on the way!"

Clicker training is especially useful with dogs that move and think quickly. You may not think of your dog as smart. But, keep in mind; it's the smart dogs that get in the most trouble. Clicker training might be just the trick to solving some behavior problems. Speaking of tricks – clicker training is an excellent way to teach tricks and more complicated behaviors.

Remember, dogs do what works. And if there's a positive outcome to whatever your dog does, he'll be more likely to do it again. Dogs love to learn. And they love to get reinforcement for it. So, after some training you'll notice your dog doing all kinds of things just to get that click and treat out of you. Does that mean you always have to have your clicker and treats with you? No! Just the opposite. You've conditioned your dog to work for you no matter what. You aren't bribing or, worse yet, forcing your dog. You're teaching him, "work harder, maybe I'll pay off." Click and treat every once in a while and see what happens. It's fun. And the opportunities for learning never end.

(Author: Michael Baugh. Reproduced with permission from North Coast Dogs LLC, Cleveland, OH.)