

Clicking with Your Dog

Activity 2.1

This exercise will help you teach your dog that it's worth paying attention to the clicker, because it provides valuable information. You'll pair the clicker with treats to help your dog understand that a click means a reward is on the way.

You'll need

Quiet, distraction-free environment
Clicker
Treat bag
High-value treats
Your dog

Setup

Take your dog to a quiet area of the house (such as the bathroom or a bedroom) where there aren't any toys or other things for your dog to focus on. The first few times your dog hears the clicker, you're not going to ask him to do anything special.

Keep your training session very short. One to three minutes is plenty.

Review your clicker mechanics skills. Before you begin, decide which hand will be your treat hand and which hand will be your click hand, and determine where you will hold your hands in between clicks and treats. When you are prepared, begin the exercise.

Steps

1. Click the clicker

Click once, and immediately feed your dog a treat. Repeat this three times: click/treat, click/treat, click/treat.

2. Wait for eye contact

Next, wait for your dog to look at you (he likely will, as he's curious about this intriguing new food game). When he does, click and treat. There! Your dog is already starting to make the connection that when he offers the behavior of eye contact,

you click and he gets a reward. You're already on your way to training your first behavior.

3. Click for eye contact

For the remainder of your training session, every time your dog looks at you, click and toss a treat to reset him. Be ready to deliver those treats quickly, and to click as soon as he looks back at you. Dogs catch on easily to this game!

4. End with something fun

End the training session by doing something else your dog enjoys, like playing fetch, tug, or giving him a belly rub.

Troubleshooting

WHAT IF MY DOG WON'T LOOK AT ME?

If eye contact is too difficult for your dog, you can make this exercise easier by breaking it down: Instead of requiring eye contact, try clicking the *instant* the dog's nose turns in your direction. Be sure you toss the treat away from you so the dog has to turn around to eat it. Be ready! As his head lifts from eating, he's going to turn toward you right away.

By asking for smaller bits of behavior (smaller than full eye contact), you can obtain a higher rate of reinforcement which will help your dog offer the next behavior, the next, the next and so on, much more quickly.

WHAT IF THE DOG JUST STARES AT MY HAND OR TREAT BAG?

As you learned in the mechanical skills section, make sure there are no early movements of your hand toward your treat bag or pocket. Keep your hand still in a *neutral* location (not *in* the bait bag) until after you click.