



Marker Training

Marker or clicker training are a form of positive reinforcement training. Marker training utilizes a word such as “yes” or “free” to mark the desired behavior of the dog and is then followed by a reward. Clicker training uses a clicker sound to mark the desired behavior of the dog and is then followed by a reward.

The reward most used in this type of training is food however toys can sometimes be used in later stages of training. We use clicker training with young puppies and transition to marker training in later stages. The clicker is an easier sound for the puppies to pick up on and can be used to teach more complex tasks later in training. Marker training has the benefit of not requiring an extra tool, the clicker, and this can be beneficial when working with dogs on leash and in busy environments.

Step 1 – Teaching Your Dog What the Mark/Clicker Means

During this beginning phase you will be randomly clicking or saying your marker word and giving your dog a food reward. It’s important that the food reward not come until AFTER the marker word for proper association. This pause only needs to last a second. This is repeated 2-3 times a day in short 3 minute sessions. The process is a simple couple of steps:

1. Say the marker word
2. Pause
3. Give the dog the reward

Once your dog begins to anticipate the reward following the mark or we move to step 2.

Step 2 – Building Engagement and Luring

In this step you will teach the dog to follow your hand for the reward. Hold the reward in your hand so that the dog cannot access the treat. Have your hand low enough that the dog is not jumping up to reach your hand. Move your hand in a slow straight line so that the dog follows the treat. Mark this behavior and reward.

1. Move the treat so the dog’s nose is touching your hand or the dog may lick your hand
2. Say the marker word
3. Pause
4. Give the dog the reward

Step 3 – Getting Your Dog’s Focus On Cue

The first big goal of training is to gain your dog’s focus. Focus is critical for learning and training. Similar to reading this and watching our videos, if you’re not focused and paying attention to the material the learning process will be delayed.

1. The dog looks at you
 - a. You can encourage this by bringing the reward to your nose
2. Say the marker word
3. Pause
4. Give the dog the reward

Step 3 – Teaching Sit

The first true obedience command. This time we will be using a lure. A lure is when you have food in your hand and the dog's nose follows the food in your hand to a position which is then marked/clicked and rewarded. For the sit have food in your hand and as your dog sniffs the food in your hand raise your hand up just above the dog's head. This will encourage the dog's rear end to go down positioning the dog into a sit. As soon as the dog's rear hits the ground mark or click and follow with releasing the food reward.

1. Dog sits
2. Say the marker word
3. Pause
4. Give the reward

Step 4 – Teaching Down

The down is also taught with a lure. This time bring the hand with food down and push a bit towards the dog. You do NOT want your dog to start out in a sit. This should be practiced from a standing position to a down position and later from a sitting position to a down. If you have your dog sit before each down the dog will not understand the down command without the sit first. We want the commands to be separate from each other. Down can be challenging and takes more practice than the sit. Make sure that the dog's elbows are touching the ground before marking the behavior.

1. Dog downs
2. Say the marker word
3. Pause
4. Give the reward