

KINDRED PAWS

ANIMAL TRAINING



Marker Training

Marker training is a technique in delivering rewards in training. The idea is that if we give a precise 'marker' at the time that the dog earned a reward, we can more effectively communicate to the dog what they did correct so they can do it again. Think of the marker as a predictor of the reward - when the dog hears it, they know a reward is coming.

Before using a marker, we need to condition it - that is teach the dog what it means. This is easy, first, give your marker, then immediately give a treat. Repeat a few times and you will find after a few days, most dogs will understand that the marker predicts a treat.

Verbal Marker

Verbal reward markers are words like 'yes', 'yep', 'good', or anything else short and clear you want to use. Verbal markers have the benefit of being always being at your disposal (you always have your voice with you), however they also have disadvantages. Everyone has a different voice and so we often need to condition the marker with each person involved in training. Additionally, it's easier to misuse a verbal marker - for example, saying 'yes' and then not having a reward available to give (common for people that talk a lot!)

Other Markers

Anything that is a quick, distinct noise or trigger can be used as a marker. When training marine life, whistles are regularly used. For training a deaf dog, a visual marker like a hand signal or flash of a light can be used.

Clicker Training

Clicker training is a common form of marker training. It involves using a 'clicker' device to make a sharp, distinct click noise as the marker. Clicker training has the benefits of being very distinguishable, meaning your dog recognises the noise faster. The noise is also very quick, allowing for more precise timing. The downside to a clicker is that it takes up a training hand to use it, and that it requires a tool (so spontaneous training sessions are not as easy). On the other hand, if you have your clicker, you probably also have rewards on you, so you can't misuse it as easily as a verbal marker.

Timing Tips

Be careful that when using marker training, we are giving the marker at the moment the dog earned the reward, and then reaching for and giving our treat.