

Training Methods

There are four basic training methods often used in training animals. Decide which method you want to use with your newest family member. Here is a little information about each method to help you decide.

Verbal Training

Verbal training consists of saying a word such as “yes” whenever your puppy/kitten does what is expected. Coupled with a reward, this reinforces the behaviour that you want. Perfect timing is not necessary since the animal can also pick up on the emotional content of the **mark** (“yes” in a happy voice). For example, if you give the cue “sit,” when the puppy’s rear hits the floor, you **mark it** with “**yes**” (happy voice) and give the puppy a **reward**.

Target Training

Target training involves an object that your pet learns to touch with his/her nose. Once the pet touches the target from a short distance, he/she can learn to touch the target from a greater distance.

This method of training is great for getting a puppy or kitten from point A to point B without pulling or having to drag the pet into a position. Targeting can also be helpful in training a pet to do tricks.

To begin target training for larger breeds of dogs, use the palm of your hand as a target. Place the palm of your hand in front of the puppy’s nose. Say the word “target,” and wait for your puppy to lean forward and touch your hand. The second your puppy leans forward and touches the palm of your open hand with his/her nose, **mark** the behaviour (the puppy touched your hand) and give him/her a **treat** (reward) to reinforce the behaviour the puppy just gave you.

With smaller-breed puppies and kittens, you can use a targeting stick or an old wooden spoon. Take a piece of coloured tape or use a marker and draw a line around the spot on the stick or spoon you want the pet to touch. Place the stick or spoon an inch in front of the animal’s nose. The second the puppy/kitten touches the targeting stick or spoon, **mark** and **reward** your pet.

If your pet does not reach out to touch the object, try rubbing a little cheese, chicken, or fish on your hand or on the targeting stick. This will usually get the animal’s attention. Repeat the above exercise with the new smell on the object.

Once your pet consistently touches the object when you say the word “target,” extend the distance between your pet and the target or your hand. Remember, every time you ask the pet to *target*, it is your job to mark and reward when he/she demonstrates the desired behaviour. Continue to gradually extend the distance until the puppy/kitten will walk around in a circle or across the room to *target* the targeting stick or your hand when asked to do so.

Clicker Training

Clicker training is similar to using verbal training, but instead of using your voice, you use your clicker. A **small click** from the clicker can be **used to mark** a requested behaviour or to form more complicated behaviours.

Timing in this method is extremely important. It requires the trainer (you) to click **the moment the animal performs the desired behaviour**; for example, the second your puppy's rear hits the floor when training the *sit* cue.

Before training your pet, train yourself to properly administer the timing of the clicker. Hold a tennis ball in one hand and the clicker in the other. Bounce the tennis ball, and the moment the ball hits the floor, click. Your click should be made at the exact moment the ball hits the floor. You may need to practice a few times to get your timing correct.

If you think you and your pet would enjoy clicker training, then by all means, give it a try. Clickers are available at most pet stores.

Hand Signals

Hand signals can be used as a replacement for verbal training. It is most commonly used when training a deaf animal, when training from a distance, in competitions, or just for fun. There are many different hand signals you can use in training. What they look like can be left up to you unless you are planning to compete in an obedience ring with your pet.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us

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