

Training Principles

What you allow today, your puppy/kitten will try again tomorrow. In many cases, this will be a good thing. To the same effect, what you ignore today, your pet will learn to stop doing in the future. Your pet will try the same behaviour many times until he/she realises that the behaviour is not going to be rewarded. When the animal makes that connection, the behaviour will stop. Puppies, kittens, and children are always testing their boundaries. Here are two simple rules to follow as your pet is learning the do's and do not's about his/her new home:

- ✓ Behaviours that are **rewarded** will **increase** in frequency, intensity, and duration.
- ✓ Behaviours that are **ignored** (not rewarded) will **diminish** in time, frequency, and duration

If you like a behaviour your puppy or kitten is exhibiting, give it a name and then **mark** and **reward** it.

If you do not like the behaviour the pet is displaying, walk away, look away, isolate him, or ignore him; **do not** scold, reason, or talk to him. Just **ignore** him when possible and walk away. This will ensure he is not rewarded for poor behaviour, positively or negatively. However, **do not ignore him or walk away if he is doing something that could hurt him or someone else.**

The most important thing your puppy wants is **your attention**. Kittens are a bit more aloof, but they still enjoy getting attention. **As far as your pet is concerned, whether you are scolding, pushing, pulling, or yelling, it is still attention.** When you pay attention to your pet with words, pets, toys, or treats, he/she will want to perform more of those behaviours because he/she gets your attention. **Making a short, sharp sound with a can or plastic bottle with coins in it, clapping your hands together, or a loud word such as "off" will interrupt the pet's behaviour.** When the puppy/kitten stops the inappropriate behaviour, remember to mark and reward him.

You will want to make some decisions in regard to the training methods everyone in your household will use. **Harsh corrections are no longer considered productive when training animals.** Besides, your new family member deserves more respect than that.

For any type of training to be successful, **everyone** must use the **same training methods**. When different family members use their own style while training, the pet will only get confused and you will be setting your pet up for failure.

Although done differently, every puppy and kitten needs and deserves appropriate playtime and an opportunity to burn off excess energy every day. People who give their animals the exercise and playtime they so desperately need while young will find training will go much faster and easier than for animals who do not receive these opportunities.

Puppies and kittens who receive consistent guidelines and daily opportunities for exercise and play will become wonderful family members. **Training, patience, consistency, and love** are the keys. Consider your baby pet your newest savings account. What you put in today, you will get back in the future with interest (a well-behaved and trained pet for perhaps the next 10, 15, or 20+ years).

Marking the Correct Behaviour

Like most animals, one of the ways your dog learns is by **associating things that happen at the same time**. For reward-based training to work, **the reward must be given as soon as the desired behaviour is offered**. This should happen within a half second from when the puppy offers the desired behaviour.

This is not always possible, however, unless your puppy is right by your side. To get around this problem, you can create a temporary substitute for the reward that becomes associated with the concept that a reward will come shortly. This learning process is called **associative** or **classical conditioning**. The temporary reward substitutes are called a **mark** (or a bridge). A mark can be any word or other type of signal, just as long as it is used consistently. For example, you could use **the word “yes” or a click from a clicker** as a mark. You may choose to use another word, but it must always be the same word. In time, your puppy/kitten will begin to associate that something good is going to happen when he/she hears the word “yes,” the click from the clicker, or whatever other word you have decided to constantly use.

Timing and **consistency** in all training are very important. The mark should happen the moment the desired behaviour happens. It is important to follow up the mark quickly with the reinforcement reward (treat, pet, or play).

Turning Lures into Rewards

A **lure** is something you use to **guide your pet into a behaviour**. A **reward** is something your pet **receives after he/she offers a behaviour**. The most commonly used lures and rewards are food treats, although toys can be effective.

The lure is used to **coax** an animal into a behaviour you want him/her to do. It physically guides the pet into the desired position, such as a *sit* or a *down*. You can use a lure to **entice** your pet to *come* when he/she is called by showing him/her the treat.

A reward just seems to “magically” appear when the pet offers a desired behaviour. This differs from a lure in that your pet may anticipate a reward, but does not know for sure if there is one or when it will appear. If you have a visible reward in your hand, he will learn to offer the desired behaviour only when you have the reward in your hand. In some situations, rewards may be visible, but they are not used as lures. A perfect example would be playing fetch with a dog. The dog sits, and then you throw the ball. At first the reward may be food treats, as most puppies and kittens are motivated by food; however, the reward can be play, a favourite toy, or an ear scratch. **Whatever motivates your animal most will work as a reward**. Rewards work only if the reward being used is important to the animal. You will want to take some time to learn what motivates your pet.

When training your pet, you must determine what he/she loves and likes. **Training treats are not meant to be meals**. Always use *tiny pieces* of food so that your puppy/kitten does not fill up on them. Training treats should be low-fat and may include small, healthy commercial treats or tiny pieces of cheese, liver, chicken, fish, chicken hot dogs, or beef. Training toys for puppies to be used as rewards can be squeaky toys, tennis balls, a Frisbee, or any toy your puppy really enjoys. Training toys for kittens can be dancing feathers or tassels, catnip, a soft mouse, or other animated objects.

Offering your pet his/her normal mealtime kibble is okay if you are asking for an easy behaviour without distractions. In many cases, though, kibble will not be enough to motivate your pet if there are distractions present.

Once your animal understands the cue you are requesting, treats should be used **intermittently** and **unpredictably**. One time you may reward with one tiny treat, another time two, then you may give an ear scratch or you may choose to use a favourite toy as the reward. The most important thing you can do is to **keep your pet guessing**.

When your pet goes from the lure to the reward for the first time or two, it is time to introduce him/her to a **jackpot**. A jackpot is a **super-reward for doing something outstanding**, such as many treats given for one behaviour. For example, when your animal figures out that the cue *sit* means “butt on floor” without being lured into the position with a treat, that is a **big accomplishment**, and your pet deserves a **big reward**. Instead of one or two little treats, give him/her a handful of treats, such as five or six treats, one after the other, until your pet has received all of them.

Sometimes people get confused when training with food rewards. Their concern is that if the animal does not see the reward, they will not give the desired behaviour. This is true only when you forget to turn the lure into a reward. See the following two examples.

Example: Using a Lure

Say you want to train your pet to *sit* on cue. Show your pet the lure/treat in your hand while he/she is standing. Place your hand with the treat in it right above his nose and slowly move your hand with the treat in it over his head to a position just a hair above his nose. As you slowly move over the nose toward his head, his head will tilt upward to follow the treat until the only way he can keep an eye on that tasty treat is to put his butt on the floor. You have just lured him/her into a *sit*. Once the pet sits, mark (a word like “yes” or a click from your clicker) and reward him/her for giving you the behaviour you requested.

Example: Combining Lures and Rewards to Train a Common Behaviour

As in the example above, use a lure to begin training the *sit* command. You will want to begin associating a mark with the reinforcement (treat). When the animal’s butt hits the floor, mark the behaviour (sitting) with a word such as “yes” or use a clicker, if you prefer. Once you have marked the desired behaviour, quickly give the animal the treat. Repeat this exercise 15 to 20 times over three or four days.

Once the animal is performing the intended behaviour consistently, it is time to add the word “sit.” The reason you wait to introduce the verbal cue is because he/she knows what is expected (sitting). Now is the time to **associate a cue with the behaviour**. When you lure the pet into the behaviour, say the word “sit” the second the animal’s butt touches the floor. As soon as the behaviour is completed, mark and reward your pet. Repeat this exercise seven or eight times a day (for 10-15 seconds) over the next couple of days, or until you are sure your pet is getting the idea; then it is time to replace the lure with a reward.

Keep the treat you are using as a reward **out of the animal’s sight** this time, but have it available quickly when you get the correct behaviour. Using your hand the same way (but without a treat), give your pet the verbal cue “sit” and wait for him/her to think through your request. **Do not repeat**

the cue. Give your pet a few seconds to figure out your request. The second his/her butt hits the ground, mark the behaviour with a “yes” or click and quickly give the pet a jackpot (many tiny rewards) to reward a great job. Now that your pet understands the *sit* cue, you no longer need to use the food as a lure to coax him/her into sitting from standing. Instead, you give the verbal cue “sit,” butt hits floor, and you immediately mark that *sit* with “yes” or a click from your clicker to let the animal know he/she has done exactly what you wanted, and then you **reinforce the correct behaviour with a treat as a reward**. The reward reinforces the desired behaviour.

Rewards Schedule

When you begin training your puppy/kitten, one very important piece of the training is a reward schedule. A **reward schedule** refers to **how many and how often your pet will receive treats from you**. The concept of a reward schedule is to keep your animal interested and guessing about what he/she may or may not receive when offering the requested behaviour.

This schedule will start off very basic and then vary as the requested tasks become more difficult, other family members begin to train him, and distractions are added to the training schedule. Good trainers are quick, both in marking the correct behaviour and rewarding it. They are generous, yet unpredictable, with their rewards. They are unpredictable by changing the number, type, and even how often they use different rewards. This scheme will **keep your pet guessing, make it fun, and keep your pet’s attention focused on you**.

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