

# Canine Kinship

## Trick Training 101



**Basic requirements:** Time Dedication and Patience! Work on tricks training when you and your dog are calm and focused.

**Conditioned reinforcement (the clicker):** Dogs do things that are worthwhile. A behavior is only worthwhile if it's reinforced, and therefore is more likely to be repeated. Food, play and praise are all 'unconditioned reinforcements', because we don't have to teach the dog love them.

When your dog shows a desired behavior, you can reward with a treat and a pat but you need to be close to the dog to do so. You can also use praise to reward. Unfortunately, experience shows that dogs receive so many 'verbal text messages' from us that they ignore most of what we say.

This is where the conditioned reinforce comes in. By pairing food (primary reinforcement) with a clicker (conditioned reinforcement) you now have a tool that can encourage a dog to experiment and shape specific behaviors. The 'click' is a signal that tells the dog 'good job, you will get a treat now'. If the dog performs an undesired behavior, the behavior is ignored and only the correct behavior is rewarded.

**Treats:** Small, soft, smelly treats are best. Boiled chicken, cheese or sausages are a few examples.

**Jackpot:** A jackpot is an abundance of 'over the moon' tasty treats (opposed to just 1 treat) for a great effort or for making a large leap forward. Reward jackpots quickly and with great enthusiasm. Jackpots get the dog motivated at a very high level.

**Training Duration:** As exciting as it is to want to get started, limit trick training to 5 minutes (maybe 10 for a highly motivated dog) practice sessions. Integrate trick training into your daily walks and practice in several different places a day.

**Generalizing:** If you practice your trick in the same place (like your living room) every time, your dog will not understand the cue when you take it on the road. Be sure to practice in several different places and vary your body posture in your training sessions. This will firm up the commands

**Commands, the 'wow' factor:** There are several possibilities to combine the different tricks with voice or visual signals. Once your dog has mastered the exercise, you can work your 'word' into a sentence.

Example: If you are teaching your dog to turn on the light, say the word 'light', as he is turning the light on. Then start integrating the word into a sentence, 'It sure is dark in here, I wish we had some light!' Your trained dog turns on the light and your friends are impressed!

## Some Tricks to Try

### Shake a paw

1. With your dog watching, place a piece of food in your hand and close your fist.
2. Hold your fist at your dogs chest height
3. He may sniff your hand and then will try to get it. If he uses his paw to scratch at your hand, click and reward immediately. It's best to reward using the other hand, as we don't want to teach the dog that the point of the exercise is to dig at your hand with the treat.
4. Once he starts to lift his paw, say the command 'paw' (or word of your choice)

### Trouble shooting

If your dog just stares at your hand, open it and let him see the treat and close it again. You can also open your hand, sniff the treat yourself to see if that brings interest. Switch treats to something smelly. Change your position, or move a few feet from the dog to incite movement. If it still doesn't work, you can hold his paw, click and reward, but this doesn't make him use his brain power. So try a combination of trouble shooting ideas until he is lifting his paw on his own.

### Waving – a variation of 'shake'

1. Hold out your hand towards the dog
2. When he tries to put his paw in your hand, withdraw your hand, click and reward, while saying the command 'wave!' or 'say hi'
3. Once your dog is mastering the verbal cue, wave at your dog and 'say hi'

### 'Shame on you' having your dog cover his face with his paw & the use of props

You will need:

A few post-its prepared with tape

1. Have your dog sit in front of you and stick the post it on the top of his muzzle
2. As your dog is trying to brush away the post it, click and reward
3. Repeat with the post its (you will need several as the stickiness will decrease with use) and say the command 'shame on you' as you dog brushes the post it away.
4. After a few tries with the post it, try saying the command without the post it.
5. If he doesn't respond, go back to the post it and try again after a few more tries.

**Remember to keep practice sessions short and HAVE FUN!**

**Happy Training!**

## Some Training Terminology

**Luring**- Hands off method of guiding the dog through a behavior

**Targeting**- Something the animal is taught to touch with some part of his body. A target is generally stationary

**Shaping**- Reinforcing behavior that is already occurring so that it occurs more often. It consists of taking a very small tendency in the right direction and shifting it, one small step at a time toward and ultimate goal.

**Back-chaining**- Training the last behavior in a chain first, and then training the next to the last behavior etc, until the behavior goal is met.

### References

Trick School for Dogs, fun games to challenge and bond. Manuela Zaitz, 2008 Cadmos Book, Great Britain

Click for Joy. Melissa C. Alexander, 2003 Sunshine Books Inc., Wrentham MA

Don't Shoot The Dog, Karen Pryor, 1999 Simon & Schuster