

What is Marker Training?

- Marker training is a simple way of dog training that communicates with the dog what behavior is correct and desired by the handler.
- It is a science-based teaching method that simplifies communicating with the dog with positive reinforcement (operant conditioning)
- It allows the learning of behaviors to be established quickly and efficiently with a primary reinforcer (food / toy/tug/ sniff/ chase ball/etc) reward.
- The dog must make the choice to offer the behavior. The more you reward the desired behavior, the more the dog will offer that behavior again for their reward.
- Gives the dog the opportunity to offer the correct, desired behavior for food reward.

Your marker can be a clicker (non-emotional), a word (“yes”) or a specific sound. Some argue that a clicker works best in the learning phase, and I tend to agree, simply because as human beings, we like to talk a lot and the marker word gets “screened” out by our dogs due to all the other “noise” from us. And other times, if stressed, or frustrated, our tone of voice will change, thus again lose some efficiency. The clicker is also distinct from other signals in the environment.

When the dog has already learned the behavior, then using a verbal marker is just as efficient as a clicker (non-emotional marker)

Will marker training work with any dog?

- Yes. Marker training works with all breeds, all ages, all types of dogs, purebred and rescue, champions and house companions. With deaf dogs substitute a light flash for the marker.

It's not Click/Treat, it's CLICK and THEN Treat!

Source : <https://www.clickertraining.com/node/2016>

Remember, the clicker (I'm just using this as an example because this is what I use, substitute your own **marker** if you use a different one) is a **bridging stimulus** (also often referred to as a conditioned reinforcer!). Therefore, it bridges the time between the behavior and the reward (**reinforcement**).

Think of the clicker as a camera...the **timing** of the clicker is such that "you are taking a picture" of the exact moment in time the dog offers the desired behavior. After you have marked the desired behavior, you follow up with a reward (food/toy). So, even if your dog moves slightly after you marked the desired behavior, your dog still understands, that it was the behavior he offered, when you used your marker work or clicked, that is being reinforced. Not the behavior before or after. But the behavior you marked. That is why marker training can be so efficient.

There are a number of things one can do to improve their clicker timing. For timing practice, I suggest using a different marker. You don't want your dog to come running hopeful for a **training session** if you are just practicing your timing. When I practice my timing, I often blink my eyes or snap my fingers.

How does one practice marking behaviors and improving the speed of their timing? I practice by watching TV and blink when the camera angles change. Or I'll select a particular word, and blink whenever it is said on a TV show. I've sat down at the park before and blinked as a car's headlights passed a nearby street sign.

For a bridging stimulus (conditioned reinforcer) to be effective **it has to be a predictor of the delivery** of the reinforcement, meaning first click and THEN reward. One of the biggest problems I see with "green" clicker trainers is that they click and treat at the same time, or are fumbling with the treat bag as they are clicking. This is sloppy training, and needs to be cleaned up.

What I don't like about "Treating while you're clicking": it devalues the marker signal while undermining its purpose. **If the dog is focusing on the food, the click has been overshadowed. The marker is only useful if there is a time gap to bridge between the behavior and reinforcement.** If you can reinforce as the behavior is occurring there is nothing to bridge. The click and the reinforcement should be two separate events.

Ideally, the reinforcement should be delivered less than two seconds after the behavior (marker/bridge).

I like to click with my right hand and reinforce with my left, generally. So, my left hand is totally still and not in or near my treat bag as I click. If you are digging around in your treat bag while you are clicking, it takes the dog's focus off the click and puts it on the food, which is not what we want. Doing so makes it harder to wean off food reinforcement and teaches a dog not to work unless food is in sight.

As you practice the timing exercises you may notice your speed at text messaging or skill at photography increases directly with your practice on your clicker timing. As they should! You are, after all, improving your coordination.

Also, a warning to new clicker trainers...please don't click near your dog's ears! Often, when a dog is frightened by the sound of the clicker, it is because someone has clicked too close to his ears. An iClick is much softer sounding than a traditional box. Take any clicker and click it right next to your ear, see how you like it! Imagine how much more startling in an animal that hears much better than we.

CHARGING UP YOUR MARKER

Now that you have read this, it is time to "charge up" your marker, meaning adding value to it. Otherwise, it is just a work or a click with no value.

I use both a clicker and a marker word with my dogs. You can do both as well, or simply just pick either a clicker or a word as your marker.

I have included videos that shows you how to charge up both a marker word ("yes") and a clicker.

Let's get started...

- **Charge up your marker word "yes":** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h056sIvEjQ&t=4s>
- **Charge up your clicker:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCO2FfpKtjA>