

Will I have to use the clicker and treats forever?

The clicker is used to identify the behavior you like when the dog is learning. Once you've trained the behavior, you no longer need to mark it with the clicker.

As for treats, it's a bit more complicated. Just like you expect to be paid for going to work each week, so your dog expects (and deserves) to be paid for doing what you ask.

I believe it was trainer Gary Wilkes who originated the bank account analogy. Reinforcing behavior is like adding money to a bank account. The bigger the balance, the more likely the dog will do the behavior when you ask for it—and the more interest you earn! If you ignore a behavior, you make a withdrawal. If you punish it, you make a big withdrawal. If you stop making deposits (by reinforcing the behavior) and start making withdrawals (through lack of reinforcement), eventually the bank account will run dry, and you'll lose the behavior.

Don't take desired behavior for granted. You don't have to reinforce it with food treats forever—but boy, it's special when you do! Other times praise and a pat are plenty.

What can I use to reinforce my dog?
page 23

How do I move from food treats to praise only? **page 23**

When and how do I fade the clicker?
page 23

You say I can do competition obedience, but I can't use a clicker or food in the ring. How can I clicker train? **page 23**

My dog is afraid of the clicker! What do I do?

Honestly, this isn't an unusual problem. A clicker makes a very sharp sound, one that works so well in part, it is believed, because it strikes a primitive, emotional, instinctive part of the brain called the amygdala.

To make the sound less startling, at first, you can layer the metal tab of the clicker with medical adhesive tape—each strip will make it quieter. Then, as the dog becomes less reactive to the noise, you can begin peeling off the tape one strip at a time. You can further muffle the sound by holding it in your pocket.

Alternatively, you can use the "button" on a Snapple (or baby food) lid or even the button on a ballpoint pen.

You may find that any mechanical click sound scares your dog at first. In that case, do the following things.

- Switch to a mouth click temporarily.
- Wear the clicker around your neck all the time, so the dog gets used to seeing it.
- Click once before you set down his dinner to build an association between the sound and something he really wants.

Be very nonchalant about these steps. Ignore any fearful behavior. Remain upbeat and go on about your business like everything is normal. Most of all, be patient. Wait until your dog alerts—but doesn't startle—at the sound of the clicker before using it for training.

What kind of equipment do I need?

page 23

How do I handle fearful behavior?

page 23

see also