

Dog Training

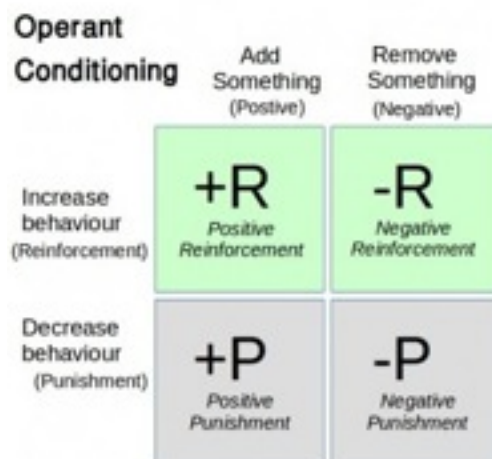
When training your dog there are a number of areas to consider. It is important to understand how a dog learns and the process involved in teaching a dog certain behaviours or extinguishing unwanted behaviours. The following is a brief overview of important information you need to know to help you on your dog training journey.

Operant Conditioning Behaviour = Consequence

Operant conditioning is a learning process in which the likelihood of a specific behaviour is increased or decreased through positive or negative reinforcement each time the behaviour is exhibited. Below are some examples of how this may be used in dog training.

Positive Reinforcement: Something is added so the behaviour is increased. E.g. If the dog sits it gets a treat or a pat.

Negative Reinforcement: Something is removed so the behaviour is increased. E.g. If the dog walks at heel the



Positive Punishment: Something is added so the behaviour is decreased. E.g. If the dog barks it is sprayed with citronella.

Negative Reinforcement: Something is removed so the behaviour is decreased. E.g. Putting a dog in time out, withdrawing your attention.

When training dogs we focus on the positive reinforcement quadrant of operant conditioning as it communicates to the dog what we want them to do so the desired behaviours increase.

Ways to achieve a behaviour

In order to reinforce a behaviour that is desired we must first get the dog to perform or offer that behaviour. There are a number of ways to do this and below are some examples:



Targeting: Involves getting the dog to first touch a target and then using that target to move the dog or place the dog in a position that achieves the desired behaviour. To use targeting the dog must first be conditioned to 'touch' the target.



Shaping: Involves breaking the behaviour down into tiny steps which can be reinforced and progress into the final desired behaviour. E.g. If you want your dog to hold an object in its mouth then you would first start by reinforcing the dog looking at the object, then moving towards it, then touching it and so on.



Luring: Involves using a reinforcer to move the dog into position. E.g. Holding a treat on the dog's nose and then moving it up and back away from the dog to get the dog to put its bottom on the ground. When the dog's bottom is on the ground the treat is given.



Capturing: Involves rewarding the dog at the exact moment the desired behaviour is offered. E.g. If the dog barks and you want the dog to 'speak' you can reward the dog as soon as it barks.

Adding a cue

Almost any behavior can be put on cue. If you are training a new behavior make sure the dog is offering the correct behavior by using one of the methods explained above before adding the cue. Cues can be verbal, physical or visual.

Marking the behaviour

Think of marking a behaviour like taking a photo of the desired behaviour. Using a marker like "Yes" or a click communicates to the dog that they have done the right thing and they will be rewarded for it. It is essential to condition the marker (see Clicker Training handout) for it to be effective.

Proofing the behaviour

It is important to teach each behaviour in at least five different environments for it to be generalised. Consider adding distractions, duration or distance to each behaviour but not all at the same time.

Counterconditioning and desensitisation

Counterconditioning is the process of replacing an unwanted behaviour or response with a desired one. Desensitising is the process of lessening a dog's reaction to a particular stimulus.