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IN THE BEGINNING...

When I started out with clicker training, I didn't have a clicker. I had one piece of information from Margie English: if you pair a certain word or sound with a treat, you can use that to pinpoint the exact moment when something happens and it's not necessary to have the food right there. Up until then, I hadn't used food in training because I saw so many problems with it: dogs that worked only when they saw the food, dogs that shut down very rapidly if they weren't given treats frequently, dogs that appeared to know a behavior when they saw the food moving around in front of them but when the food disappeared so did the behavior.

I could see right away, though, that using a conditioned reinforcer (CR) got around most of those problems because the food was out of the picture as far as the dog was concerned. It could be in my pocket or over on a table.

So I tried it. I didn't have a clicker, so I used the word "Thatzit!" I said Thatzit! and handed my dog a treat. Pretty soon, she was giving me a terrific alert when she heard the word. Then what? Well, Chamois and I had been having problems on the outside loop of the figure 8, the first curving step after the straightaway where Chamois would be a small amount lagged. I'd worked on it in various ways, by using the word "Hurry!" on the last step of the straightaway, by increasing my own

speed to a jog going into that first turn, etc. All these things worked a little, in that for the first few figure 8's afterwards, she would anticipate and speed up. But over time, she'd slow down again.

On that day, I did a couple figure 8's by doing a sloooooow through the inside loop and jogging through the outside loop. Then I did an inside loop at a regular pace and said Thatzit! when Chamois drove through the first step of the outside loop with me (anticipating the jog). She did a classic double-take and I broke off the Figure 8 to run over to the bowl of goodies and handed her a handful. She never lagged through that step again—finally, she *understood* what I wanted, rather than fumbling around

sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing. I was hooked.

I started trying it out with all my dogs (eight of them at the time, ranging in age from 2 years old through 14 years old). They all loved it and we were having lots of fun. But I noticed something that bothered me. I've always talked a lot to my dogs and even though they clearly understood Thatzit!, it was getting blurred with everything else I had to say. I needed something more unique and more precise. I ordered my first clickers.

I started reading and talking about clicker training and most of all, I started trying it. My own dogs and all the fosters that have gone through my household have been most gracious about being the subjects of my training experiments. When I was

wrong, they let me know and then forgave me; when I am right, they let me know and celebrated with me. I couldn't ask for more. So thank you, all of my sometime and forever dogs.

SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

About Training

This workbook is a collection of some of the things I have learned about dog training and what works for me. It's not intended to be the final word on anything! My training methods have changed from when I began training and no doubt will evolve further. I have some assumptions about dogs and people and training that underlie these methods.

For clarity of communication, I use the word “command” throughout this booklet to indicate a deliberate verbal or hand cue given by the handler. I

use the word “cue” to mean all of the environmental conditions that the handler may or may not be able to control that help the dog figure out what to do.

Good dog training is easy, effective and efficient. If training is going right, the dog's behavior will change towards what I want in each training session. If I hear "You have to do this every day for a couple weeks before you see any results" I look for another training strategy. It's not that some behaviors may not take weeks or even months to train! It is simply that there should be a perceptible change in each and every training session.

If a dead dog can do it, it ain't behavior. This is a simple rule of

thumb used by behavior analysts called the Dead Man Rule. Behavior involves action of some type—the lack of action cannot be trained. For instance, can a dead dog be trained not to bark at the door? Sure! Can a dead dog be trained not to jump on visitors? Sure! Can a dead dog be trained to go over to a mat in the living room and lie down on it? Nope—dead dogs can't move. The Dead Dog rule is an easy rule of thumb for assessing training goals.

I can't make a dog do anything, all I can do is control the environment and the consequences to get the behavior I want. The dog is the one in charge of acting! If I am the one moving the dog into position, I am training my dog into allowing me to move her into position. Yes,

eventually, the dog will anticipate. Eventually. My life is too short to make training this way a feasible option!

If I'm working harder than the dog, it's time to re-think my training strategy. My part of training is largely mental, it's up to the dog to act. Allowing the dog to decide to act makes for more efficient learning.

Always give the dog the benefit of the doubt. Although my dogs disprove it all the time, I cannot expect the dog to behave better than the way I've trained them to. If the dog does outshine my training, I was lucky! I never blame the dog for my own lack of luck or training effort.

A dog can be trained to do anything that they are physically and mentally

capable of doing—but is it worth the effort to do so? There are some tasks for some dogs that would take an extremely large investment of time and energy to train. Buddhists have a perfect story about this: a man spent ten years in study and meditation to learn to teleport himself across a river. When this man told the Buddha of his accomplishment, the Buddha replied, "Foolish one! You have spent ten years in learning to cross this river yourself, when you could have earned the pennies to pay a boatman to take you across in a few hours and then have spent these last ten years in helping others."

If I don't have an estimate of the time it will take to train something, I probably haven't thought out the training in enough detail. Good

training happens in small, discrete steps. Those individual steps may not look much like the goal behavior, so it's important to think out where training is going in advance. Knowing where each step will go helps keep me from getting stuck on a single step.

As soon as I start training something, I throw the timeline away.

The best way to measure training with is to measure changes in behavior. These changes happen when they happen and not before. Since every dog brings something new and unique into training with them, the fastest way to get frustrated is to try to ignore that in order to stick to a timeline.

The most common reason behind getting angry with a dog is that the handler doesn't know what to do. If I feel frustrated or angry with a dog, it's a signal to me to step back and re-think the training strategy. If things have gone so far downhill that I'm feeling angry with the dog, the best thing to do is get out of the situation as quickly as possible.

There is always a different way to train any behavior. If one way isn't working, try another. There's no reason you have to train anything the way someone else does.

If something doesn't work the first, second or third time, there's no reason to try it a fourth, fifth or sixth time. The commonest mistake trainers make is in repeating something the same way, expecting

a different result the next time. This could also be one of the definitions of insanity! Each time you do something, you should see some change in the dog's behavior, no matter how tiny. If you don't see a change, stop!

Avoiding a problem can be either the smartest training strategy or the stupidest. Keeping the garbage out of reach is a good way to avoid expensive vet bills. Never dropping the dog except in the obedience ring is a good way to start major recall problems. Deciding whether to avoid or work on a problem is a good deal of the art of training.

Just because I think I'm teaching the dog something and the dog is succeeding at it doesn't mean the

two of us are working on the same thing. One example of such a situation is where the handler thinks they are teaching the drop on recall and the dog thinks that the task is to drop after seven strides towards the handler.

About Dogs

Dogs act out of their own self interests. Ultimately, dogs want to please themselves. There are dogs that want to please their handlers—in order to get social approval for themselves. The most powerful commitment to action comes from dogs who are convinced that the action involved is in their own best interests. I do believe that dogs can love human beings—but again, that love is ultimately in their own self

interest. Pretty much like humans, really!

Dogs are essentially lazy. A dog will leave out the details of a behavior that are not reinforced. Given enough practice, a dog will figure out the most efficient way to perform a given act or series of actions. Particularly in competitive obedience, what is most efficient is sometimes against the rules! For instance, my dear old Fergie was soooo proud of herself the day she went out and brought me all three gloves back that it was all I could do not to laugh. Why the heck are we encouraging handlers to leave their laundry all over anyway???

Dogs are gamblers. Predators do tend to be gamblers, due to their

lifestyles. Food is not easily available—the predator must find the prey and then kill it. Prey animals tend not to be gamblers, again due to their lifestyles. Most herbivores have food all around them, easily abundant. However, they are themselves food for others, so they have to be cautious. The horses who run screaming "OHMIGAWD IT'S GONNA GET ME!!!!" when the bushes rustle are more likely to survive and perpetuate their genes than the horse who sticks around to find out what it is. Predators are the opposite—the dog that investigates every rustling bush on the chance that it might be a rabbit is more likely to survive than the dog that waits for a suicidal rabbit to hurl itself into his mouth.

Dogs are reinforcement driven.
Again, this is due to their lifestyle as predators. If something gets in the way, they look for a way around it. Dogs are focused on getting what they want and if they can't get it one way, they'll try another. Prey animals are looking for safety first—nothing is more reinforcing for them than that safe feeling.

Dogs are not adept at learning by watching other dogs. Dogs do pick up emotional states from each other.
A lot of what appears to be learning by watching is actually what is called allelomimetic behavior—this means that when exposed to the same conditions, many dogs react the same way. Pair this with picking up emotional states from each other and you have what looks like dogs that

learn by watching. For instance, the puppy that follows the rest of the pack in barking at the front door may very well have done that without any other dog to watch! There are animals that learn very well by watching; in Lads Before The Wind, Karen Pryor relates a story of two dolphins that were similar looking but had different performance routines. One day, each dolphin seemed hesitant as they went through their routines—it was discovered afterwards that the two dolphins had been mixed up and each had performed the other's routine, even though they hadn't been specifically trained to do so.

Dogs are great at anticipation.
Knowing this, handlers can either use it to their own advantage or spend a

lot of time struggling with it. Anticipation can be the basis of complex behavior chains (like retrieve over the high jump or tracking) and it can be the basis of things like seizure alert training (where the dog alerts the handler to an oncoming seizure). Or it can be the cause of many a nonqualifying score.

Dogs pay attention to touch first, scent second, sight third, and hearing last. In training, this means that when you are trying to teach a dog by touching them, they are likely to focus on the touch so much that they don't notice any of the other cues you are giving them. If you are trying to teach a specific verbal command, you have to make sure you're

eliminating all touch, scent, and sight cues.

Dogs tend to learn tasks as context specific. and have difficulties with generalizing. To a puppy, a sit in the kitchen is completely different from a sit in the living room, which is completely different from a sit in the park. In order to generalize, the puppy must learn to sit in many different locations, under many different conditions. For success in training, handlers have to make an effort to keep changing the context.

The more you say to your dog during training, the less your dog understands. A really well trained dog may understand 200 words (in the form of commands). Human beings typically have vocabularies of over 10,000 words and working

vocabularies of over 5,000 words. This means that a really well trained dog hears 25 times more words than she understands. This makes it very difficult for a dog to pick the significant words out of all the other words that are meaningless. Imagine only recognizing one word out of 25—even when you did hear a familiar word, it might well take you a moment to pick out that familiar word out of all the others that you don't understand.

The faster the dog moves, the slower the handler should move. If both of you are running around at top speed, neither party has a chance to think and reflect.

Dogs learn from repetition. Each repetition should give the dog a tiny

piece of new information to add to their mental collection. Each repetition under new conditions teaches the dog a little more about what you want. One ten minute stay in a quiet room (same conditions) does not teach the dog as much as 60 ten second stays in 60 different places (different conditions). Handlers get hung up on the idea of repetitions—they don't seem to realize that it is the changing conditions that make repetitions effective, not just the fact of many repetitions. Doing many repetitions under the same conditions does not teach the dog much at all.

THE TECHNICAL STUFF

What is Operant Conditioning?

Operant conditioning is a method of learning where the dog's behavior is affected by the consequences of their actions. Almost all training is operant conditioning!

Behavior can be analyzed by using a series of observations about the nature of learning. These observations or principles are very simple but their application can be very complex. It's like chess—simple rules that a six year old can learn and infinite complexity in the application of those rules. This method of analysis can also be used to plan out

training strategies. And then figure out where that strategy went wrong!

Clicker training is a form of training that focuses on the principles of positive reinforcement and the use of a conditioned reinforcer. Clicker trainers try to conform closely to the principles of operant conditioning.

Operant conditioning in its purest form does not rely on trying to figure out what the subject is thinking. It is only concerned with observable behavior. I am not a purist! So this workbook isn't pure operant conditioning—as I said, this is what works for me.

There is one basic idea that underlies operant conditioning: *when the animal acts there is a consequence*. This assumes that the

animal must act in some way in order for there to be a consequence and that the consequence is what follows the act closely enough that the animal can associate the two things. In other words, it won't work to see your puppy sitting, then praise it for sitting five minutes after the puppy has wandered off! When it comes right down to it, operant conditioning is just common sense about training.

The Formalities of Reinforcement and Punishment

Reinforcement and punishment are the terms used to refer to the consequences of a dog's actions that modify the dog's future actions.

These terms are modified by the words positive or negative, so that there are four categories: positive

reinforcement (+R), negative reinforcement (-R), positive punishment (+P), and negative punishment (-P).

These terms are very precisely defined, in order to be useful tools for analyzing training. There are a lot of people, dog trainers included, using these terms to mean other things. Punishment, in particular, is a word that has become politically incorrect in many dog training circles (the word correction is used instead).

My definitions (and translations of the definitions) of these terms follow. These definitions have nothing to do with knowing how the dog feels about anything or how the handler feels about something. The definitions depend solely on the dog's observable behavior.

Why is it important to use these terms? The beauty of operant conditioning is in using it to analyze what happens in training. To know why something works, to figure out why something else doesn't work. To realize what is necessary and what is superstitious on the handler's part. Superstitious means something the handler does, believing it affects the outcome of training, when it really doesn't have any effect at all (for instance, rubbing a rabbit's foot before going into the obedience ring or believing that all dogs have to be forced into a down in order to respect humans).

Positive Reinforcement

My formal definition of positive reinforcement is: something given to

the animal directly after a behavior that increases the probability of the behavior re-occurring.

This definition doesn't say anything about how the animal feels or thinks of what was given! It depends on the animal's observable behavior after being given that thing. This may seem like a hairsplitting definition, but it is very important. *A positive reinforcer is defined by the dog, not by the handler!* It doesn't matter if the handler thinks that garlic flavored liver should be a dog's dream of a treat—if it doesn't increase the chances that the dog will act in that particular way again, it's not a positive reinforcer.

Probability implies a number of attempts—not a guarantee that in a given attempt, the behavior will recur.

Even OTCH dogs can occasionally fail to qualify! By giving +R, the handler is tilting the dog's behavior from however often that behavior occurs naturally upwards in frequency. If the handler is reinforcing downs, a +R will increase the number of downs that the dog offers. It doesn't mean that the dog will spend it's life in the down position! Or even that the dog will do a down when the handler particularly wants it to happen—operant conditioning increases the odds but it's not a guarantee. And by operant conditioning, I mean *any* form of training, not just clicker training.

Conditioned Reinforcers

My formal definition of a conditioned reinforcer (CR) is: an otherwise

neutral stimulus that has been paired with a positive reinforcement and is used to signal to the animal that the positive reinforcement is now available.

A conditioned reinforcer can be: a clicker, a flash of light, a whistle, a tongue cluck, a touch, a word, a clap, a certain gesture, a bell, or any other thing that the dog can perceive and the handler can control. It is also possible (and very useful) to condition a variety of CRs.

The best CRs are precise and unique. The CR can be used to single out that split second when the dog is RIGHT, so it has to be as accurate as a camera. It should be sufficiently unique that the dog doesn't have to stop to ask

themselves "was that what I thought it was?"

The reason to use a CR is that it can be difficult to deliver the positive reinforcement at exactly the right instant. What if you're trying to get the dog to jump higher? If you give the dog a cookie after the dog has landed after the jump, how does the dog know if it was the takeoff, the height of the jump, the landing, or the three steps after the jump that earned the reinforcer? It takes many trials before the dog can sort it all out. If you use a CR, though, you can click that exact instant and you don't have to worry about getting the cookie to the dog immediately—the dog can land and take three steps and you don't have to worry about

exactly what the dog thinks you were reinforcing.

Negative Reinforcement

My formal definition of a negative reinforcement (-R) is: something taken away from the animal directly after a behavior that increases the probability of the behavior recurring.

So -R still increases the behavior, but how? What can you take away from a dog that will increase the likelihood that they will repeat the same behavior? Something unpleasant—the dog acts in a certain way because that “turns off” the unpleasantness. For example, one way to use a shock collar is to give the command and then start giving the dog a low level shock. When the

dog performs the command, the shock stops.

Negative reinforcement is a bit tricky to think about because it shares many similarities with positive punishment. The difference between the two is that -R increases behavior and +P decreases behavior.

Positive Punishment

My formal definition of positive punishment (+P) is: something given to the animal directly after a behavior that decreases the probability of the behavior recurring.

In other words, punishment suppresses behavior. Does it stop a given behavior altogether? It depends—but not usually. Just as positive reinforcement is no guarantee that a dog will repeat an

action in any given attempt, positive punishment doesn't guarantee the dog won't do it; it just means that the dog is less likely to repeat the behavior.

There is a difference between punishment and simply doing something unpleasant to the dog. This is where looking at the dog's subsequent behavior is very important. If the dog is barking and the handler squirts lemon juice in the dog's mouth, that's unpleasant (for most dogs). However, is it a punishment? If the dog does less barking afterwards, yes it was a punishment. But if the dog barks just as frequently afterwards, then it wasn't a punishment, just an unpleasant action.

The effect of a given punishment usually doesn't last forever. Neither does the effect of a given reinforcer! Dogs will work to try to get around a certain punishment. Think about wolves—if a wolf gave up on the chase the first time a tree gets in her way, she's probably going to be a very hungry wolf.

Conditioned Positive Punisher

My formal definition of a conditioned punisher is: an otherwise neutral stimulus that has been paired with a positive punishment and is used to signal to the animal that the positive punishment is going to follow.

The conditioned punisher can be any otherwise neutral stimulus—a flashlight flash, a certain gesture (a “thumbs down” for instance), a

certain sound. It should be unique and precise, not easily confused with anything else in the environment.

Many people inadvertently create a conditioned punisher. How many dogs have you seen that cringed when their owner raised their hand suddenly? The dog was conditioned, probably in puppyhood, that a suddenly raised hand is followed by a sudden smack on the behind.

Some shock collars come with what is called a “warning tone.” This is a conditioned punisher—first the tone is paired with an electric shock. After the association is firmly in place, the handler can occasionally use the warning tone to stop the unwanted action without following it up with the shock. However, if the trainer overuses the tone, it will lose its

power to predict the shock for the dog. The dog will start to gamble: “maybe THIS TIME the shock won’t follow, so I’ll keep on doing this.” The dog may even become more creative about trying to avoid the shock. Now instead of having one behavior to punish, the trainer has three or four behaviors to get rid of!

The conditioned punisher *must* precede the punisher. Many people have been taught to say "No!" and deliver a leash jerk simultaneously. This is ineffective because the dog pays attention to the touch (leash jerk) and misses the audio cue altogether.

The results of punishment are inherently less predictable than the results of reinforcement. Punishment

is a way of taking away behavior but Mother Nature abhors a vacuum so something has to take the place of the undesired behavior.

Reinforcement is a way of singling out precisely which behaviors you want to see repeated—much more predictable results.

Negative Punishment

My formal definition of a negative punishment is: something taken away from the animal directly after a behavior that decreases the probability of the behavior recurring.

What can you take away from a dog that would decrease behavior? Something that the dog wants! For example, Dancer (one of my GSD) used to rake the front of her crate with her claws when I was

approaching with her food bowl. The sound was horrible, worse than chalk on a blackboard. I started turning around and waiting for her to stop that sound. In effect, I was taking away the chance of her getting her dinner on time. Very quickly, she stopped raking the front of the crate (she always was a hog dog!).

Negative punishment is especially effective with dogs that have been trained primarily with positive reinforcement. With such dogs, the removal of the desired object often increases their desire to figure out what will work.

Conditioned Negative Punisher

My formal definition of a conditioned negative punisher (CNP) is: an otherwise neutral stimulus that has

been paired with a negative punishment and is used to signal to the animal that the negative punishment will follow.

The signal for a negative punisher can be anything: a light flash, a gesture, a certain sound, a word. I use the word “ah-ah.” I’ve also used Fisher disks, brass disks on a ring that make a very distinctive dull clanking sound.

A conditioned negative punisher is very useful with dogs that have lots and lots of ideas to try out. You can use the conditioned negative punisher to tell the dog “that’s not what will earn you the cookie this time.” There is a fine line to walk, though; use too much negative punishment and the dog is likely to say “well, you’re not satisfied with

anything, I might as well just give up!”
Punishment is a suppresser of behavior and if you're not careful, you can suppress ALL behavior.

There is a tendency in some handlers to want to micromanage their dog's learning processes. Taken too far and this results in a dog that has never been given the chance to develop problem solving skills.

And remember—a negative punishment only works if the dog wants what is being withdrawn. If the dog is headed off towards the other end of the field to flirt with that oh-so-pretty bitch, using a CNP is likely to cause the dog to think “oh, stuff yer hot dog, I'm off to get lucky!”

TRAINING IN THE REAL WORLD

Getting Sophisticated about Positive Reinforcement

Getting sophisticated about positive reinforcement means becoming unpredictable, devious, tricky, cunning... fascinating! Dogs are essentially gamblers, why not take advantage of this? The more unpredictable, etc., you are, the more interest you hold for your dog.

Training based on positive reinforcement can be incredibly powerful. It means that the dog is working in order to get something for themselves, rather than to avoid something unpleasant.

The definition of reinforcement depends on an increase in the frequency of behavior. An interesting thing about using a lot of positive reinforcement is that the dog tends to increase many behaviors, not just the single behavior being trained. This can be disconcerting for trainers—"ohmigawd, that dog is out of control!" Not to worry, the dog is just trying out lots of ideas hoping for reinforcement. All the handler has to do is pick out what they want and ignore what they don't want. Since the dog is doing those things in an effort to get clicked, they'll drop the unclicked things quickly.

In command based training positive reinforcement is usually pretty simple: dog does the right thing or the handler makes sure the dog does

the right thing, then the handler does something pleasant for the dog. Usually this something pleasant is fairly predictable; the handler falls into a pattern of giving pats and praise or giving a treat for each positive reinforcement. This is where people argue that "you can't take food in the ring with you" and where Buffy doesn't sit unless the treat is visible.

By introducing an element of doubt into training, the handler can get many, many behaviors for one reinforcer. This doubt should be in many different categories: what the positive reinforcer will be, when it will be delivered, how much of it there will be, how many times the dog has to do something to get it, how much effort will be rewarded.

Variety of Primary Reinforcers

Every dog has at least fifty things that they enjoy. Some of these things are pretty mild, some are in the "would walk over hot coals to get," some of them are things that the handler is not about to let them have. Even in the beginning stages of shaping, try to use at least three different types of reinforcer. It can be as simple as three different treats (see the Lagniappe section for the "Breakfast of Champions" mix, for instance). As the dog gets more experienced in training, vary the reinforcers more widely. Include games, toys, special petting, special activities, anything that gets that dog's tail wagging.

Having trouble thinking of fifty things your dog enjoys? Try listing the things your dog finds distracting. Use those things, as much as possible, as your reinforcers.

One particularly devious ploy for the owners of intact males that are occasionally used at stud is to seize the day! The day the bitch is ready to be bred, that is. Have the male do some easy and well known obedience exercises (remember that his brains are fried at this point, keep it simple). When he gets it right, click and bring on the girl! If he believes that the way to get the girl is to do what you want, you've got a potent method of getting him to concentrate in the presence of that specific type of distraction.

If you own a working herding dog and you dread the obedience trial that gets moved into the sheep barn due to rain, you can use sheep as your reinforcer. Get in the habit of doing at least a couple obedience exercises right outside the sheep pen before you start herding. Vary what you do and how much you do. At some point, click and open the gate for the dog to do a little authorized sheep chasing and then move into working the sheep seriously.

Variable Reinforcement

A curious thing about positive reinforcement is that variable or intermittent reinforcement is much more powerful than consistent reinforcement (or no reinforcement).

An easy way to understand this is to look at slot machines. I greatly doubt that anyone would get addicted to a machine that predictably gave out one nickel for every dollar fed into it—no matter how pretty the flashing lights were! However, by making the return unpredictable the casinos make incredible amounts of money from people feeding the one-armed bandits (which are set to return 5% of the money put into them). Anyone playing the slot machines could probably tell you that their chance of hitting a jackpot on the next quarter fed in is very low. But the hope that *this time* will be the one time that hits the jackpot is what keeps people addicted. As long as the person remains convinced that sooner or later the machine will cough up a

jackpot, the more money they've fed into the machine the more likely they are to feed the machine more money. The slot machines give out many more small prizes than they do large jackpots and this only serves to whet the players' appetites.

Dogs are the same as people in this regard. If the dog is convinced that they will eventually hit a jackpot by acting in a certain way, they will keep trying and trying and trying. The dog will actually put more effort into obeying a certain command if they aren't sure that they will be reinforced that particular time! Once a command is learned, performance is actually enhanced by uncertainty about the reinforcer.

Never teach your dog to play the slot machines, by the way. They're all diehard gamblers waiting to happen.

Schedules of Reinforcement

After each increment of the behavior has been shaped, stop trading on a one-for-one basis. As soon as possible, introduce the concept of doing something twice for one reinforcer (two sits, two nose touches, two steps at heel position, etc.). Simply pretend you didn't see the dog perform the first time and wait for the dog to try it again.

After two-fers, move to three-fers. Don't make it a straight line progression starting with one for one and moving steadily to 100-fers. A steady (predictable) progression tends to encourage the dog into

making the least acceptable effort for all the trials in the middle, between each reinforcer. Mix it up, so that your dog never knows whether *this time* will get the reinforcer. After all, if the dog is reasonably sure that there will be no reinforcer for at least ten tries, the first nine tries are likely to become half hearted.

To construct a schedule of reinforcement keep track of the average number of times in a row the dog can succeed at a given task. Then figure out what 75% of that number is. Then do a random number of trials at plus or minus 50% of that number.

For example, if the task is a sit stay, the dog can usually hold the sit stay for at least ten seconds (this is the

baseline number). Seventy five percent of that is seven and a half seconds. Plus or minus seven and a half seconds means that the range is three and three quarters seconds to eleven and one quarter seconds. So when practicing stays with this dog, vary the length of the stay unpredictably from a minimum of three and three quarters seconds to a maximum of eleven and one quarter seconds.

Sometimes the stay is really easy (three and three quarters seconds); sometimes the stay is pushing the edge of the dog's ability (eleven and one quarter seconds). Overall, most of the stays are well within the dog's ability to succeed, so the dog will succeed most of the time. This

success builds the foundation for further success.

When the dog is reliably succeeding at the maximum number of tries in the schedule, increase the baseline number by ten percent and figure out new minimum and maximum numbers of trials at the new level.

In the example of the sit stay, the new baseline number is eleven seconds (ten percent more than ten seconds). Seventy five percent of eleven seconds is eight and one quarter seconds. The new minimum is four and one tenth seconds (rounding off) and the new maximum is twelve and one half seconds.

In tasks that are essentially the dog doing the same thing over and over, you can build up to quite lengthy

repetitions by doing a series of trials. For instance, if the dog can heel correctly for four steps the handler can do a series of trials in a row, and actually get in forty or more steps of heeling overall.

Jackpots

A jackpot is a lot of a regular reinforcer or a very special reinforcer or anything that makes that reinforcer particularly memorable.

The human temptation is to save jackpots for particularly difficult tasks or for outstanding performances. There is merit to this strategy—if the dog has to overcome a difficult distraction or carry out a complex task, you can encourage them by giving them a really memorable reinforcement. The problem with this,

though, is that if the dog knows that the jackpot only comes after five minutes of heeling, the four minutes and forty five seconds of heeling between the beginning and the jackpot are going to suffer.

To be most powerful jackpots should be unpredictable. The dog should never be able to say for certain "if I do this, then I'll get that." Sometimes the jackpot should come after an easy recall or after three steps of heeling. Sometimes there should not be a jackpot after seven minutes of heeling. Yes, it feels unfair but heck, the day you told your puppy she couldn't eat the sofa she figured out that you were an unfair, arbitrary person who ignores the deepest needs of a puppy's heart. So live up to your bad reputation! Your dog may

not always enjoy it (she really wanted to eat the sofa) but you'll be much more interesting to her.

Conditioned Reinforcers—The Magic Wand

I use a clicker as my first conditioned reinforcer. It's fast, as fast as clicking a stopwatch. It's unique—most dogs haven't heard anything like it. I don't stop there, though; I condition a variety of CRs for use in different situations.

A dog will work harder for a conditioned reinforcer than they will for a visible reward. I believe that this is so because a clever handler builds in variation of positive reinforcement. All the dog knows is that the CR is the signal that "the goodies are coming up!" They aren't given the

chance to ask themselves “is that cookie worth doing a fast recall for?”

The clicker ends the behavior—after the dog hears the click, they are free to go get the reinforcer. This is something that’s difficult for many trainers to grasp at first. Command based training tends to focus on getting the complete behavior before the dog is rewarded. Clicker trainers don’t require the dog to perform the entire behavior in order to be reinforced. Duration is easier to build if it’s based on many successes.

Each click should be followed by the positive reinforcer. There is some debate about this—some trainers use a click without the treat as a way of moving to a variable schedule of reinforcement (two-fers, etc.). This

can work but it is not as powerful or effective as following up each click with the positive reinforcer. The click is information to the dog and this information works best if it always means the same thing. If it sometimes means “the treat is coming up!” and it sometimes means “you did the right thing but no treat” the information that the dog receives is less clear.

There are two parts involved for the dog in fully understanding the clicker. The first part is that it means "the goodie is coming up!" The second part is that the dog can control the click with their own actions.

Many handlers stop with the first part, using the clicker as an unmistakable way to signal "yes! that was it!" However, if the handler can

take the second step into allowing the dog to control the click, they are using an incredibly powerful training tool—far more powerful than using it as a simple conditioned reinforcer. From the dog's point of view, they are training their human to give them goodies.

Some handlers become concerned that in allowing their dog to train them to dispense the goodies, they will be starting or encouraging dominance problems with their dog. This has not been a problem in my experience. The *handler* is the one controlling the conditions under which the goodies appear. For dogs this is a powerful message about who controls the resources. In looking at pack behavior, the beta and omega dogs spend a lot of effort placating the

alpha—clicker training works with this natural tendency. If anything, clicker training elevates the handler's status in the dog's view.

If a handler can teach themselves to allow the dog to control the click, they are on the way to being a better trainer. Sometimes the dog needs help in figuring something out, but many times the help offered is as confusing from the dog's point of view as the original task.

Using a clicker effectively develops the handler's powers of observation. Observing behavior is a skill and as such, it can be practiced and refined. One part of good observation is in looking for the finest amount of detail you can discern. Novice observers get bogged down in the big picture—there is so much to see that they get

overwhelmed and miss the really important details. Decide what specific part of the dog will signal success to you and just watch that part. Is it the muscles on top of the head moving when the dog closes their mouth over the dumbbell? Is it the tilt of the pasterns as the dog shifts their weight forward or backwards? Sometimes the detail to watch isn't the dog at all, it's the prop! For instance, feeling the bump of the target stick or watching the end of the dumbbell rise off the ground.

This observation tends to promote a tighter relationship between dog and handler. Who can resist this sort of intense attention?

Shaping

There are three main ways to teach behavior with a clicker: free shaping, luring, and capturing.

Free Shaping

Free shaping is also called "shaping by successive approximation." It's a bit like playing the childhood game of Hotter/Colder. As the dog moves around (all dogs move, if only to breathe), the handler picks out movements that are marginally closer to the goal behavior to click.

For instance, to teach a dog to spin clockwise the handler might first click any tiny movement to the dog's right, even as tiny a movement as an eye or ear flick. Then the handler clicks larger movements to the right: a head

movement, a head turn, a front foot moving, both front feet moving, etc.

If the clicker were a camera, each “picture” you capture with the clicker while free shaping could be put together into a flipbook and create a sequence showing the dog moving progressively closer to the action you want. Did you make “moving cartoon” flipbooks in grade school? If not, it’s easy and fun. Take a pad of paper (Post-it Notes™ pads work well) and draw a stick figure on the lower right-hand corner of each page. Each stick figure should be drawn in a slightly different posture; if you want your figure to appear to jump up, draw each figure slightly higher than the last for several frames. When you hold the flipbook firmly with one hand, you can flick through the pages

and the stick figure will appear to float upwards.

Free shaping is a dance of communication between dog and handler. The handler has to balance reinforcing enough attempts by the dog to keep the dog working on the problem and raising the criteria for the dog so that the dog doesn't get stuck at a certain level because they believe that they have finished the action.

Luring

The most familiar type of luring is done with a treat or a toy. The handler moves the dog's body by moving the goodie. For instance, if the handler moves a treat over a puppy's head and then straight back

between the ears, most puppies will sit.

There are drawbacks to luring in this way, however. If the treat or toy isn't engrossing enough, the dog doesn't watch or follow it and luring won't work. But if the dog is absolutely nuts about the treat or toy, they move their bodies to follow it but aren't consciously aware of what they are doing—when the treat or toy disappears, so does the movement.

One way around these difficulties is to use targetting. First the dog is taught to touch a target with a body part (nose, foot, rear end, etc.). Then the target is moved around to move the dog's body through the desired action.

Using a target as a lure is subtly different from using food or a toy. The dog is moving in order to inspire you to click rather than moving in order to get to the food or toy.

The target can be used in place of a treat or toy to lure actions like sits, downs, and heeling. The dog can be taught to target to a target placed away from the handler for go-outs. The dog can be taught not to step over the target, making it an effective barrier.

When using luring, the lure (whether it is food or a toy or a target) becomes part of the cue for the dog. Rather than abruptly dropping the lure, the most effective strategy is to make it less and less obvious. This is called fading. For instance, if the handler was luring a sit by moving a

treat over the puppy's head, the motion can gradually be faded until it has become a hand signal for a sit. If the handler uses a target pinned to their jeans for heeling, the target can be faded by gradually making it smaller and smaller.

Capturing

Capturing is the action of watching the dog for a spontaneous behavior and using the clicker to catch that moment.

Capturing can be used to encourage expression for the breed ring. It can be used to capture things like spontaneous rolling over or play bows or full body shakes.

There are dogs that appear to go into a trance whenever they sense they are in a training session. These

are usually crossover dogs (dogs that were originally given command-based training, whose handlers are switching over to clicker training). These dogs wait to be told what to do, which can be frustrating for the eager handler who wants to see the dog throwing lots of behaviors. By carrying a clicker and treats around all the time and capturing behaviors, the trainer can help the dog learn to try out different ideas.

One of the ways that dogs will try to communicate with their humans is by approaching them and deliberately soliciting attention by showing them a new behavior (for instance, puppy does a perfect sit with a significant look to the owner). By carrying a clicker and treats, you can

acknowledge this attempt to communicate.

Increments of Success

To quote Margie English, "increments are everything." The more tiny steps you can break the training process into, the better it will go. Try to set up the initial teaching phase of training so that the dog has a 95% chance to succeed each time.

Since each increment is clicked, which ends the behavior, training in tiny increments can seem incredibly slow. This is truly an example of making haste slowly. Dogs learn from success; tiny increments mean lots of success. A dog will learn more from a hot dog cut into sixty tiny pieces given out for sixty tiny pieces of behavior than they will learn from a

whole hot dog given as a jackpot for a big chunk of behavior.

Extinction

Unreinforced behavior extinguishes. That is, anything that the dog does that is not reinforced in some way, the dog will eventually stop doing. The key to this, though, is that the behavior must not be reinforced! Reinforcement can come from many sources other than the handler.

Extinction isn't always a straightforward, yes-or-no process. It can involve the gradual lessening of the effort the dog puts into an action. For instance, unreinforced recalls can deteriorate from a gallop to a canter to a trot, to a slow trot, to a walk, to a walk with frequent pauses, until finally there's no continuous

movement of the dog towards the handler at all.

Extinction can also involve an intensification of effort, called an extinction burst. This occurs most often in the case of an action that had been reinforced a number of times in the past. For instance, when the dog nudged the owner's arm, the owner always petted the dog in the past. Then, one day, the owner stops petting the dog on (the dog's) cue. Most dogs will nudge harder and more insistently. It's as if the dog is saying "LOOK HERE, I'm nudging your arm already!!!"

If the increased effort is reinforced, then the behavior will persist longer without further reinforcement.

Remember? *Variable schedules of*

reinforcement are more powerful than constant reinforcement! If the owner decides to pet the dog after getting three or four nudges, it will take longer for the nudging behavior to extinguish. And before the behavior extinguishes altogether, there may well be another extinction burst! So the next burst might involve the dog face punching the owner's arm eight or nine times. Or the dog may well add pawing the owner's arm with a front foot.

Extinction bursts can be deliberately used in training. Sometimes a dog will be stuck at one level of training—one way to get out of that level is to reinforce it several times in a row and then stop reinforcing it. Pretend you don't see it. Out of frustration, the dog may well give you a harder or

faster effort that you can catch with the clicker and move to the next level of training.

Self Reinforcing Behaviors

One of the most frustrating things to deal with is obnoxious behavior that is self reinforcing. Performing the behavior itself is the reinforcement for the dog, so they do it again, get reinforced again, and on and on.

Sometimes the handler can control the source of the reinforcement and can end the behavior by shutting off the reinforcement. One discouraging thing about this strategy, however, is that the dog may well go through an extinction burst before the behavior goes away altogether. This is most likely to happen if the dog had a long

history of being reinforced for the behavior.

Oftentimes the source of the reinforcement is beyond the handler's control. One example of this is barking. For some dogs, the very act of barking feels good. The more they bark the better they feel.

One strategy for dealing with such behavior is to teach (and heavily reinforce) an alternative behavior that conflicts with the first behavior. For instance, if the dog can't bark while carrying a tennis ball (some dogs can, some can't), teaching the dog to carry a tennis ball and reinforcing tennis ball carrying heavily can stop the undesired behavior.

Another strategy for dealing with self reinforcing behavior is to change the

motivation for the behavior. Get the dog performing the behavior as a means to getting something else they want and the behavior becomes less self reinforcing (and so tends to occur less often on it's own). For instance, teach a barker to bark on cue and give that dog opportunities to really bark with your blessing and even your participation (barking with a buddy is always more fun than barking alone). Barking without the cue will tend to lessen. Barking has been effectively turned into a type of work—and most work is done for pay.

Sometimes there's just no easy way to deal with a behavior via positive reinforcement. The behavior, for whatever reason, has to stop and stop NOW. How to stop behavior?

With punishment. Punishment is many a trainer's first resort but they don't think the matter through. Punishment may temporarily stop the behavior but the dog will be thinking up ways to get around the punishment. This isn't because the dog wants to defy the handler—this is part of the genetic history of being a dog! So a wise trainer figures out how to substitute a desirable behavior; in effect, they pick the way the dog can get around the punishment.

Another problem with punishment is miscommunication. The trainer thinks they are teaching the dog one thing and the dog sees it completely differently. This is also a problem with positive reinforcement. However, it can be more difficult to detect a

miscommunication in punishment, because punishment involves the suppression of a behavior, rather than increased behavior. If you mistime the click in teaching the dog to raise a front paw, it's pretty easy to see miscommunication in action. It's much more difficult to see the miscommunication if you don't see a behavior. The classic example is housetraining. The owner thinks she is teaching the puppy not to pee in the house. The puppy sees the message as "never pee near a human being." Since the puppy stops peeing in front of a human being, it can be quite a while before the human realizes that the puppy is peeing in secret spots.

Changes of Criteria

Training can be viewed as a process of changing and increasing criteria (the conditions that the dog's act or actions must fulfill in order for the handler to click). Both the details of dog's action or actions and the conditions under which the dog is acting are separate criteria. If there is a secret to training, it's in knowing how fast to change the criteria.

Dog trainers refer to some of these changes of criteria as the process of proofing. A very common method of proofing involves adding distractions and then punishing the dog if the dog fails. This training strategy does work—countless thousands or millions of dogs have been successfully trained this way.

A faster way to train, though, is to *catch the dog with the clicker while he is still succeeding*. Dogs learn from success faster than they learn from failure. This also promotes self confidence and a showy attitude. The more often the dog is reinforced for performing a certain action, the more likely that dog is to repeat that action in the future. The greater the variety of conditions under which the dog can perform the action, the more likely they will generalize that action in a new context.

Cues

Cues are anything that the dog is using to determine what the desired action is. It may seem obvious to the trainer that the cue is my verbal

command, but it's far from obvious to the dog!

Obvious environmental cues are things like jumps—it wouldn't make any sense to tell the dog to jump if there were no jumps in sight. But dogs will often pick up on environmental cues that may be irrelevant such as indoors vs outdoors, on mats vs carpeting vs concrete, etc.

The dog may also be picking up cues from the handler. Things like eye flicks, head bobs, shoulder movements, etc, are all things that may seem to be part of the picture to the dog.

Most handlers have experienced or observed the dog that gets into the trial ring and suddenly doesn't seem

to understand the exercises they were doing so well in practice. One cause of this can be the change in the handler's body language in the ring. One way to get around this problem is to be conscious of showing the dog as many different sorts of body language as possible, to help the dog separate out what is important from what can be ignored.

Fading

There are lots of times when a trainer will use some type of luring, extra equipment, etc, in order to set up a situation where the dog has a greater probability of succeeding. It's important to remember that such help is quite often regarded as a cue by the dog. In shaping the dog to perform the behavior without the

extra cues, try to change one thing at a time in small steps.

For instance, if the dog has been taking the dumbbell out of your hand and you've been slowly lowering the dumbbell to the floor, fade your hand as a cue in increments by touching the dumbbell with four fingertips, then three fingertips, then two, then one, then one fingertip a quarter inch above the dumbbell, then one fingertip a half inch above the dumbbell, etc.

Commands—First or Last?

In the traditional forms of dog training, the handler gives the command right away and then either compels or lures the dog into performing the action, hence the term "command-based training." The dog doesn't really understand the

command, so it takes many repetitions of hearing the command and then being compelled or lured to carry it out. Usually, the dog isn't carrying out the command perfectly—the handler has to keep refining the way the dog performs.

In clicker training, the command is the last thing taught. The handler doesn't teach the command until the dog can do the behavior reliably the way the handler wants to see it. The reason for this is that dogs (just like people) tend to remember something most strongly in the first form they learned it. Under stress, dogs often revert to the first way they learned something. So if the first way the dog learned the word "Sit" is a tucked sit with the front feet lined up, that is the way they are most likely to sit when

they hear the command. On the other hand, if the first way the dog learned the word sit was by bracing their hind legs as the handler pushes down on their rear, under stress that dog may not sit at all!

People tend to confuse teaching the command with teaching the behavior. Teaching behavior is what takes the longest, teaching the command for that behavior doesn't take long at all—IF you have the behavior first.

Chains

Most useful behaviors are actually a series of actions. For instance, a retrieve is actually several different actions executed in the proper order: dog waits for command, dog moves away from handler, dog locates retrieve object, dog picks up retrieve

object, dog returns to handler, dog gives object to handler or allows handler to remove the object from their mouth.

Each link in the chain should be trained separately (as much as is practical) and put on command, then the links can be put together. *The easiest way to construct a chain is by doing it backwards.* That way, the dog is moving from the least familiar towards the most familiar.

One way to understand this is to imagine memorizing a poem. If you memorize the poem from the first line forwards, the most familiar, most rehearsed part of the poem will be the first line and as you recite, you are moving progressively towards the least well known part of the poem—

the end. On the other hand, if you memorize the last line of the poem, and then the second to the last line, and then the third to the last line, etc., the first line is the least well rehearsed. So you start with the least familiar line and move progressively towards the most well known. You move from the part that you are least confident of to the part you where you feel the most confidence.

A step by step description of the retrieve over the high jump looks like this:

- 1) dog sits at heel**
- 2) dog hears handler's verbal command**
- 3) dog spots high jump**
- 4) dog moves away from handler, aiming for high jump**

- 5)** dog jumps high jump
- 6)** dog spots dumbbell
- 7)** dog moves to the dumbbell
- 8)** dog picks up dumbbell
- 9)** dog turns with dumbbell in mouth
- 10)** dog spots high jump
- 11)** dog approaches high jump
- 12)** dog jumps high jump
- 13)** dog spots handler
- 14)** dog moves towards handler
- 15)** dog adjusts line of travel to sit in front of handler
- 16)** dog sits in front of handler
- 17)** dog waits in a sit stay with dumbbell in mouth
- 18)** dog hears handler's verbal command
- 19)** dog gives handler the dumbbell or allows handler to remove it

Each step of the chain puts the dog into position to correctly execute the next step of the chain. For instance, the dog can't retrieve the dumbbell if she can't locate it. Each step of the chain starts out with the opportunity to properly perform that step, so the beginning of each step of the chain is a cue.

In a behavior chain, each cue acts a conditioned reinforcer for the previous link. The cue for each step of the chain assumes two meanings: "you did that right" AND "do the next step now."

In training the above chain, ideally each link would be taught separately. However, in the real world this is impossible! You can't remove something from the dog's mouth unless the dog already has it in her

mouth. You just get as close as you can.

Sometimes handlers get lucky and the dog covers up for them. Many handlers never teach the dog to jump the high jump going away from the handler as an exercise on it's own; they rely on the dog following the path of the dumbbell over the jump as a lure. Some handlers get lucky and the dog never reveals the weakness of this link in the chain. Some handlers aren't so lucky. Training is more reliable than luck!

When the dog is proficient at each link of the chain, then it's time to put them together. Ideally, you'd start with step 19, then add step 18, then step 17, etc. In practice, the dog has learned several of the links as parts

of the retrieve on the flat and now
you are re-arranging them a bit.

One way to backchain the links in real life would be as follows:

- 1)** Put the dog in a sit-stay on the other side of the high jump with the dumbbell in her mouth, facing the handler and give her the command to jump and then to front.
- 2)** Place the dog at any point on an arc on the other side of the high jump with the dumbbell in her mouth, so that she has to angle into the jump. Start out with the dog on a very slight angle to the jump and move her at a progressively greater angle in either direction (to the right and left of the jump). Give her the commands to jump and then to front.
- 3)** Place the dog with dumbbell in a sit-stay on the other side of the

jump facing *away* from the handler. Give her the commands to come, then to jump, then to front.

- 4) Place the dog in a sit-stay with dumbbell on an arc on the other side of the high jump facing away from the handler. Give her the commands to come, then to jump, then to front.
- 5) Place the dog on a sit-stay facing away from the jump and place the dumbbell about six feet in front of her. Give her the commands to retrieve, to come, to jump, and then to front.
- 6) Place the dog on a sit-stay facing away from the jump and place the dumbbell further away from her (but still straight ahead of her). Give the commands to retrieve, to come, to jump, and then to front.

- 7)** Place the dog on a sit-stay facing away from the jump and place the dumbbell further away and on an arc around the dog. Give the commands to retrieve, to come, to jump, and then to front.
- 8)** Place the dog on a sit-stay on your side of the jump and walk over to place the dumbbell on the other side of the jump (to avoid chasing—you want the dog thinking about jumping first). Give the commands to jump, to retrieve, to come, to jump, and then to front.
- 9)** Place the dog on a sit-stay in heel position, throw the dumbbell over the jump and give the dog the commands to jump, to retrieve, to come, to jump, and to front.

- 10)** Place the dog on a sit-stay in heel position and deliberately try to make off-center throws of the dumbbell. Give the dog the commands to jump, to retrieve, to come, to jump and then to front.
- 11)** Repeat the sequence in step 9, but drop the final command to front.
- 12)** Repeat the sequence but drop the command to jump and the command to front.
- 13)** Repeat the sequence in step 9 but drop the commands to come, to jump, and to front.
- 14)** Repeat the sequence in step 9 but drop the commands to retrieve, to come, to jump, and to front.

And that's it! You are allowed to give a command in the ring, so you can make it the jump command.

There are several cues for each link in the chain above. It's not just the verbal commands—there are also cues like the handler's presence (the dog could, after all, be trained to carry out the sequence with the handler out of sight), the dumbbell, the jump, and the handler's body language.

Since each cue becomes the reinforcer for the previous link, *it is very important to prevent the dog from getting the next cue if the link is not performed properly.* This can be difficult! For instance, if the dog swerves around the high jump, the dumbbell is lying right there and is the next cue in the chain. This is where carefully training a conditioned negative punisher really pays off—having some way of telling the dog

precisely when he loses the chance to be reinforced considerably speeds up training. If you can't communicate that instant and the dog carries out a few more links, there can be some confusion and you have to go back and straighten that out.

Maintaining a Chain

If the handler makes a practice of giving the primary reinforcer after the final link in the chain, what happens to the other links? They tend to become stepping stones to the real reinforcer and the dog stops putting so much effort into them. The dog only puts in the minimum amount of effort needed to get through them.

Some links may be self reinforcing. For example, many dogs absolutely love retrieving, so the chance to grab

the dumbbell becomes a primary reinforcer in and of itself. Those links don't need so much attention from the handler.

By training each link separately, the trainer can practice that link separately from the chain. The trainer can also stop the behavior chain at any link in the chain to give the primary reinforcer. Keep the dog guessing!

The trainer can also have the dog perform several different behavior chains (also known as obedience exercises!) before giving the primary reinforcer. If the trainer is using a schedule of reinforcement around ten chains, that is practicing a higher level of performance than is called for in the obedience ring.

Classical Conditioning

This is also known as Pavlovian conditioning or respondent conditioning. It's what Ivan Pavlov did with dogs and bells. Pavlov discovered that if a bell was rung at the same time a dog was fed, eventually the dog would salivate when they heard the bell, whether or not the food was present. There are other changes present which Pavlov was able to observe but not measure objectively with the technology available at the time; breathing and heart rate would slow down, for instance.

What Pavlov couldn't see or measure directly was that the dog's body was getting prepared to eat. The outward sign was salivation—Pavlov counted drops of saliva (I

wonder if he did his experiments with Saint Bernards?). What was happening inside the dog's body was much more complex and profound than just drooling.

Experienced dog people have known for years (centuries? millennia?) that when a dog is stressed out or highly excited, they won't eat. Now it's known that dogs cannot eat when they are experiencing an adrenaline surge. Conversely, if a dog is ready to eat, they are not producing adrenaline.

Almost everybody has experienced an adrenaline rush at some point in their life. Adrenaline is what makes you feel super alert and super reactive in an emergency. It makes you feel stronger and less aware of

pain than usual. Adrenaline creates that nervous tightening feeling in the pit of your stomach and makes you breathe faster. Since adrenaline is used by Mother Nature to help you fight or flee in an emergency, it is associated with feeling fear or anger. Adrenaline rushes don't last very long. After the emergency is over, the adrenaline rush disappears very quickly.

By pairing the clicker with food many, many times, it naturally becomes a classically conditioned stimulus. Watch an experienced clicker dog—you'll often see them drool a bit for each click (depending on how that dog's face is put together; some dogs never drool visibly). This drooling is the outward sign that their body is getting ready to

eat. If the clicker is paired with food enough times, it doesn't matter how the dog feels about the food offered or the state of that dog's appetite—their body will get ready to eat.

Classical conditioning is a way of training body functions that the dog cannot consciously control. By creating a classically conditioned stimulus, you can bypass the dog's thought processes. You can create an off switch for adrenaline production! A handler can deliberately use the clicker to manipulate the dog's emotional state.

RECIPES

Clicker training any particular exercise or action can be done in many different ways, called clicker recipes because each trainer can alter the recipe to taste.

Fearful Dogs

Using a clicker as a classically conditioned stimulus calls for some different training strategies than using the clicker as a conditioned reinforcer to teach the dog to act in a certain way. Using a conditioned reinforcer means waiting for a behavior to happen and then clicking it—the click is the consequence for the behavior. Using a classically conditioned stimulus means using

the clicker to create the behavior—the click comes *before* the behavior.

There is one major similarity between the two uses: using a classically conditioned stimulus is much, much more powerful than using food directly. The dog can choose to ignore the food (think of all the potential edibles that your dog passes up every day!). The dog's body is not capable of ignoring the classically conditioned stimulus, so the dog is forced to respond.

The first step is to identify when the dog is feeling fearful. Some fear based behaviors are very obvious: the dog cringes, shies, jumps, runs away, etc. Some are not so obvious—many dogs act aggressive due to fear. In my own experience,

well over 90% of all aggressive behavior is based in fear rather than dominance! Even more subtle are the things that stressed out dogs do: tongue flicking, averting eyes, scratching, puckered forehead, narrowed eyes, sniffing, etc. A lot of stress behavior is misidentified by handlers as distraction (and punished).

The next step is to just start clicking when the dog is feeling fearful. This is the point where many people get hung up: “but won’t I be reinforcing the dog in acting fearful???” Yes and no. If you only click the fearful behavior, yes, you might encourage further fearful behavior. But if you use the clicker to create an instant of calm inside the dog, then you can capture that instant with the clicker

and shape it into the behavior you want. You start out using the clicker as a classically conditioned stimulus and shift into using it as a conditioned reinforcer. Remember that there are always variations of behavior! Even a fear reaction will vary in intensity. Use your clicker to select out the least fearful behaviors and over time they will become more predominant. Natural variation will mean that the dog will start giving even less fearful behaviors and you can then capture those less fearful behaviors. This process is called differential reinforcement of low rates of response (DRL)--selecting out behaviors that you don't see very often and reinforcing them so that you see them more often.

When you start clicking a fearful dog, the dog may not act like they notice the click at all. Have faith and keep on clicking! Click once every three to five seconds; in other words between 12 and 20 times a minute. Offer food after each click. It takes a few seconds for the adrenaline rush to subside so be patient. If the dog was too frightened to eat, they may totally ignore the food at first. Keep offering it. The first change you see may be that the dog grabs the food and then spits it out. Don't take the time to pick up the food, just keep clicking. The first time the dog actually eats the food is a turning point. At that time, you might want to point out to the dog that someone was very messy and left food lying around on the ground.

At this point, the dog has learned not to be fearful in one context. If you shift the criteria, the dog is likely to act fearful again. It's just like any shift of criteria, you have to go back to kindergarten and re-teach the exercise. In a situation where the dog is fearful, a significant shift of criteria can be as small as moving a couple feet to one side or another. You may well have to go through the whole sequence of just clicking for nothing until you've created an instant of calm inside the dog that you can shape into less fearful behavior.

If you can set up the fearful situation to calm the dog with the clicker frequently, you can turn the fearful situation (stimulus) into a cue that something good is about to happen. For instance, if the dog is afraid of

garbage trucks and you set it up so that the dog gets clicked whenever there's a garbage truck in sight, the dog will come to associate garbage trucks with the clicker which is already associated with treats. Depending on the dog, you may end up with a dog who drools eagerly when she sees a garbage truck! This is called counterconditioning.

It's difficult to communicate how powerful using a classically conditioned stimulus really is. It has been said that counterconditioning is only effective if you can isolate the dog from whatever is frightening the dog except when you are actively counterconditioning. In theory, if a dog is frightened by other dogs, successful counterconditioning can only happen if the dog is isolated

from other dogs at all other times. My practical experience is that this is not true. Yes, it goes faster if the handler can control the dog's exposure to the frightening situation(s), but successful counterconditioning can take place even if the dog is exposed to the frightening situation at other times.

Another strategy that is useful with fearful dogs is to use the clicker as a conditioned reinforcer to teach the dog to offer behaviors that the dog naturally uses to release stress. These behaviors include: full body shakes, yawning, stretching, and big, wide tail wagging ("helicopter" wags). One reason that many dogs seem calmer in the conformation ring may be because their handlers teach them to shake on command to settle

their coat in place (for that “perfect yet natural” look). If things get too rowdy in play, dogs will do a full body shake to calm themselves and each other or as an apology if things get too rough. If a dog is in a situation where their hackles go up and then the frightening moment passes, many dogs will shake to help lay the hackles back down. In situations where the dog is tense, the handler can then use these behaviors to help the dog release stress.

Many of these behaviors can be shaped via capturing. Most dogs will do them at predictable times: stretching when they wake up from a nap or shaking after a bath. Carry a clicker and treats to capture these moments. Don't worry too much at first about getting them repeatedly in

one session, just click and treat and then go on with your every day life. With many dogs, the penny will drop and they will start to offer you the behavior deliberately. If your dog doesn't do this in a week or so (if you're diligent about carry a clicker and observing your dog), there are various ways to lure or elicit those behaviors deliberately.

"Try Something Different"

A variation of a conditioned negative punisher is to develop a cue that tells the dog "try something different." This combines a negative punisher ("you're not going to get a cookie for that") and a cue to the dog to do something different. This is a really useful skill to develop with your dog

and. The following usually takes more than one session to train.

One caution, however, is that some dogs have great difficulty in grasping the concept. That's fine! You can train a dog to do anything you want without using this skill. In my experience, the sort of dog that is least likely to pick this up is the dog who rarely offers different behaviors and who is very easy to teach via luring. In other words, dogs that don't have much imagination. If the dog is having difficulty in figuring out switching between two targets, I'd reconsider teaching the skill at all.

The first step is to assemble several similar targets. These can be anything that the dog doesn't mind touching: fake sheepskin discs, toys, margarine tub lids, etc.

Teach the dog to touch one single object. If you hold the object out to your dog in a presenting, "here it is" manner, the vast majority of dogs will come up and bump it with their noses. Fade your hand holding the target so that the dog is bumping the target when laid on a coffee table or on the ground.

By this time, the dog will have been reinforced quite a bit for bumping that target. Now it's time to teach the dog the cue for "try something different." Bring out your second target and lay it about a foot away from the first target. Watch the dog closely. Most dogs will touch the first target but a significant minority of dogs will immediately move to touch the second target. It doesn't really matter because no matter which way your

dog decides, you are going to immediately change your mind and click only for touching the other target.

The sequence goes: handler brings out second target and lays it down; dog approaches one target; handler gives the CNP (I'll use Ooops!). Some dogs will try harder on the target they've selected (extinction burst), other dogs immediately switch to the other target. If necessary, slide the targets closer together to help the dog switch targets. When the dog does switch targets, click and jackpot.

Continue to click for touching that target for awhile and then change your mind again. When the dog approaches the target, say Ooops! and withhold the click. When the dog

switches targets again, click and jackpot.

Work until the dog is switching easily between two targets when you say Ooops! Introduce a third target, following the same procedure. Work until you have introduced five or six targets and can switch the dog between them.

Then put all the targets away and teach the dog another simple behavior, like raising a paw. Then bring out one target and use Ooops! to switch the dog between raising the paw and bumping the target.

Then teach the dog yet another simple behavior and put away all the targets. Use Ooops! to switch the dog between behaviors with no targets in sight.

Doggie Zen

I call it Doggie Zen: to get the treat, you must give up the treat. It's the basis for most training—the foundation of "do what I want and then we'll do what you want."

Learning Doggie Zen is the beginning of learning emotional control.

Get a nice, smelly, really-high-on-the-delicious scale treat, let your dog know you have it and then close your hand over it. Let the dog lick, snuffle, poke, nudge, delicately nibble and try to get that treat out of your hand.

Eventually your dog will give up and back away or turn their head away—CLICK and open your hand so they can get the treat. If the dog bites harder than is acceptable, yelp and pull your hand up out of their reach for a minute. If the dog gets too

insistent and rough about trying to get the treat, give them a time out by going where they can't reach you for a few minutes.

The first few times you do this, it may take quite a while for your dog to give up. Just be patient, smile and say NOTHING. Your dog will eventually give up. Practice this exercise several times a day and in as many different places (at home, in the yard, at the park, in other people's houses, etc) as you can find.

Very quickly, your dog will start to back away when they see you hold out your closed hand. Voila! You have a signal! However, you might prefer a verbal command. When the dog is predictably backing up when

you present your closed hand, it's time to insert the verbal command. Say "Leave It!" sweetly, hold out your closed hand, click (when the dog backs away) and open your hand. Anticipation will take over and the dog will realize that the words "Leave It!" mean you're about to hold out your closed hand.

When your dog backs up well on the words "Leave It!" it's time to incorporate this command into new situations. When you go into a new situation, though, you have to go all the way back to kindergarten. The easiest way to do it is to sit down and **SILENTLY** place the treat on a chair next to you (assuming your dog is large enough to reach the seat of that chair). Let your dog try to pry the treat out from under your hand until

the dog gives up. When the dog backs up or turns their head away, click and move your hand so your dog can get the treat.

Your dog will learn to back off a bit quicker than they did the first time. When the dog is backing off when your hand goes over the treat, it's time to add in the verbal "Leave It!" to this situation.

Then start a new situation by dropping the treat on the floor and covering it with your foot. Again, you'll have to go back to kindergarten and re-teach it. This time, it should all go just a bit quicker.

Keep figuring out new situations. Keep going back to kindergarten to re-teach the "Leave It!" It will go just a little faster each time.

Jumping Up

This is a bugaboo for many pet owners. The classic advice is to punish the dog: step on the dog's back toes, knee them in the chest, put a leash on and jerk the dog's neck. However—what is the motivation for most jumping up? The dog is friendly and wants attention. So the easiest way to teach the dog not to jump up is to stop reinforcing the jumping up by withdrawing attention from the dog (negative punishment) and supplying an acceptable alternative for getting attention (positive reinforcement).

When the dog jumps up, the person turns their back or steps out the door. When the dog has all four on the floor, click and bend over the dog to

greet, exchange kisses, etc. Over time, you can use the clicker to shape a sit or a sit-and-shake hands.

The most difficult part of the whole process is getting the cooperation of family and friends. This is where teaching an interactive trick like shake hands is invaluable! People who simply will NOT stop reinforcing your dog for jumping up when you ask them to will stand and wait for the dog to offer a paw for shaking. Yes, you're training the other person to offer an incompatible behavior!

Pulling On Lead

Many otherwise highly trained dogs pull on lead (including my own!). This is especially prevalent with dogs that are usually walked on Flexi-leads (my dogs apply a Flexi-worth of

pressure to the lead). I don't care strongly enough about this to train it in my own dogs, but I have trained other people's dogs not to pull.

The easiest way is by catching the dog doing it right. Warning: do not try to catch it by letting the dog get to the end of the lead and then turning back to look at you—clicking for this behavior will result in a dog that alternately pulls and looks back.

Start out walking in a straight line. If you can, catch the dog while she is surging past you by clicking when she's in approximately the right position. Many dogs are too fast and many handlers are too slow for this to work, so the alternative strategy is to gently turn and walk the other way, allowing the dog to catch up. Use your hands to cushion the leash so

that the dog isn't jerked. As you walk in the other direction, the dog will catch up—this is the moment to click!

An alternative method (thank you, Sue Ailsby) is to gently step backwards until you have gotten far enough away from the distraction for the dog to stop focusing on the distraction and remember about walking nicely on lead.

At first, you click for every single right step. Very quickly you can move to clicking every other step, every third step, etc. Vary the number of steps for each click.

Targeting

Targeting is a very useful skill you can use to teach your dog all sorts of other skills. You teach the dog to touch a specific object with their nose, with a front foot, or with any other body part. The object can be a dowel, a telescoping pointer, a margarine tub lid, a back scratcher, a horse crop, or anything else that your dog can safely touch.

One way to teach targeting is by using your own index finger. Get your clicker handy and simply point at your dog. The vast majority of dogs will sniff and/or bump your finger with their nose. Click and treat! For the rare dog that doesn't naturally sniff your finger, putting on a smear of peanut butter, cream cheese, or

garlic is usually successful. A great advantage of using your finger is that you can actually feel when the dog is making contact.

When the dog is consistently touching your finger when you hold it right in front of them, move your finger an inch to the right or left. Gradually increase the distance the dog has to move in order to reach your finger. You can also move your finger up and down. Most dogs do not naturally check out things much above their own head level, so increase the distance upwards gradually.

When your dog can move a foot or so in any direction to touch your finger, it's time to transfer the skill to a target stick. Hold your target stick

so that it is even with your index finger, so that the dog touches both things at the same time. Move the target stick out, ahead of your fingertip an eighth of an inch at a time. Once the dog will touch the target stick when it is about two inches ahead of your index finger, you can simply curl your finger around the target stick in a natural holding position.

Move the target stick around, reinforcing frequently, until your dog can follow it in circles, serpentines and figure eights. You can move the target stick in a circle around your body, passing it behind your back—HEY! that's also called a finish, isn't it! Used in this way, the target stick is a lure. This usually is a more effective lure than food or toy lures—

rather than simply moving to try to get the food or toy, the dog is moving to manipulate the target stick in order to get you to click. It's a subtle difference but an important one.

Move the tip of the target stick downwards in increments, until your dog will touch it when it is on the floor. Place the target stick on the floor and withdraw your hand in increments, until the dog is touching the target stick even when you are standing up straight. You can move progressively further away from the target and you have a way to get the dog to stop when they are moving towards you—which is the first step towards a drop on recall or in respecting a barrier.

"Touch what I touch with the target stick"

The next level of targeting skill is to teach the dog to "touch what I touch with the target stick." There are several ways to teach this.

One way is to teach it in the same way you taught targeting initially. Touch an object with the target stick so that the dog is touching both the target stick and the object. Withdraw the target stick in tiny increments until the dog is touching the object rather than the target stick.

Another way to teach it is based on retrieving. Put two retrieve objects of approximately equal attraction out on the floor. Touch one of the objects with the target stick, withdraw the target stick and give the retrieve

command. Click as soon as the dog's mouth touches the object. If the dog completes the retrieve, that's fine. If the dog breaks off the retrieve, that's even better! When the dog is touching the correct object, start changing objects and working up to objects that are not retrievable.

Soft/fuzzy objects are easiest to get the dog to touch. Walls are a bit more difficult (you could smear the wall with a bit of cheese or hot dog to make it more attractive to the dog).

If your dog hasn't learned to retrieve yet, you can teach this with a variation on the shell game. Get two or three paper cups and use a permanent marker to number them. First teach the dog to knock over a paper cup in order to get at the treat underneath. When the dog has that

figured out, put out two cups and put a treat under one of them. Shuffle the cups a little so that the dog doesn't know which cup has the treat under it (but YOU remember the number!). Touch the cup with the treat with the target stick and let the dog go. When the dog approaches the cup with the treat, slowly pull the target stick up a bit so that the dog can knock over the cup. You click as soon as the dog touches that cup. If the dog knocks over the cup to get the treat, that's fine. If the dog stops and comes to you for a treat, that's even better! Eventually, you will stop putting the treat under the cup anyway. Most dogs will try the other cup before or after the target cup—don't worry about it, just ignore it. When the dog has figured out that the presence of

the target stick is the clue to which cup has the treat, put out another cup. When the dog has that figured out, start pulling the target stick away from the cup a little sooner. When you can pull the stick away from the cup while the dog is still at your side, start putting out toys instead of cups. Then start using a variety of different objects.

Laser Pointer

It's easy to teach a dog to follow the dot from a laser pointer as an extension of targeting. Here are four ways to try it:

1) Capturing

Some dogs are naturally fascinated by the dot and will follow it or paw at it spontaneously, so that would be my first strategy. Dim light helps

make the dot more visible. Carpeting, particularly light colored shag carpeting, diffuses the dot and makes it larger and more obvious. It's easy to use the clicker to capture the actions of a dog that naturally plays with the dot.

2) Backchaining

Some dogs do not naturally follow the dot—in fact, they often seem unaware of it. A different training strategy is to use anticipation to teach the dog to see the dot.

First I teach the dog to "touch what I touch with the target stick" as above. Then put out an object and light it with the laser pointer for a good, long moment. Nyla and Gumma thingies light up nicely, as do fake sheepskin things. I don't worry if the dog doesn't

appear to notice the dot and I don't try to do anything like pointing at the dot. After I've lit the object with the dot, I turn off the laser pointer and touch the object with my target stick. This is simple backchaining. The dog will quickly figure out that the laser dot predicts what you will touch with your target stick.

3) Luring

Find a treat that blends in with the flooring. You should be able to see it easily, but the dog should have to hunt it by scent. I have light yellow shag carpeting in my bedrooms and have found that Peanut Butter Captain Crunch cereal is a good blend.

Toss out one treat at a time and light it with the laser pointer. Don't worry

about the dog's head breaking the beam when they home in on the treat—eventually, you want the dog to remember the location of the dot without seeing that spot lit continuously. Most dogs will figure out fairly quickly that watching for the laser dot is quicker than hunting the treat by scent.

4) Shaping

Light an object with the laser dot and use the clicker to shape the dog towards touching the dot. This can be slow and tedious—but then the dog gets the idea and it is just amazing!

Once the dog has learned to touch what you've lit with the laser dot with whatever method you use, you want to start turning off the dot before the dog gets to it. In small increments,

turn off the dot sooner and sooner, until you are just lighting the target spot for a second or two before the dog heads for it.

You can use this skill to teach the dog to do go outs. Pick a command that means "the laser dot will be straight ahead of us." Say the command, then light up whatever is directly in front of you. When you see the dog anticipating that the dot will be straight ahead, use the dot for a shorter and shorter period (fade the dot).

PROBLEM SOLVING

I am often asked for advice by people who are having problems with their dogs. I have come to realize that, for me at least, problem solving does not rely on having an inspired hunch. Problem solving is as easy as moving down a mental list of questions and exploring the possibilities. Following is a list of the questions I ask, in roughly the order I ask it, some of the possible answers and what those answers might suggest.

- 1) *Could this be a medical problem?*
Especially in adult dogs in familiar situations, changes of behavior can be the first symptom of a medical problem. Well over half of all housetraining problems in adult

dogs are due to medical problems like urinary tract infections, parasitism, full or impacted anal sacs, hormonal imbalance, etc. Changes in temperament, particularly towards increased fearfulness or irritability, can be early symptoms of hypothyroidism or cardiomyopathy. In older dogs, increased anxiety can be a symptom of serious illness that makes the dog feel more vulnerable. There's no point in trying to train a medical problem, so this question should be answered first.

2) *What is the behavior?* People often make mistakes by trying to describe the dog's motives in very general terms (for example, "that dog is acting dominant") rather than

describing specific behaviors (“that dog is guarding her food bowl”). Describing a dog as dominant doesn’t help in figuring out a way to teach that dog to be an acceptable member of society. Describing the how, what, when, and where of a behavior is necessary to defining the behavior.

3) *Has the dog ever done anything like this before?* Generally, for something to be defined as a problem, the dog has been repeating the behavior or an approximation of the behavior. This is where a good knowledge of canine behavior is important. Many people don’t see any connection between Muffy hanging back when visitors come to the house and Muffy snapping at a stranger when

she's on lead, so they say that Muffy did it without warning. However, Muffy has been trying to avoid strangers for a long time and then one day, her usual choice (moving away or, in other words, flight) was taken away by the leash and she had to do something else to try to keep what feels to Muffy like a safe distance. Muffy has been giving a warning for a long time but her owners just never noticed it.

4) *What is the reinforcement for the behavior?* Dogs don't usually repeat any action unless there is something in it for them. If you can figure out the reinforcer for the behavior, it often suggests a course of action. Remember that dogs do things for dog reasons and that those reasons don't include human

emotions like spite or revenge. Muffy chews the couch because it's fun and good jaw exercise, not because she's taking revenge for her owner leaving her alone every day.

- 5) *If there are multiple problems, is there an overall pattern?* This is where an assessment of the dog's overall attitude can be made. If the dog shows many dominant or fearful behaviors, the owner can implement an overall attitude re-adjustment program **AS WELL AS** training for each specific problem.
- 6) *Is training this problem worth the time and effort?* Some problems are easier to deal with by management or prevention, rather than training the dog. Garbage raiding is a classic because it is

strongly self reinforcing. It's also a bit scary to train, because the consequences of failure could be fatal to the dog. Yes, dogs can be taught not to raid the garbage but most of the time it's easier to put the garbage out of the dog's reach.

- 7) *What has the owner tried to do about this problem in the past?* No point in repeating failure—many possible courses of action can be eliminated by this question. A lot of information can also be gathered from the owner's response—oftentimes, enough to pinpoint why the dog is still acting that way.
- 8) *What are the owner's physical and mental capabilities?* Talking about dog training is well and good, but eventually someone has to actually

train the dog. If the person who will be training the dog isn't capable of carrying out a certain training strategy, the dog won't get trained.

9) *What are the possible outcomes of certain actions?* You can't predict everything a dog will do, but it's always a good idea to go through the possibilities and make plans for them.

LAGNIAPPE

Lagniappe is a Cajun word meaning “a little something extra.” The things in this section aren’t clicker training but they’re useful to know anyway.

Breakfast of Champions

1 large (15-20 ounce) box of cereal
(I use Cheerios)

1 package of hot dogs

1 large handful of freeze-dried liver

Cut the hot dogs into coins, about 60 coins per hot dog. Spread them out on a white paper towel and cover them with another paper towel. Nuke them in the microwave for approximately 3 minutes on full power. Microwaves vary, so keep an eye on them. When they are done,

they should be crisp around the edges and rubbery in the middles. If they burn, they're fine, dogs love them that way too. They will be incredibly greasy! Mix them with the cereal and the freeze dried liver in a large sealable container. The cereal will absorb the grease and odor of the hot dogs. I've kept this mixture at room temp for as long as six months with no problems.

Hot Dogs for Puppies and Toy Sized Dogs

1 package of hot dogs

Cut the hot dogs into quarters lengthwise. Then line up the quarters and cut across them fifty or more times—you'll get 200 or more individual bits out of each hot dog. Put the hot dogs in a sauce pan and

fill the pan with water. Boil the hot dog bits for ten minutes, then put the pieces into a sieve or strainer and rinse under cold running water. This removes a great deal of the fat and salt from the hot dogs—too much salt can induce vomiting and too much fat isn't good for little dogs. The hot dog pieces are rubbery but easily swallowed. These should be refrigerated and used up within a week.

Faux Paws "Ice Cream"

32 ounces plain or vanilla yogurt

8 ounces peanut butter

Mix well and freeze in small amounts; ice cube trays work well! Let partially thaw before giving to your dog. Makes a great jackpot treat.

Liver Kisses

1 lb raw beef liver

2 eggs

1-2 cloves of garlic (optional)

1 1/2 tablespoons of bonemeal powder

2 cups of all purpose flour

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Put the liver, garlic (optional) and the eggs into a food processor and whiz them until they are a disgusting slurry. Fish through the slurry with a fork to remove the stringy bits of tissue from the liver. Put the slurry into a bowl and add the remaining ingredients. Mix well. If the dough is too stiff, add water to thin. Fill a large pastry bag with a medium sized tip (star, round, whatever catches your fancy) and pipe kisses onto a sheet

of baking parchment. Cook for 12 minutes and then check by breaking one kiss in half. It should be brown (chocolate colored) all the way through and be somewhat like bread dough inside. Cool and then store in the refrigerator or freezer. I've kept these at room temperature for up to 24 hours with no problems. These kisses don't create as much odor as cooking liver bar cookies. Adding garlic seems to make the liver odor more pronounced to me, so I don't use it.

Thunderstorm Phobia

I have used and recommended Bach Rescue Remedy with success. This is a homeopathic remedy (also available as Calming Essence—different brand). The theory of

homeopathy treats the whole patient rather than the individual symptoms, so two dogs with the same symptoms may need different remedies. Rescue Remedy does not work for every dog, but when it works, it is very effective. The dosage is 2-4 drops directly on the tongue, repeated every five minutes as needed (although I haven't met any dogs who needed more than two doses).

Some dogs are apparently bothered by the static charge in the air during a storm; they may tend to seek shelter in the bathtub or behind the toilet (which grounds them). Some of these dogs gain relief when they are treated with an anti-static spray (spray onto a rag or paper towel and wipe the dog with it).

Neutering Male Dogs

I won't go into the benefits of neutering, which are widely known. Something less widely known is how to help adult males be more comfortable after neutering. In "standard" neutering, the testicles are removed from a small incision in the scrotum (the sack of skin that holds the testicles). With puppies, the testicles are small and the skin is thin and elastic, so the scrotum shrinks rapidly after surgery. With adult males, the testicles are larger and the skin is thicker and less elastic. A common complication of neutering adult male dogs is that the scrotum swells hugely, causing great discomfort for as long as several weeks. This discomfort (pain) can be completely prevented by having the

veterinarian perform a “scrotal ablation.” This is the complete removal of the scrotum. It is considered more invasive surgery because more tissue is removed and it leaves a longer incision; however, it completely prevents the huge swelling that causes many males so much pain (and the attendant risk of infection).

Living with High Energy Dogs

I enjoy them! But high energy does bother some people; the following management strategies have been very successful.

Check the dog’s diet. An adult dog with too much energy might be getting the canine equivalent of rocket fuel. Look for a high quality food with about 20% protein and 12%

fat. Better yet, make the dog's food (there are several books with good recipes—I recommend Dr Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats by Richard Pitcairn DVM, PhD and Susan Hubble Pitcairn).

The dog should be getting 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day— aerobic meaning that the dog is panting steadily.

Use up some of the energy by having the dog “hunt” for meals. Instead of feeding the dog out of a bowl, hide a handful of food here and there throughout the house and/or yard, then turn the dog loose to find it. If that gets too easy, invest in a couple Kongs and stuff them with some of the food and with dog

biscuits so that the dog has to really work to get it out.

Teach the dog to track or play scent discrimination games. Scentwork isn't physically exhausting but it does mentally tire out dogs.

Another alternative is the Buster Cube, a blue plastic cube about five inches per side with a hole leading into the interior. Dry kibble is placed in the middle of the cube and the dog has to roll Buster around to get the food out. It takes my dogs, who are absolute Buster addicts, about an hour to empty the cube completely.

Bite Inhibition

Once upon a time I was a novice dog owner (no, the dinosaurs weren't roaming the earth but I'm not sure if the Ice Age was over quite yet!). I

had my first dog, Sheba, a German Shepherd who was practically perfect in every way and I wanted a puppy. When I got the puppy, I'd done a lot of reading about the best way to raise a puppy and I'd talked to all the experienced dog owners I could find. There were differences of opinion about many issues but on one issue there was unanimity: never, ever let a puppy bite!

I was the kid who always tried to color inside the lines and obey all the rules, so of course I wasn't about to allow my brand new puppy, Fergie (another German Shepherd) bite. But when I watched her with Sheba, most of their play was mouth play. They played tug of war, they wrestled, and most fun of all, they laid face to face and jaw wrestled while making a

singsong wrestling growl. I wanted in on it, too. I didn't get a puppy just so Sheba could have all the fun!

I noticed that Fergie had bitten Sheba a little too hard a few times and Sheba had somehow taught her to keep her bite soft. I thought that I could probably figure out how to do it as well.

The books said that if I let Fergie bite me or play tug of war, she would think of me as a littermate and try to dominate me. However, I could see that Sheba had no trouble at all maintaining her position as Fergie's superior. In fact, sometimes Sheba had to encourage Fergie to play by rolling over on her back and waving her front feet at Fergie. Sheba didn't make a big show out of being superior; as far as I could see, she

simply assumed she was and Fergie went along with that. So did every other dog that Sheba met, even when Sheba was a dignified old lady of fifteen. Well, I could do that, too.

For years it was my secret: I played with my dogs by letting them mouth wrestle with my hands. They never tried to dominate me and they only did it in play. I continued reading and discovered something startling: there were actual experts who talked about bite inhibition. When I read the description of bite inhibition it was exactly what I had been calling "biting nice."

So now I'm out of the closet. Not only do I play mouth games with all my dogs, I actually teach them to play mouth games and tug of war!

This is all about how I do it and why I do it.

From watching puppies and from talking to experienced breeders, I learned that it's normal for puppies between about six and sixteen weeks old to be obsessed with playfighting. When two puppies of this age meet, they want to wrestle. At this age, Mother Nature has given them needle sharp puppy teeth, so they can really sting each other but they can't cause serious damage. I believe that the lesson that puppies learn at this age is the most important one a puppy can learn: how much bite is enough and how much bite is too much.

Any dog can be pushed into a position where they feel they must bite to defend themselves. The

difference between the dog that administers a good hard pinch to the tormenting six year old human and the dog that rips the six year old's face off is bite inhibition.

The traditional methods of teaching puppies never to bite include things like scruff shakes, cuffing the puppy under the chin or the infamous "alpha wolf rollover." A very common complaint by people who use these methods is that the puppy turns around and bites harder. Two puppies playing together egg each other on by jumping on each other, poking at each other with their feet, and wrestling! No wonder many puppies come back and bite harder—their human is giving them every indication they should.

How do puppies learn bite inhibition? By biting! Trying to teach a puppy bite inhibition without allowing them to bite is like trying to teach a child to ride a bike without ever letting them get on the bike. It just can't be done.

How do puppies learn when they've bitten too hard? They give each other feedback. Just enough bite is rewarded with more play. Too much bite and the other puppy yelps and stops playing. It works for humans too: let the puppy bite and give a very high pitched yelp if there's too much pressure. A normal puppy will back off for an instant. If the human is a good actor, the puppy will do some self calming by shaking or sitting down to scratch or else apologize by giving a lick. It's

often best to rehearse your high pitched IPE! or OUCH! in private before trying it out on your puppy.

If the puppy comes right back and bites harder, give another high pitched yelp and walk away. Go somewhere the puppy can't reach you. The message: puppies that can't play nice play alone.

Some people roll the puppy's lip over their teeth either to prevent biting or to promote bite inhibition. This is not as effective because the puppy has to learn to moderate their bite without the feedback of pain from their own nervous system.

Very quickly, the puppy learns how much bite is enough to make the game fun and how much bite stops the game altogether. They bite and

mouth but they do it in such a way that it doesn't hurt at all.

Figure out how to initiate mouthplay with your puppy. It's usually pretty obvious—certain body postures, hand gestures, etc, will get the puppy to playing. For the times when you'd rather NOT be covered with puppy slime, teach your puppy Doggie Zen. When you have a good, reliable Leave It! on command, start using it when your puppy initiates mouthplay. Not every single time at first—but maybe one time out of five. And then one time out of four, one time out of three, etc, until you use it whenever your puppy initiates mouthplay.

When your puppy is about six to seven months old, use "Leave It!" whenever your puppy initiates mouthplay. Don't give up mouthplay

altogether, though! You worked hard to develop that soft mouth and it's like any skill that depends in part on muscle memory—it needs to be practiced to keep it fresh

Easy Rinsing Shampoo

1 cup Orvus paste

1 gallon (minus 1 cup) water

1/2 teaspoon essential oil of lavender (optional)

1/2 teaspoon essential oil of rosemary (optional)

Mix together well. This shampoo is very dilute, but it lathers well and rinses well. The lavender and rosemary add a nice but not overwhelming scent and are also good for coat.

Whattalotta Options Cookies

The following recipe is a guide for creating dog cookies with whatever you happen to have on hand. Just how healthy and nutritious these cookies are depends on what you choose as ingredients.

Choose two or more of the following to make a total of 3 cups:

whole wheat flour spelt flour
white flour soy flour
rice flour barley flour
oat flour potato flour
wheat germ (not more than one cup)
powdered milk (not more than one cup)
torula (nutritional) yeast (not more than one cup)

powdered buttermilk (not more than 1/2 cup)

Choose one or more of the following to total 3/4's of a cup:

milk water
 buttermilk vegetable oil
 cream butter or margarine
 egg (1 egg equals 1/4 cup)
 egg white (2 egg whites equals 1/4 cup)

Choose one of the following (to help the cookies brown nicely):

1 teaspoon of honey 1 1/2
 teaspoons of white sugar
 1 teaspoon of molasses 1 1/2
 teaspoons of brown sugar

Choose one or more of the following to total 1/3 cup:

small baby food jar of meat
peanut butter
salt (not more than 1 teaspoon)
canned veggies
fresh garlic (not more than one
tablespoon)

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.
Mix all of the above (really helps to
have a blender or Cuisinart). Roll out
the dough on a lightly floured surface
to a thickness of about 1/4 inch.
Transfer to cookie sheet. Use a pizza
cutter or ordinary table knife to cut
the dough lengthwise into ribbons 1/2
inch wide or so. Don't worry about
completely separating the ribbons,
they'll snap apart easily after baking.
Cut the dough at right angles to form
cookies that are about 1/2 inch
square (smaller for smaller dogs).
Bake for approximately 15 minutes—

times vary with the ingredients and how thick you roll out the dough.

If you cook them so that they are soft and chewy, dogs love 'em but they don't keep as long. If you cook them so that they are crispy all the way through, they'll keep for quite a while (varies with ingredients).

Remember, there are no preservatives, so I store them in the fridge or freezer.

