

# Conditioning the Clicker and Attention

## Exercise 5.5

In this exercise you will teach a puppy the meaning of the clicker by pairing it with food treats. You'll know the puppy understands the meaning of the clicker when he orients to you in anticipation of a treat.

### You'll need

Clicker

Puppy or dog (it's best if he's hungry!)

Several small, delicious treats

Treat bag

Quiet, non-distracting environment

### Conditioning the Clicker

Hold the clicker behind your back, against your side, or in a pocket the first few times that you click. This minimizes the risk of the sound startling or frightening the puppy.

1. Place a handful of treats in your hand before you begin. You should deliver treats to the puppy as quickly as possible initially. Holding the treats in your hand reduces the time it takes to reach into the treat bag.
2. Hold your hands in a neutral position.
3. Click once, then deliver one treat (remember your clicker mechanics: treat hand remains still until after you click).
4. Repeat this until the puppy orients to you in anticipation of his treat. Then you'll know he understands the meaning of the clicker. With most dogs, this happens very quickly.

### Attention

The first step in training is having a puppy's attention. The attention cue is used for focusing the puppy on the handler. An attentive puppy eases training.

**Goal:** Puppy looks to the handler's eyes when cued.

**Possible cues:** "Watch," "Watch me," "Look," "Eyes"

**Helpful hints**

- When first teaching attention, make sure you are in a non-distracting environment.
- Avoid using the puppy's name as the cue because it is overused and not reinforced sufficiently outside of training.
- Reinforce quiet attention (eye contact).
- Do not click and reward any other offered behaviors (barking, jumping, mouthing).
- Delivering (spitting) treats from your mouth to the puppy can help. Naturally, the puppy will want to stare at your mouth.
- When initially training small dogs, sitting on the floor may be easier because the dog does not have to look up as far.
- Shy dogs might not be comfortable looking people in the eye, especially if being stared at by the handler. Avoid staring at the dog and click and reward looking toward your face.

**Get the behavior**

1. Click the instant the puppy looks at your face (not necessarily your eyes).
2. Hand a treat to him. Repeat varying which hand delivers the treat.
3. Once the puppy is quickly looking up at your face to earn the click, begin to toss a treat on the floor. Vary where the treat is tossed. Alternate between tossing the treat on the ground and offering a treat from the hand. By tossing the treat, this resets the dog to reorient to the handler rather than just sitting and staring. Refer to video.
4. Practice 1 to 2 times a day for 10 to 20 repetitions. Repeat until the puppy is reliably looking at your face/eyes to earn a click/treat.

**Add the cue**

1. Add the cue once the behavior is predictable. When the puppy finishes eating the treat and begins to turn to look at your face, give your verbal "attention" cue. The verbal cue should precede eye contact. Repeat 10 times.