

Marker ABCs

A marker is a training tool that communicates to your puppy they just did something that you really like.

- The marker can be a unique sound like a clicker or a special word that is delivered just as you see your puppy they just did something that you really like. A clicker is a small device that makes a “click” sound when pressed. If you like the idea of the clicker but you find that you are “all thumbs” using it, you can use a special word instead of the click. A good choice is the word “YES!” As soon as your dog does something you like you can say “YES!” and then give him a treat.

Why bother using a marker sound when your dog does something right?

- The marker instantaneously and precisely conveys the information to your puppy that they just did something you really like, just like taking a photograph captures a moment in time.
- Sometimes the behavior we want to reward happens so quickly that it is hard to reward the dog fast enough. A good example of this is loose-leash walking. We want to let the puppy know EXACTLY when he is walking in the right spot – alongside us with a loose leash. Marking at the very moment he is doing the right thing, and then giving him his reward, helps him **learn the correct behavior more quickly.**
- Sometimes the puppy is a distance away from you when he does the right thing - for example: sitting to be petted instead of jumping up on a stranger at the far side of the dog park, or crossing the living room to pick up a dog toy rather than chewing on the shoe right next to him. Your puppy needs to know when his good behavior has earned him a reward – and you can do that by quickly marking while your pup is at a distance, and then giving your puppy the well-earned reward right afterward.

The marker is followed up with a reward.

- When using a clicker or a word for your marker, only click or say your word **ONCE** for the behavior. Try not to repeat the click or the word. You want to mark once and then reward.
- By giving your dog a reward (food, treat, game) after each mark, he will learn to LOVE the sound of the marker. The marker sound will come to mean “REWARD TIME!”

Summary of Key Points for Marker Training:

- ✓ Mark only when your dog has done something you like, otherwise you are reinforcing behavior you don't want
- ✓ Whenever you mark you **must** reward the dog as soon as possible afterward, with a treat or something to dog likes
- ✓ Instead of a clicker you can use the verbal marker “YES!”
- ✓ Only click once or say your word once.
- ✓ **Don't mark the dog to get his attention, mark him when he is already paying attention to you.**