

Using a marker in training

- and teaching 'sit' and 'down'

When training dogs, it's important to remember that any behaviour a dog finds rewarding is a behaviour they are likely to do again in the future! We can help to make any behaviour we like, and want them to do, rewarding for our dog by making sure it results in them having a nice time. To work best, the rewards we use have to be something our dog really wants and will make an effort to find out exactly how they have to behave in order for us to reward them!

A marker is a special signal used in training that tells your dog **'yes, you got it right, you're brilliant!'** You can think of it as taking a snapshot photograph of the correct behaviour – exactly at the precise time that good behaviour is happening!

The sound of the marker means **'I am going to give you a reward now, in direct response to the exact behaviour you were doing as you heard this sound'**.

Once a dog understands this they are likely to repeat that behaviour

again, in order to hear the marker sound again, and receive a reward again! Clever dog!



A marker signal helps when training new behaviours, because once the dog understands how it works they will remember that they are receiving a reward for the behaviour they were doing when they heard the marker! And of course, they'll be more likely to repeat that behaviour again, as they know it works out well for them!

What can I use as a marker?

Use a marker that you feel comfortable with! Remember you might need to take it to training classes and different places so if you might forget a small handheld mechanical device then use your voice instead – as you'll always have it - and consider visual signals for deaf dogs!

Markers can be:

- ❃ **Vocal** – some people say “yes” or “nice”. Choose a word your dog is unlikely to hear at other times, so you don't confuse them. Take care to say the word calmly because sometimes we can get excited during training, especially when our dogs are doing really well! But shouting out the marker might

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excite, distract or even confuse them – the aim is to be consistent and say the word in the same way every time you use it!

- 🐾 Visual – an obvious hand signal such as a thumbs-up can be a useful marker for a deaf dog.
- 🐾 Mechanical – some owners prefer to use handheld devices that make a click sound when pressed (clicker) or whistles. The benefit of a clicker is that it **always sounds the same to a dog every time they hear it, unlike our own voice which can change in tone, pitch and volume** so it will always give a consistent signal!



Getting started

Before you can start to use a marker, you'll need to first prepare to use it by teaching your dog that the sound of it means something good is on its way!

- 🐾 With tasty treats that your dog really likes nearby - but not in your hand so they don't distract them – FIRST make the marker sound and SECOND straight away give your dog a treat. Repeat this so your dog is hearing the marker then getting the treat – marker then treat, marker then treat! You're building up this pattern in your dog's head, so they know to expect a treat when they hear the marker – and at the moment it's so easy for them that they can't get it wrong, because we haven't even asked them to do anything at all other than be there... yet!
- 🐾 Repeat this until your dog looks to you when they hear the marker, expecting a treat. It is important that you use your marker first, and then get the treat for your dog afterwards – if you use the marker and get the treat at the same time this will make it harder for them to learn that the marker is important (they will just watch you for movement towards the treats instead of paying attention to the sound!).
- 🐾 Once your dog is responding to the marker by expecting a treat straight away you're ready to start using the marker to help teach him to do a specific behaviour when you ask!

How to teach your dog to Sit - using a marker and 'luring'

We can teach dogs many new skills using a technique called 'luring' – where we use food to lure them into the position we want, to help them get it right straight away, and then reward them. Luring is a much kinder way to guide your dog into position – rather than using physical force and pushing or pulling them into position - as it requires your dog to learn the correct behaviour for themselves and removes any potential for causing fear or discomfort. Our dogs are our friends, so we don't want to push them around – and we really don't need to!

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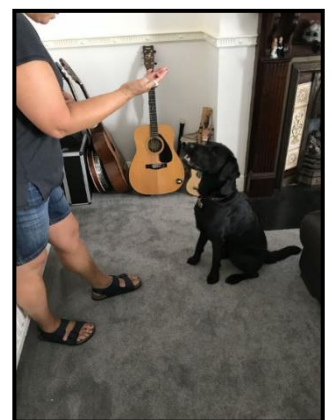
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- Take a treat and hold it out to your dog's nose, then slowly and smoothly raise your hand above and over their head. Your dog should move their head back to follow the treat and when doing so, as their body hinges, their bottom should touch the floor. **The very second your dog's bottom hits the floor use your marker to capture this precise moment, and then quickly give them the treat.**



- You don't need to say anything at all to your dog at this point, other than telling them how clever they are for getting it right! Asking them to "sit" now is meaningless, because they don't know what this word means, and you might find yourself saying it over and over again, which will only confuse them in the long run – when in future you'll want them to sit the first time you say it!
- Repeat this until your dog is quickly sitting down when you present and then move the treat from their nose to above their head. You can now add your instruction word "sit". **Dogs learn language by associating the word or words we say with the action they are doing! This means that when we are teaching them a new instruction word (or cue) we need them to connect it with the appropriate action before we can use it.** So now that your dog understands the behaviour they have to do in order to get the marker and their reward, start to say "sit" as they move to sit down. Then continue to mark the moment that they do sit down and of course follow up with their reward.
- Repeat this several times so that your dog has lots of opportunity to connect the word 'sit' with the action of moving into a sitting position.
- Now you're ready to try without having a treat in your hand! Say "sit" as you move your hand exactly as you did before when you held the treat, from your dog's nose to up above their head. You are now luring them into position with your hand only – without a treat in it! If they struggle without the treat in your hand you can use it for a little longer before fading it out in this way.
- Once you can lure your dog with your hand empty you should be following this pattern:



Saying "sit" and guiding your dog into position with an empty hand > giving the marker exactly at the point their bottom hits the floor > following this up with a treat!

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- ✿ The last step is to make your hand signal smaller so that your dog doesn't rely on it and is able to sit when you ask them to with your voice – as you might not always have your hands-free when you want them to sit! Dogs often enjoy learning with hand signals because they naturally respond very well to visual movements within their environment and watching our body movement helps them understand things, so they might struggle with this step – take it slowly and if they do struggle just go back to a step at which they were confident and repeat that for a little while longer before trying again. Start to make your luring hand movement gradually smaller and smaller, so that your spoken instruction of “sit” becomes the most obvious signal to your dog. Remember to always mark and reward at the right times!

How to teach your dog to lie down – using marking, luring and shaping

Shaping is a way of training a dog to do something that involves using your marker to mark very gradual steps that your dog makes towards the desired end result – always following

the marker with a reward of course! For example, if we wanted to teach a dog to go up a flight of stairs then we might begin by marking them for walking up to the first step when we lure them. Once they were doing this with confidence and ease we might then withhold the marker until the dog is confident being lured onto the second step and mark them at this new point! Once the dog became confident at reaching two steps we might again withhold the marker until the point at which they are confidently lured up to three steps... and so on!

Shaping is useful when the behaviour we want our dog to do is much more complicated, and some dogs can find lying down very difficult because it is so much easier for them to stand up when we start luring them, so they can become confused! Make sure you are always consistent and do lots of repetitions marking exactly the same step to make sure they're happy with this stage before moving on – by this point, when they're confident, when they don't hear you mark them when they expect they should carry on moving in an attempt to get you to mark them, and bingo! they were right - you'll mark the next step and can progress! Videoing yourself is a great way to check if you're marking your dog at the right time – plus you'll have a lovely record of their progress!

When teaching a dog to lie down you might find you have to initially start off marking just a slight crouch or lowering of their back for several repetitions, and then progress to marking them for getting closer to the ground for the next while. It might involve a fair few steps for some dogs before the point at which they realise they're being marked and rewarded for getting closer and closer to the ground, but for other dogs they'll lie down very quickly! There's no right or wrong, it's every dog at their own pace as learning is individual! Just the same as us humans!

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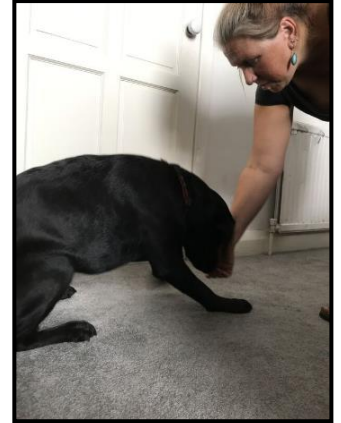
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- 🐾 Starting with your dog in the sit position, hold a treat near your dog's nose, and in a slow, smooth motion move the treat down in front of their chest and in a straight line between their legs until it reaches the floor. Your dog should naturally follow the treat and lower their back or even begin to crawl forwards with their front paws. Use your marker when your dog starts to move towards the floor (even a crouch to begin with!) and repeat this until your dog is following the treat all the way down to the floor.
- 🐾 If your dog stands up, don't worry, stay calm and remember at the beginning stages there's no point asking them to "lie down" because they just don't know what these words mean yet. Just go back to luring them very slowly and mark very gradual stages in which they start to lower their body to the ground, this might even be just bending their head forwards to begin with. There's no need to rush and going at their own pace means they'll really be learning this well, and they'll understand this action throughout their whole life, so it's worth it!
- 🐾 Repeat each step and progress gradually until your dog is reliably following the lure all the way into a 'lying down' position. Repeat this several times so it becomes second nature to your dog to follow your lure into the down position. You will now be marking the point at which they assume the 'lying down' position and following it by giving them the reward.
- 🐾 Once your dog will easily and confidently follow your lure into the down position you can add in your spoken instruction "down". Start to say the word as your dog gets themselves into the correct position. This means they will start to connect the word "down" with this very action. Remember to carry on marking them when they reach the down position and always follow this with a reward. Repeat this stage several times so that your dog has lots of opportunity to connect the word 'down' with the action of moving into a lying down position.
- 🐾 Now you're ready to try without having a treat in your hand! Say "down" as you move your hand exactly as you did before when you held the treat, from your dog's nose down to the floor. You are now luring them into position with your hand only – without a treat in it! If they struggle without the treat in your hand you can use it for a little longer before fading it out in this way.
- 🐾 Once you can lure your dog with your empty hand you should be following this pattern:



Saying "down" and guiding your dog into position with an empty hand > giving the marker exactly at the point when they lie down (watch out for hovering!) > following this up with a treat!

- 🐾 The last step is to make your hand signal smaller so that your dog doesn't rely on it and is able to lie down when you ask them to with your voice – as you might not always have your hands-free when you

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want them to lie down! Dogs often enjoy learning with hand signals because they are very visual and watching our body movement helps them, so they might struggle with this step – take it slowly and if they do struggle just go back to a step at which they were confident and repeat that for a little while longer before trying again. Start to make your luring hand movement gradually smaller and smaller, so that your spoken instruction of “down” becomes the most obvious signal to your dog. Remember to always mark and reward at the right times!

Trouble-shooting

If your dog struggles to either sit or lie down, then try asking them to sit on a comfy blanket instead of the floor. If they still struggle it may be uncomfortable or painful for them to sit or lie down, so book an appointment for your vet to examine them to make sure they're okay!

Top Training Tips

- 🐾 All dogs are individual and learn at their own pace – they have strengths and weaknesses, just like people!
- 🐾 Try to set your dog up to always be successful when training! If they are finding things too hard, think about how you can make it easier, or go back to a stage at which they were confident and repeat that for a little while longer.
- 🐾 Keep training short and sweet - little and often keeps it fun and entertaining, for both of you! Finish with a fun game!

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs.

If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog please email:

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Your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via: www.dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk

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