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MOGIF 

# DOG OBEDIENCE

Training at home



**10 EASY TIPS**  
for training  
your  
**DOG/PUPPY**  
regardless of  
his age



Usually, we tell our dog “**great job**” whenever they do something right such as following our instructions.

Whenever I ask my customers if they have a word of praise for their dogs, there are several words that we use during our practical dealings with them which can also cause a problem. The problem is, the dog lacks the necessary understanding behind those signals and commands that we give them, and sometimes the time management in giving those signals also causes a problem—which will be discussed later.

We can all agree that teaching dogs in our own human language is really difficult. That is why we need a “signal marker” or cues to tell them that they’re doing a “good job” and that they deserve to be awarded in following our instructions. This “signal marker” should be conditioned as early as possible.

With this signal marker and the shifting of the reward point, we work our way along the training plan towards our desired goal.

# What is a Signal Marker?

A signal marker is a certain word or sound that “signals” the dog’s behavior with pinpoint accuracy which tells the dog: “What you’re doing right now is correct from a human point of view - and you will get a positive reward for it.”

Accordingly, you only have 0.5 to 2 seconds to react whenever a dog demonstrates a behavior that will be followed by a reward, giving you insufficient time. It’s usually difficult to react in time whenever they do a positive behavior so a Signal Marker can help you with this.

(Source: [easy-dogs.net](http://easy-dogs.net))

## What is a reward point?

I will illustrate this with a description of a situation:

A strange dog comes up to you and you want your dog to look at you instead of looking at the other dog.

1. 1st point:

Mark your dog’s gaze to the other dog a few times and then stop. Your dog is already expecting the click/signal marker to come and will look at you if it does not. This is when we move the reward point .... (depending on the dog, these steps are built up. Some dogs need intermediate steps while some need a more small-step training plan).

2. 2nd point:

Your dog sees another dog and looks at you → Signal Marker

3. 3rd point:

Depending on the goal, one continues to orient him/her to the desired behavior etc....

## What happens next when the dog has learned the signal marker?

Dogs learn about success & failure in everyday life. However, they are genetically “energy savers” which means they only show a behavior when it is worthwhile. Whether a behavior is worthwhile or not is determined by the dog - via intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

Do you want to call your dog off focusing on a rabbit? Don’t come at him/her with a handful of kibbles. The reward/motivation must be to his liking, not yours.

**At this point, some dog owners might say:**

“I want my dog to do this for me, not for the reward!”

However, a dog is a living being - not a robot. A dog has as much psyche, soul, feelings and thoughts as we humans.

A human-dog relationship is a relationship that only works if there’s a bridge or connection between the two of you.

Yes, there are people who build their bridge on fear. That means the dog “obeys” the commands out of fear of consequences.

## THIS IS NOT A LIVELY RELATIONSHIP FOR ME!

My dogs are given clear boundaries so that they have security in their movement framework. They get transparency for their trust in me - the stronger the trust, the bigger the range of motion.

They get emotional support from me and through my social support, they do not have the feelings of being alone/they have someone to help them take away their fear/to get to know new things despite uncertainty, etc.

Have you ever had a scared dog or know one? Then you will understand how important safety, boundaries, transparency and social support are.

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### Back to the topic ...

Checklist:

- Marker word conditioned
- Gradation of praise words (and also follow them consistently).

The signal marker tells the dog “Very good job, you get a reward for that.”

We do not want to constantly and permanently reward them with simple exercises like sit or stay etc. with the signal marker. Therefore, one introduces gradation like e.g.

- “Fine” for level 2
- “Super” for level 3
- “Good” for level 4
- .... Etc.

Based on this gradation, there is also a corresponding reward.

- At level 1 there is the mega great treat (sausage, cheese, ...).
- At level 2, there is also a treat, but not a high quality one (e.g. dry food).
- At level 3, there is a verbal reward and a butt tickle (social attention).
- In the case of a level of 4, remain verbal and question yourself whether your own approach is suitable (possibly check the environment for distraction or if you took a step too quickly in the training).





I don't necessarily want to bore you with further theory, but there are a few points that I would like to touch upon briefly, so that your understanding of the way your dog learns can possibly be improved a bit. In parentheses I put the respective technical terms, so you can decide for yourself whether you want to learn more about it on the Internet.

» **What reinforces the behavior of your dog? (operant conditioning)**

At the beginning of the last century, the U.S. psychologist B.F. Skinner researched how punishment and reward change the previous behavior of a living being. His work developed into the theory of operant conditioning. At every moment when we or our animals learn, operant conditioning takes place.

The consequence that follows behavior influences future behavior.

**Quick information:**  
**Action (conscious behavior) + consequence (reinforcement/punishment) = behavior becomes more probable/less probable**

There are four possible consequences of doing so, which will make the behavior more or less recurrent in the future.

Something can be added (+/positive) or removed (-/negative), and this can be pleasant or unpleasant for the person or animal.

As a result, the behavior will be shown in the future, either shown more often (reinforcement) or less often (punishment).

These four possibilities are most easily represented in a graphic showing the four domains (the four learning quadrants).

\*Positive in operant conditioning means that something is added. Negative therefore means that something is taken away.

**Positive reward**

Something pleasant is added

- Praise
- Treats
- Social attention/interaction (game, favorite exercise, ...)
- Dog may do what you want

**Triggered feelings:**  
joy, fun

**Positive penalty**

Something unpleasant is added

- Linen print
- Yelling
- Send away
- Intimidation
- Press down into seat
- City noise
- Strange people/dogs
- Coral collar (forbidden by law!)
- Power

**Triggered feelings:**  
anxiety, stress, pain

**Negative reward**

Something unpleasant is taken away

- Pull on the leash when the dog sits down, for example
- The fear trigger moves away

**Triggered feelings:**  
relief

**Negative penalty**

Something pleasant is taken away

- Dog does not get the expected reward or no reward at all
- Play is taken away
- Dog/person the dog wants to go to moves away
- Ignore (ONLY IF the dog's behavior is not self-rewarding).

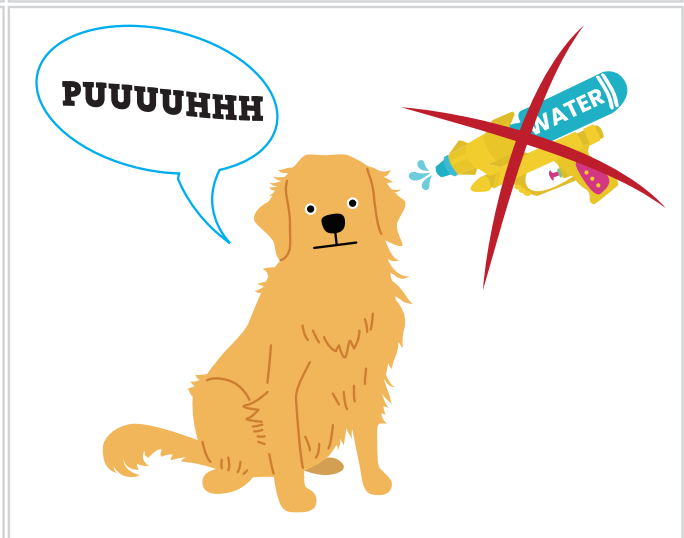
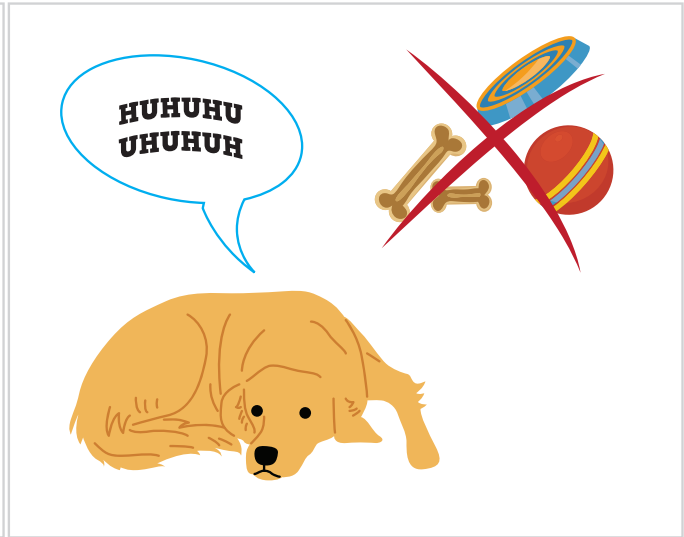
**Triggered feelings:**  
frustration, disappointment

The following cartoon is from #positiverocks and shows the quadrant of operant conditioning:

- Positive reinforcement - Positive Penalty
- Negative amplification - Negative Penalty

Try to assign these terms to the areas

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## Do I need to know all this?

No, of course it is not mandatory. Counter question: Does it do any harm?

The term “positive reinforcement” has been on everyone’s lips since the amendment of the Animal Welfare Act, and everyone is virtually writing it on their banner to train dogs in a friendly manner. Of course, there are also trainers who rail against “positive reinforcement” and claim that there is absolutely no possibility of training without inflicting punishment. Are they right? That’s exactly what you’ll find out here.

We are merely scratching the surface of learning theory here, which has been researched for decades and has been proven to work.

Do you have children? Wouldn’t you have preferred to help your child, your niece/nephew during school time if you had known more about learning theory? This thoroughly researched learning theory is valid for all mammals – including humans.

I will try to go as deep as possible to show you the best result. You do not have to go to a workshop in order to learn what trainers learn in 2-3 years of training.

### Summary:

Clicker/marker training is the use of positive reinforcement:

- We give the dog something pleasant in response to a desired behavior (food, attention, a scratch/cuddle session, a favorite exercise or he/she just gets to do what he/she wants)
- This is called an amplifier (more on this later).





# The thing with the “click”

At the beginning, I already mentioned why the clicker/signal marker is useful - it facilitates the communication between a man and a dog and at the same time, it creates transparency and security. A simple, not conditioned word of praise, as you use it mostly in everyday life (see description at the beginning), is just not enough - depending on the situation, we do not have enough time to create a link; and on the other hand, the dog will also not react to a “Fine”, “Super”, if it was not linked accordingly and consequently the statements, “My dog does not react to me outside!” come. In addition, our voice transmits emotions that can be ambivalent for the dog or the pitch does not transmit what they want to convey.

The clicker always sounds the same and we humans have also internalized the marker word over time so that we usually express it at the right pitch. In addition, we can overcome distances through the signal marker and still tell the dog at the exact time/point, what the behavior we just found great was. He/she can pick up the reward from us or, depending on the exercise, we bring it to him/her while the dog remains in place.

## The “aha effect” of clicker learning

Once the dog gets an idea of what direction we want it to go, positive reinforcement turns it into an active, thinking-training partner. Because we use the clicks to inform them precisely which behavioral detail is “correct,” and the dogs will quickly and precisely demonstrate the desired behavior again. They do this on their own - and do not need to be pushed, pulled or otherwise put into position. This is pleasant for the four-legged training partner, promotes their willingness to cooperate → team building - and makes both sides want more!

### Technical jargon:

The clicker becomes a secondary reinforcer (learned reward) and gives the dog a promise of a primary reinforcer (innate reward such as food, social contact, acting out impulses). The clicker buys us more time to reward the desired behavior.

### **Book recommendation: “Understanding Amplifiers” by Viviane Theby**

When selecting the signal marker, you should only make sure that it has no further meaning in everyday life, the signal should be short and crisp. If you want a word, for example, “Yep” is suitable, “Click”, “Tick”, “Yip” .... For deaf dogs a light signal. It must be easily perceived and unambiguous, as well as consistently linked to the reinforcer.

The handle in the pocket - whether jacket or lining pocket

This grip is directly linked as a signal marker by most dogs. Depending on our sequence, the dog reacts to a signal/command before the grip in the pocket or only after the grip in the pocket.

The correct sequence is:

Signal/command → dog performs → (click/marker) → hands back in the pocket  
For many, the reach into the pocket comes during the first step or even before the first step. That way, you get a dog that looks at your signal  
"If you do something, I do something! If you don't, I don't." \*wink\*

The consistent use of the signal marker makes the rules of the game clear and understandable for both sides.

**Click = food & no click = no food**

I had already mentioned that training consists of more like what we are discussing here. Training is composed of 3 pillars:

**Timing      Criterion      Reward rate**

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### **Signal Marker Hints:**

It takes us humans longer to utter a word in response than it does to make a mechanical movement. Instead, we can press a clicker faster than we can utter the spoken marker signal.

Just to get started on this topic - and since time management is an important factor in moving forward - you should take this into consideration.

My tip is to use a very clear signal like the clicker for the beginning. With a little more practice, you can later use just about any signal marker you feel like!

# What Clicker Training Is Not...

Positive reinforcement training is not magic, nor a type of witchcraft that will make all behavior problems disappear into thin air. It is not “throwing cookies/cotton balls at the dog” or “girl stuff” to practice tricks.

Training with the clicker/signal marker however, has a bad reputation in some circles. This is not because of the method, but because it was not properly explained/understood/applied. From my own experience, I must also mention that it is sometimes due to people: there are dog owners who like to inflict pain on their dog and prefer corresponding training methods.

As I mentioned, we’re only scratching the surface here. However, I would be very happy if your first look at reward-based training arouses your interest even more. If you’ve been using punishment-based training so far, I’m even more excited that you’re here and taking your first steps on this new path with me.

## **Do you feel like it’s a little experiment?**

While you go through this script, whether it is in one day or in a week with interruptions, watch your dog and wait for the moment when he/she does something right/good (without you having given him/her a signal for it) and reward him/her for it with attention, a tickle or maybe you have a treat in hand. Pay attention to what changes in you and your dog during this time.

## **Of course, I have to include the legal notice:**

“All information in this script is given to the best of our knowledge and belief. Care in the implementation is nevertheless required. The publisher/author assumes no liability for personal injury, property damage or financial loss that may result from the application of the presented method.”



# What is (m)an amplifier?

## Reward or reinforce?

There is a small, but important, difference between a reward and a reinforcer.

**Reward** = the incentive for something good to someone. A chewing treat after the extensive lunch round, an air filled Kong to lick out as an occupation ... etc.

A reward makes the recipient feel good. However, a reward is not linked to a behavior.

**Reinforcer** = in the context of learning, describes something that follows as a consequence of a behavior, whereupon that behavior will be exhibited more often in the future.

This can be, for example, be a smile and a thank you when someone hands us something from a shelf in the supermarket. It can be a touch or a caress if the person touched finds it pleasant. When dealing with our animals, this can be food or an extensive scratching of a particularly itchy spot.

In summary:

*A reinforcer is anything that the receiver finds pleasant and rewarding, and is dependent on current needs and the given situation.*

## Amplifier list

At this point, take a moment to make a list for your dog and note what reinforcers might be. If there are other animals in your family, you can make a list for your other animals as well. Try to really look at the question from the animal's eyes.

For yourself, you can also consider which of your animals' reactions are reinforcers for you.

Need ideas on what this list might look like? For example, like this:

### Reinforcer list for the dog owner:

- **Body contact** - I like it very much when my dog comes to me to scratch at an invitation.
- **Eye contact** - I feel very comfortable when my animals are in contact with me, looking at me and thus able to respond to my signals.
- **Voluntariness** - my dog always comes to me on his own will. This voluntary contact is always a nice confirmation of our good relationship.



Reinforcer list summarized for my two dogs:

- **Exercise** - running/dashing through the woods chasing a food dummy or toy is something Titus does with great enthusiasm.
- **Food** - Fips likes to eat very much, but he has changing preferences. Titus also likes to eat, but takes what he gets most of the time.
- **Back scratching/stroking** - But this is for the owner only, Titus acts somewhat strange when others come close to him.
- **Tug of war** - tug of war with a stuffed animal, while humming is great for both.
- **Sniffing and rummaging** - looking for the piece of food/dummy/ball in the grass, picking up the game trail once again or reading the “walk news” in a relaxed way is fun for both.



As different as our dogs are, their preferences are also different. So, you can't say across the board which reinforcer works for a dog/creature. Basically, you can't assume that every animal - thus also dog - likes to work for food. The prerequisite, of course, is that what's good for him/her is not constantly available in everyday life.

Of course, there is much more to it than that from a learning theory point of view, but this should be enough to get you started.

You can easily find out if your chosen food can be a reinforcer for your dog:

Take a small portion of food in your hand (or in a food bowl) and give it to your dog. Observe how he/she eats the food. Quickly and joyfully? More cautiously and slowly? Does the enthusiasm change when you offer the same food three times? Or does he/she even turn away after a brief sniff? In the latter case, it is probably not a suitable reinforcer.



## Food ideas

Below you will find a small selection of possible food reinforcers for your dog:

- Dry food that has a strong smell
- Cheese
- Meat sausage or wiener
- Dried meat or fish
- Frolic (yes, it's junk food, but we do go to the chip shop sometimes)
- Cat food and cat treats
- Cooked chicken meat
- Liver sausage
- Homemade tuna cookies
- Cream cheese
- Canned food
- Fried chicken hearts or liver

Some things should be taken into consideration: the type and amount must be adapted to the particular dog. Some dogs do not tolerate milk, then, for example, no cream cheese should be used. Also, for allergy sufferers there is now a wide range of dried meat and other feeds to buy. To avoid getting overweight, the easiest way is to subtract the amount of clicker food from the dog's daily food ration.

# What an amplifier is not!

The term reinforcer in this context means that the dog should find the addition pleasant. **The dog should be the one to decide the reinforcer, not the human!**

Forcing food on a full dog, forced cuddling, or chest patting is not a reinforcer for most dogs. Especially in the context of fearful dogs, “not being able to eat” should be perceived as an alarm sign. In fear, the body refuses to eat in order to better prepare for flight or attack.

## Less is more - breaks

Before we finally get to the practical exercises in the next chapter, I would like to say a few words at this point about a topic that is, in my eyes, often neglected:

### Breaks.

Maybe you've seen them yourself: the over-excited dogs who seem to be throwing behavioral cues around during clicker sessions? Who nudge at the person or bite into the food bag when the person wants to talk for a moment? Dogs, like overtired children, can't settle down and may even bark at the person, jump on them or bite the leash!

### No need to worry!

The described behaviors normally result during the beginning of clicker training when not enough emphasis was placed on the introduction as well as the design of breaks and clear structures.

This can be avoided by a well thought out exercise structure right from the start. But even if the child has already fallen into the well, the next points will help you to bring calm back into your training.

Work where you can and not where you can't.

If you are not yet sure on how to handle the dog, clicker, food and everything else, find a training area where the dog can stay calm without immediately going into a 180. Choose a place where there is no other excitement or establish a new place if all the previous training places are characterized by restlessness.





**Count out your treats.**

Put your treats out of your dog's reach. Fill your food bag with a counted number of treats (for example, 10) at a time. As soon as the treats are used up, give your dog a signal - for example, showing the empty palms and the voice signal "break" or "end" - and briefly leave the work area to refill your bag. During this time, you can also reflect later in the training on what went well in the previous run and what should be changed.

**It is better to have several short sessions than one long one.**

You don't need to train for an hour at a time for your dog to understand the exercise. Several short sessions, such as 3 × 10 treats, are often perfectly sufficient. After that, you can do something else, such as walking, playing or an extended cuddle session.

**Give the dog something to do during the break.**

Nothing is worse than sitting around idly. A stuffed Kong, some dry food in the grass or a chew item are good to make waiting palatable for the dog.

A few treats on the floor will avoid frustration at break time, and sniffing can help your dog relax.

**Calm behavior as a condition.**

Make it a habit to start all exercises only when your dog is calm and alert. Is he/she looking around or barking excitedly? Just wait a moment or leave the training place for a few seconds. As soon as your dog turns to you again or is calm, you can continue with the exercise.

If your dog is still very excited after leaving the training site twice, then review the previous points again.

## Give yourself a break

If you notice that you are becoming unfocused or that something is not working out the way you thought it would be, give yourself a break. It's not a failure to stop an exercise session and take a leisurely walk instead. We all have bad days. So does your dog, by the way. And it's not always about working off goals.

Walking the dog in nature is one of the most calming and meditative moments for me. Then I can take a breath and watch the dog sniff and explore the world.





“Into the forest I can go to lose my mind and find my soul.” Totally hits home. After that, I can get going again, refreshed and focused.

Taking a break together strengthens the relationship.

## Practice makes perfect

### The dry run

#### From theory to practice

I'm sure you're already full of energy - but before I let you go into training; I'd like to tell you about an important exercise that prepares you perfectly for the start of clicker training with your dog: the dry run.

Just like driving a car, fishing, knitting or dancing, we cannot start directly with the target. Dealing with clicker, food bag, food and possibly leash and additional objects requires a little practice. If you skip this point and get knotted in the leash or trip over the dog, the risk increases that the dog either does not understand the click at all or that behaviors creep in that you do not want to have.

#### A clean 1-click 1-cookie pass looks like this:

**Signal - Behavior - Click - Grab the food bag - Feed - Zero position - Signal - Behavior - Click... and so on....**

We'll talk about how to recognize the right moment to click when working with your dog. So, for our dry run, we are left with the following elements:

**Click - reach into the feed pocket - feed - zero position**

**The zero position is a neutral posture that the trainer assumes when he/she is neither giving a signal nor feeding the animal.**

First of all, get all the things you need ready:

- your feeding bags
  - the food you want to click with, for example dog dry food
  - your clicker (if you do not use another signal marker)
- an empty bowl

# Step 1

Place the empty bowl in front of you on a table or shelf. If you are working with a small dog, a stool or the floor can be used. At first, take only your clicker in your hand and practice your signal marker a few times. Can you repeat it several times in quick succession without it changing? Do you find it easier with your left or right hand? Or do you want to change signal marker again?

*Don't worry, this feels a little weird at first, but will help you train cleanly later!*

# Step 2

Reach into your food bag a few times in quick succession and place one treat at a time into the empty bowl in front of you. Can you reach into the bag quickly or is the opening too small? Can you grab the treats well or do more fall to the floor than into the bowl? If necessary, find a different food bag or choose different treats until you can make the move fluidly and quickly.

# Step 3

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Now click it!

In this step, you combine the signal marker and feeding. For the future, it is extremely important that the signal marker is given before you reach into your food bag. As I mentioned in the section on reinforcement, the dog will quickly learn to ignore the signal marker and only pay attention to reaching into the bag.

As a trick, you can click around your body by putting the food hand on your thigh or at your hip, for example - the so-called zero position. As soon as the click sounds, reach into the food bag and place a treat in the bowl in front of you.

*Reminder:*

**The zero position is a neutral posture that the trainer assumes when he/she is neither giving a signal nor feeding the animal.**

*The feed hand rests in one position until clicked, in training for example- in front of the belly or behind the back.*

# Step 4

Have you done the exercises described above with your right hand? Then now use your left hand. Since we train with the dog in many different positions, it is important that you can click as well as feed with both hands.

## A small challenge at the end

How many treats can you feed in 30 seconds with each hand? Film yourself or have someone film you and check if the click really happens before you reach into the food bag! Practice together with family members or friends and make a little competition out of it. Can you also place your treats unerringly in the hand of a training partner who is moving?

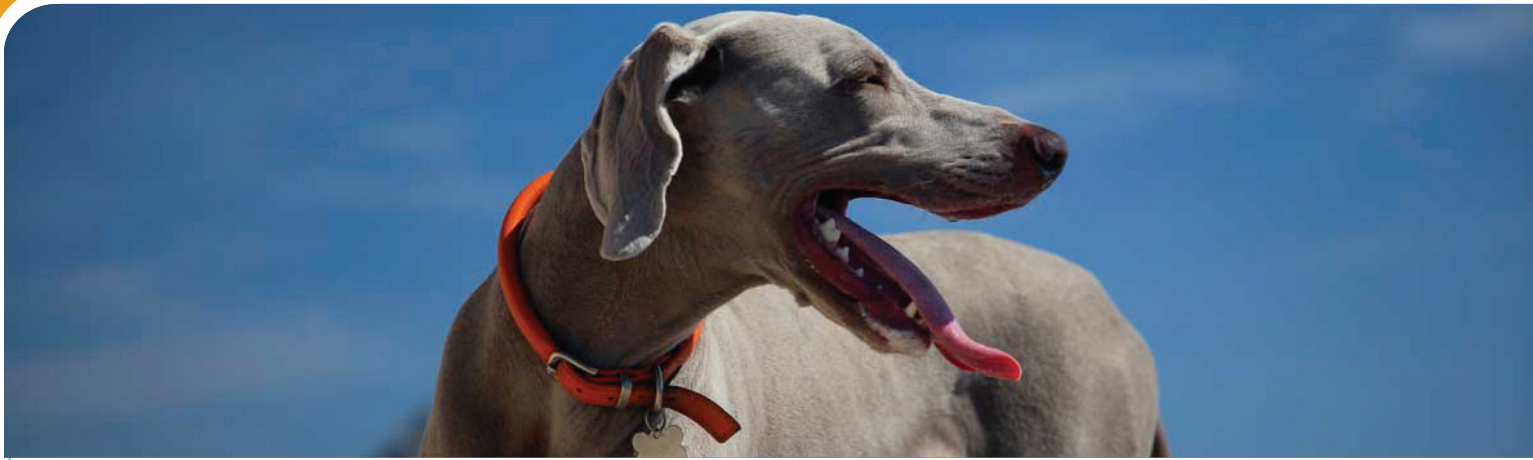
If you want to get a better understanding of how your dog feels during training, here are some suggestions that you can follow:

Train with a family member to click each other - everyone takes turns as a dog trainer. The trainer takes 2 props such as a dice and a game piece. With these 2 props he/she thinks about something like for example, the figure stands on the cube and you click the other there, so he/she places the figure on the cube.

# Summary: What is Clicker Training?

**Clicker training is the use of positive reinforcement in conjunction with a marker signal**

1. "Positive reinforcement" represents the addition of a pleasant and rewarding consequence that increases the likelihood of a desired behavior to be exhibited more often in the future. The other three learning quadrants are negative reinforcement (removing something unpleasant), negative punishment (removing something pleasant), and positive punishment (adding something unpleasant).
2. A positive reinforcer is anything that the dog perceives as rewarding. Here, you have to look at each dog individually. In general, food is a reinforcer that works very well in many cases. A reward is not a reinforcer because it is given independently of a specific behavior.
3. A signal marker should be unambiguous.
4. It should be well perceived by the dog and always be paired with the reinforcer. Known signal markers are the clicker, the whistle, the snap or a word.
5. The most common mismatch is reaching into the food bag before the click. The dog learns to ignore the click and to pay attention only to the reach into the food pocket.
6. With the help of a dry run without your dog, you can practice in peace to know the timing for the food bag, treat and signal marker.



## Module 2: How do I “amplify” correctly?

### The magic hand

Many problems with training via food arise from the human not following the correct sequence of “click first, then feed second”.

Over time, the dog will pay more and more attention to the “magic food hand” rather than listening to the click or the signal marker. The long-term result will be a dog that constantly looks at its human’s hands and uses the movement of the hands as information when something was right and it receives its reinforcer.

#### One example may make it clearer:

A dog is supposed to learn “stay down”. Now, in the optimal case, the dog would get both the click (first info: that was right) and the food (consequence that reinforces the behavior) for the behavior “staying down”. So, click = stay in place + get food in place while lying down.

Some dogs get up after the Click and pick up their food, which is not a big deal. The Click has marked the right behavior before. In short: Click = stay in place + food for the owner’s run. Don’t worry: even dogs that get up after the Click will understand the exercise sooner or later. It’s just, in the words of Viviane Theby, “training with the handbrake on”.

A dog that no longer listens to the click will possibly stand up when reaching into the bag, since the human’s hand first goes to the food and only then is there a click. The result from the dog’s point of view could then be: Reach into the pocket replaces the click = announcement of food + click for the approach to stand up already = a false pass.

#### When feeding, make sure that:

- You can easily and quickly reach for the food (no crackle bags or tight jacket pockets).
- Your hand moves to the food only after you have clicked.
- Your dog has all four paws on the floor while you feed him. As a beginner in training, you should always ask someone to check whether you are following the sequence (or simply film a training session and check yourself).

I’ll explain why this is important in the next section.



# My dog is a snap monster

From your dog's behavior, you can easily tell if any of these points need a little more practice.

I often see that dog owners stop training with food because their dog only looks at the food bag, jumps towards the hand or grabs the food out of the hand like a snapping turtle.

Unfortunately, the fault is usually sought in the dog, especially if the food has unpleasant consequences for the human. Does this also sound familiar to you?

At this point I can reassure you! Every dog can learn to take his food carefully and politely from your hand. It just takes a little practice.

In many cases, snapping at food results from an unfortunate choice of feeding position.

Sometimes it is the food that puts the dog in too high excitement. Then it can happen that the dog pinches his human's fingers. Some dogs learn to pinch because of the reflexive withdrawal of the food hand, because the human releases the food faster.

You've probably seen how a child wanted to give a dog a treat - and dropped it at the last second. Especially if the dog reacts a bit impetuously at the beginning, it is difficult to stay calm yourself and not throw the food down the throat of the oncoming snapping turtle.

## **Below I'll describe a few of the most common problems and how you can deal with them.**

Your dog's nose is right on the food bag after clicking or while feeding: You probably didn't follow the order "click first, then feed second" quite correctly and the dog follows your hand or arm movement. In some cases, the handling is simply too awkward for us humans (the opening of the food bag is too narrow, the treats in the jacket pocket are difficult to reach, etc.) and we simply take far too long to give the food to the dog.

Your dog is reaching for your hand: Snapping at the food often comes from pulling your hand away a while bit (or just before) your dog takes the food. This often happens sub-consciously, especially if the dog has already taken the food rudely in the past. It's best to film yourself feeding once. You can practice with your tired and full dog to keep your hand stable at a fixed point while feeding, for example always with the back of your hand on your knee.

**Attention, tripping hazard! If you pull your hand away every time your dog tries to grab it, you are reinforcing this behavior! Your dog learns that he/she has to be even faster, otherwise he/she will miss the chance to get his food. This leads to stress, which in turn leads to increased snapping. Concentrate on making emphatically slow movements. Wear gloves if necessary or feed exclusively for a while by throwing the food on the floor in front of your dog.**

Your dog pinches your hand when you take the food: This can happen if your dog is too hungry in some cases (and yes there are dogs that are ALWAYS hungry). These dogs should be given a little food before the training session to be a little more relaxed in training.

The portions that the dog receives before training and during training, should be subtracted from the normal food portion, then there are no figure problems. Try feeding the normal everyday food during training and see if this brings an improvement. Some dogs get so excited at special treats and due to that, they tend to forget their manners.

**Your dog jumps up at you when you feed him/her or stands with his front legs against your legs:** You are probably presenting the food in such a way that your dog cannot reach it without coming towards you. Check if you are bringing the hand down far enough that your dog can reach it with all four paws on the ground. This is often a difficult task for people with small dogs, as all that stooping down can definitely hurt their backs. Here you can, for example, put a bowl on the floor and drop the treat in it or hand the treat down in a soup ladle.

## The dog has to eat something anyway!

### On training with food as a reinforcer in general

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Some of these points are regularly discussed between dog owners and trainers and there are definitely different opinions.

### The click is a promise

We should still discuss a few points with regard to clicker training, because it is important to adhere to certain rules at the beginning, as long as you do not yet have the corresponding advanced knowledge. The error traps listed in the following text should help you to deal safely with the possible side effects.

- **The Click is a promise!**  
This means that every click is followed by food. Even if you clicked by mistake or clicked something that was not quite optimal. If you leave out the food too often after the click, your dog will look for other information about when food is
- available. As a rule, this again involves reaching into the feed pocket.

There are people who do not feel comfortable feeding their dog during training and who have concerns about becoming “dependent” on the food. I don’t want to claim that my view is the only correct one, but let’s look at it pragmatically: the dog has to eat anyway! We have the choice to give the dog all potential reinforcers for “doing nothing” once or twice a day simply in a bowl.

Or use part of the food as a reinforcer for desired behavior. The choice is yours!

## **Your dog gets his food and is allowed to eat it!**

Even if your dog still has problems with taking food (see previous chapter), the click remains a promise. Putting the food back in the bag as a punishment, e.g., for snapping or clumsy food taking, only frustrates the dog and increases the likelihood that your dog will snap even more intensely for the food the next time he/she takes it or simply leaves the training. If you are unsure what led to the behavior and how to handle it, give both of you a break and reconsider the tips from the previous session.

## **Continue if your dog is attentive!**

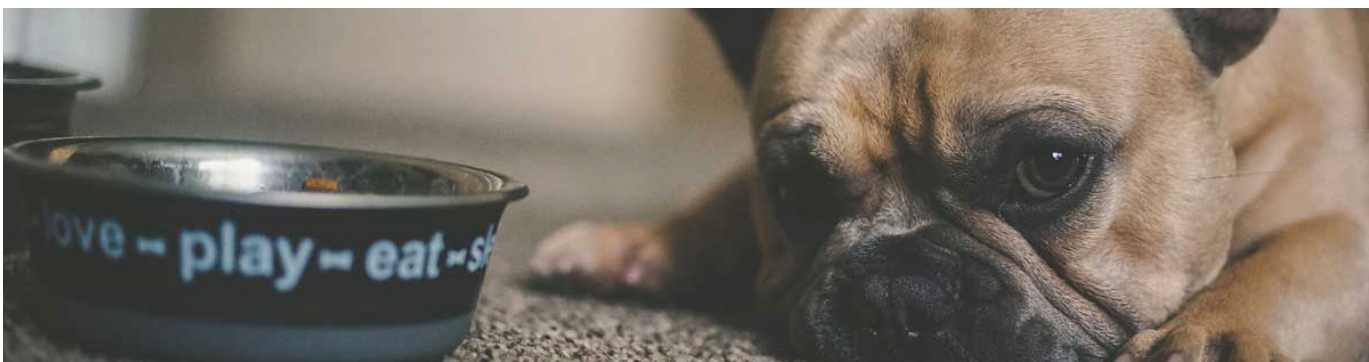
Especially with beginner teams, dogs need time to understand how training “works”. Wait with new requests until your dog has stopped chewing and is focusing his attention on you. Especially in the beginning, choose a quiet place for your training so that the dog is not too distracted by the environment.

Finally, one last thought on the topic of empty clicks or clicks without food. Even though it is recommended in some places to gradually phase out the treats after the clicks, I would advise you not to do that. The click itself, even if it has been combined with food very often, will not be a reinforcer that works on its own. Just as vocal praise alone - without combination with a positive consequence, such as food - will not have a reinforcing effect. You will find more about how signal marker and reinforcer work together at the end of this course.

## **Summary: Reinforce and feed properly**

### **Tips around the food**

- Feed properly: Keep the order “click first, then reach for the food” and feed your dog so that he/she keeps all 4 paws on the ground and doesn’t jump up at you. Adjust the place where you feed to the size of your dog.
- Pinching and snapping are reactions of your dog to an unfavorable feeding position. Too much hunger or a high level of arousal can also lead to stress and thus, lead to snapping.
- Pulling your hand away can increase snapping, try to avoid it and change the training circumstances.
- The Click is a promise! Always feed your dog after the click. If no food follows, you weaken the value of the click. Give your dog enough time to pay attention to you even when faced with distraction.



# Targets everywhere

## Target? What is it?

A target is an object that the dog is supposed to touch with a certain part of its body. We encounter targets everywhere in everyday life. Every object/target is linked to information:

- When you touch the accelerator pedal with your foot, the engine accelerates.
- When you touch the big red button on the remote control with your finger, the TV turns on or off.
- When you push down the door handle with your hand, the door opens.
- When you put the key in the keyhole and turn it, the door opens

These are, of course, rather simplified examples, but they show that targets serve to convey information to us about our environment and its function.

In the same way, the dogs can learn that a certain behavior in combination with an object or the human leads to a reinforcer. In this way, we can explain to them in a simple way which behavior makes sense in which place.

**Examples:** The dog looks for a certain place and lies down there (practical exercise in a moment).

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### All this is possible with a target:

- Touch and remain in a defined position.
- Touching a target in different positions. Follow in motion while touching.
- Follow in motion during the touch.
- Touching the target regardless of the position of the person. Stop at a target.

### This is what it looks like

The hand target (the dog touches the human's hand with its muzzle) can be used for recall, for example.

**Word signal for eye contact and hand target as "recall".**

In the next chapter you will find a training instruction for a target training: "Go on your blanket".



# Target training “Go on your blanket”

**Congratulations! We have come to our final clicker exercise with your dog. With this checklist, you’ll be ready for the training session:**

## **Checklist: Equipment**

You will need:

- your dog
- a quiet training area
- many treats
- your feeding bags
- your clicker (or your respective signal marker)
- a thick cushion, which is clearly different from the base
- you should already have some supplies ready in case you run out of treats.

We use a thick cushion to make it as easy as possible for the dog. In order for the dog to learn with as few errors as possible, design your training so that your dog understands the exercise as easily as possible. Some dogs don’t notice the change from a carpet to a thin blanket in the heat of training, so it’s important that the surfaces are clearly different.

**Have you already practiced hand-feeding with your dog and tested whether he/she is afraid of the clicking sound? If not, now is the time to do it!**

Click once and give your dog a very good treat within 1 second (your dog doesn’t have to do anything for it except be present). Repeat this process 5 times.

Then wait a moment until your dog looks away. Click again! Does he/she look at you immediately? Then the conditioning has worked - he/she has understood: Click = food!

***Do you have a fearful or skittish dog? Then please make sure that you try the clicker at some distance from your dog. Frightened dogs may flinch at the unfamiliar sound, so hold the clicker behind your back for the first few times or wrap your hand around it to muffle the sound.***



# “Get on your blanket” - exercise structure

## Why go on a blanket?

There are many ways to explain the meaning of the click and food to your dog. Probably the best known is to start by touching an object called a target. Target training is an easy way for you and your dog to learn the basics of clicker training.

Since it is my personal concern in this course to give you exercises right from the start that will benefit you and your dog in the long run - no matter if you continue with clicker training or not - I would like to introduce you to one of my favorite exercises: **Get on your blanket.**

## Step by step:

1. Put a thick pillow between you and your dog
2. Take the clicker in your hand and place the food near you on a table or on top of another place that is not accessible to the dog.
3. Now direct your gaze to the pillow or even point to it. Try to make sure that the pillow is between you and your dog. This increases the chance that he/she will accidentally put a paw on the pillow.
4. **Click when the first approach of your dog is to put a paw on the pillow** and throw the food on the pillow. Let your dog take the food off the pillow and wait for your dog to get back on the pillow.
5. The first touches of the paw with the pillow will be random and you may not manage to click exactly yet. Trust that both will continue to develop.
6. Your dog has now put one paw on the pillow a few times? Then wait until he/she puts two paws on the pillow and click only once: Two paws on the pillow - click - throw food on the pillow.
7. If your dog can now put two paws on the cushion, then wait exactly as described above until he/she stands with three and then with all four paws on the cushion. You click at the moment when the number of paws you have set for yourself are on the cushion and only click when this criterion (i.e. the condition you have set for the click) is fulfilled. So, three or four paws on the pillow - click - throw food on the pillow.
8. Your dog is now always with all four paws on the pillow when you point to it? Great! he/she doesn't even want to get off the pillow? Even better - you did everything right!
9. Now, on the next pass, just wait a moment after your dog has placed all four paws on the cushion. Most dogs will sit or lie down at this point, when the click no longer sounds for “all four paws on the blanket”.
10. When your dog sits or lies down, you click and feed him/her a treat on the pillow (preferably while he/she is still lying or sitting) and let him/her eat it. Throw a second treat a bit so that it lands far enough away from the pillow that your dog has to get up to get it.
11. Et voila - you are ready for the next pass! Your dog runs to the pillow - he/she sits or lies down - click - food on the pillow (while he/she is still sitting or lying down) - let him/her eat it - throw away a treat - new pass. From now on, you only click when your dog sits or lies down on the pillow.

## Now you can start:

- To send your dog to the pillow from different directions,
- delay the click for lying down - by the second, so that your dog stays lying down longer and longer,
- or send your dog to the pillow from ever greater distances.

Below this page is the summary on how you can respond to the different reactions of your dog. But first I would like to explain why this exercise is useful in my eyes.

## This is what you learn with this exercise

You learn to create a clear criterion for a click, watch your dog closely and only click when you see the desired behavior.

You're learning, too, not to click, if you have doubts about whether what you saw was right. After all, you can always point to the pillow again if you ever missed a good behavioral offer from your dog!

There is a Signal when your dog can earn a click (your hand pointing to the cushion). You will also practice clicking first and then reaching for the food, thus training your movement correctly.

## This is what your dog learns with this exercise

To follow the hand instruction of a human being is a great thing! Far too many dogs learn that the hand of man can be something unpleasant, if they are often touched without being asked or have already had bad experiences.

Your dog learns: Click = food. In addition, he/she learns to offer behavior and to receive the click as information that he/she is receiving food. The click thus becomes a means of communication between you: Desired behavior offer = Click = Done right = Food is coming!

## Other advantages of the exercise

I want to be able to send my dog to a defined place at any time and not have to capture him/her when I want to take him/her out of a situation.

I want my dog to do this voluntarily and willingly. This way I can avoid pouncing on him/her in a body language that is threatening or even scolding him/her around, which may cause him/her to get scared or panic.

I want to be able to tell my dog to wait on the blanket until the situation allows him/her to participate again.

## Get on your blanket!

### Help, my dog does not understand the exercise!

As always in training, of course, every dog reacts differently. In the last section of this page, I would like to give you an overview of possible problems and how you can deal with them.

#### **Your dog walks around the pillow, but doesn't put a paw on it:**

This is a clear sign that the dog is not comfortable with the pillow. You can try if another pillow or a blanket he/she knows works better.

#### **Your dog looks at the pillow, but does not walk on it:**

in this case, your dog is telling you his doubts. Stop for a moment and slowly move around the cushion facing your dog with enough distance. If necessary, kneel down and tap the cushion with your finger.

#### **Your dog walks away after a while and has "no interest" in the pillow:**

If your dog drops out of training, it could be for a number of reasons. Success has eluded you for too long? You pointed to the cushion several times, but the behavior you were waiting for wasn't there and you couldn't click? Then take a step back in your training.

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Oftentimes, the food is not rewarding enough to make the dog work hard to find out what you want from him. Check whether the previously mentioned points in this list may play a role.

#### **Your dog nudges your hand, but doesn't understand the connection with the blanket:**

First of all, check your feeding technique.

Be careful not to feed with the same hand you are pointing at the blanket.

Maybe your dog can't tell for sure if you are giving your signal or feeding him. Is he/she snapping at your hand to grab you away from his/her basket or is it a dog that has not yet learned bite inhibition? Then the same steps as in the previous points apply.

Check if you should use another pillow or an unknown blanket. Click while your dog can still be relaxed and not have his wild 5 minutes and stop the training if certain behaviors appear that should definitely not be part of the task.

### **But doesn't this teach the dog to snap or get his way? Is he/she allowed to get away with it?**

If your dog shows the reactions described above, he/she has already learned those in the past.

It is now up to you to show him/her that these defensive reactions or biting of human hands are not necessary.



From now on you pay attention to the minute signals with which your dog tells you: you are too close; you frustrate me or I am much too tired and therefore overreact. In the first step, your dog learns that your hand is only a signal by always keeping your hand far enough away that a nudge or threatening gesture cannot occur. If in doubt, please contact a dog trainer and ask them to look at your dog's behavior.

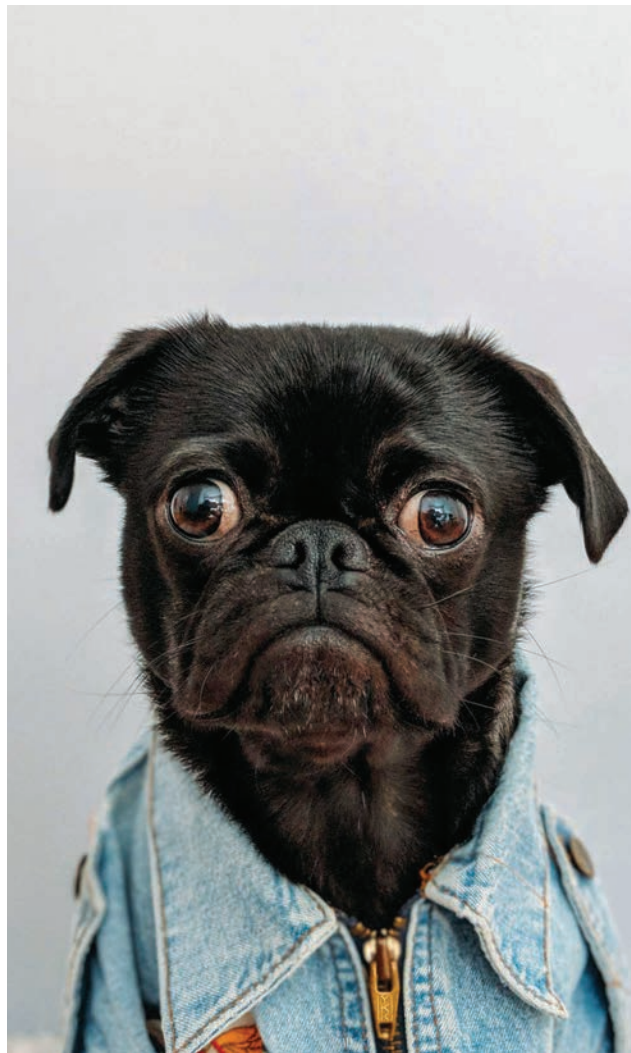
## Summary: Training

A target is an object that the dog touches with a previously defined part of its body. Different types of targets can be used:

- **Hand target:** the hand of the trainer.
- **Target rod:** a long rod with a prominent tip.
- **Flat Target:** for example, a bucket lid or a Frisbee disc.
- **Ground Target:** a doormat or cushion on which the dog stands, sits or lies down.
- **Stationary Target:** an object that the dog can go to and stay there for the trained duration.

The target can be used in different ways:

- Touch **Standing**
- Touch **in Motion**
- **Consequences, without** touching the target
- **Consequences** during the **Touch**
- **Dependent** from the **Man Position**
- **Independent** from the **Man Position**
- Single Touch
- Permanent Touch



## And finally... A final thought

In the first section I wrote that I use the term clicker training to refer to the learning with the help of Positive Reinforcement. At this point, I would like to point out once again that all four learning quadrants (positive reward, negative reward, positive punishment, negative punishment) are part of our life and everyday life.

So, when I call myself a clicker trainer, I mean that I try to apply the principles of positive reinforcement whenever possible - starting with the design of the training situation. And that's what this is all about

On the Internet you can find various statements that inadequately represent the basics of the laws of learning:

- “I train exclusively through positive reinforcement.”
- “I communicate with my dog only naturally, without conditioning (training).”
- “I pick and choose from all the methods of what works and what’s best for me.”
- “Dogs need clear messages and training with food is just bribery.”

Whenever you come across such statements, it is advisable to ask exactly what they mean. It often turns out that terms are misunderstood or (deliberately) used incorrectly. So, if you find such statements a bit strange, don't be afraid to discuss them with others or to read them again.

### **Please always remain fair, respectful and friendly to other dog owners and trainers.**

Observe and question the methods of trainers, look at the animals they work with. But don't be tempted to judge them as humans. Each and every one of us wants the best for our animal and does so within our means and current level of knowledge.

Even if it sometimes seems that “horse and dog whisperers” use special methods, it is and remains training that can be traced back to the four learning quadrants.

For some, this may disenchant the training world, but the magic is really more in the result, not the method.

We can all, by what we do, influence the lives of the creatures entrusted to us. Knowledge about how learning works can help us to do this. Empathy and gut feeling help us not to lose sight of the sensitivities of our animals during the process.

I wish you a lot of fun with the further training and maybe we will hear, see, or read each other again soon.

*With all love,*  
**Stefanie**