



# Harmony Dog Training

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## Reward Markers

### Overview

Training is most efficient and effective when we have a clear way of communicating to the animal the precise moment that they have done the behavior we like. Using reward markers allows us to provide this communication so that the animal can learn faster.

### What It Is

A reward marker is something that the animal can perceive (such as a sound, sight, touch, etc.) that predicts that a reinforcer, such as a treat, is coming. When an animal understands this association, we can use it to “mark” the behavior we are trying to train, helping the training to go faster.

### Types of Reward Markers

The most common types of reward markers are something that the animal can hear, such as a click of a clicker, a short word such as “yes,” a short whistle, etc. Whatever sound is being used should be short and distinct, able to be produced quickly, relatively unique (not something the animal hears a lot in non-training contexts), and not a sound that the animal finds aversive or scary.

For deaf animals, we can use a visual marker, such as a “thumbs up” signal.

For deaf and blind animals, we can use a gentle touch to a part of their body, such as their chin.

### A Few Simple Rules

For the marker to have meaning, it must come right before the treat – not at the same time or afterwards.

The marker should happen at the time of the behavior you want to reward – think about taking a snapshot of what it is you are trying to reinforce.

A marker is a promise. If you have marked a behavior, even accidentally, you must follow up with a reward. Otherwise, the marker will not be as effective as a training tool in the future.

### FAQs

*Am I going to have to carry a clicker and click every time my dog sits forever?*

No. Markers are used in the learning process to help the animal understand what is earning reinforcement. Once they understand the behavior and its cue, you don't need to continue to click.



*What if I don't have a clicker on me? Can animals understand multiple markers?*

Yes, in fact, we encourage you to teach a couple types of markers. A verbal marker such as “yes” can always be used if you don’t have a clicker handy. During a particular training session, however, pick one marker that you are using – no need to both click and say “yes” at the same time.

*Is this different from praise?*

Yes, your marker word is a distinct type of information. This is why we recommend “yes” as a verbal marker. We don’t often say this word to our dogs in normal praise, and it is short and easy to say. We often tell our dogs what a good girl or good boy they are (which is great!), but this is different from a marker word that reliably predicts another reinforce.

*Can't I just use praise?*

Animals vary in how much they are motivated by praise. Most animals will learn much faster and reliably when we use something they value even more, like food or toys. Pay attention to what your animal likes most, and use what gets you the best results. If a behavior gets stronger, it is working. Feel free to tell your pet how smart and wonderful they are, but most will also learn faster and work better for you if there is some extra incentive too!

[Learn more](#)

Karen Pryor Clicker Training: <http://www.clickertraining.com/>