

## **Canine Communication**

### **The Importance of Timing and Marking Rewards**

A marker, often in the form of a verbal cue like "yes", or a clicker, is used in dog training as a precise and consistent way to communicate with your dog and mark desired behaviours.

#### **Here's why markers are used:**

- A marker provides immediate feedback to your dog the moment they perform the desired behaviour. This instantaneous communication helps your dog understand exactly what action led to the reward.
- A marker acts as a bridge between the desired behaviour and the reinforcement (such as treats, praise, or play) that follows. It signals to your dog that they've done something right and that a reward is coming.
- Using a marker helps clarify which specific behaviour is being rewarded. It allows you to pinpoint and mark the exact moment your dog performs the desired action, eliminating confusion and making training more effective.
- A marker provides consistency in training sessions. By using the same marker consistently for desired behaviours, you establish clear communication patterns with your dog, making it easier for them to understand what is expected of them.
- Markers allow for precise timing in training. They enable you to capture and mark behaviours as they occur, even if there's a slight delay in delivering the reinforcement. This accuracy helps reinforce the desired behaviour more effectively.
- Markers serve as motivational tools for your dog. They create a positive association between the desired behaviour and the reward, motivating your dog to repeat the behaviour in order to earn the reward again.
- Using a marker reduces the dependency on physical lures or prompts to elicit behaviours. Instead of relying solely on guiding your dog into the correct position, you can use markers to capture and reinforce voluntary behaviours.
- Immediate feedback through timely marking allows you to correct misunderstandings or errors in your dog's behaviour effectively. By marking the desired behaviour instantly, you clarify expectations and prevent confusion.
- Overall, markers are valuable tools in dog training because they facilitate clear communication, precise timing, and consistent reinforcement, ultimately helping your dog learn and understand desired behaviours more effectively.

## **Examples of Timing and Marking Rewards:**

**Sit Command:** When teaching your dog to sit, use a verbal cue ("sit") and a hand signal simultaneously. As soon as your dog's bottom touches the ground, immediately say "yes" or use a clicker to mark the correct behaviour, then offer a treat within seconds.

**Recall Training:** During recall training, call your dog's name and use a recall cue ("come"). As soon as your dog starts moving towards you, mark the behaviour with a "yes" or click, then reward them with a high-value treat upon reaching you. A little tip; hold the dogs collar or harness or ask them to sit on return – or they could just run off again.

**Loose Lead Walking:** When your dog walks beside you on a loose lead without pulling, promptly mark the behaviour with a "yes" or click, then reward them with a treat. Timing and delivery is critical to reinforce the desired walking behaviour effectively.

**Waiting at Doorways:** When teaching your dog to wait calmly at doorways, mark the moment they pause or look to you for guidance. Use a verbal marker ("good") or clicker, then reward them with praise or a treat for their patience and compliance.

**Ignoring Distractions:** If your dog successfully ignores a distraction, such as another dog passing by, immediately mark the behaviour with a "yes" or click, then reward them with a treat. This reinforces their focus and self-control in distracting situations.

**Shaping Complex Behaviours:** For shaping complex behaviours, such as agility obstacles or tricks, break the behaviour down into small steps. Mark and reward each incremental progress towards the final behaviour, ensuring timely feedback and motivation.

By understanding the importance of timing and marking rewards correctly, and by applying these principles consistently in your training sessions, you can effectively communicate with your dog, reinforce desired behaviours, and accelerate their learning progress.