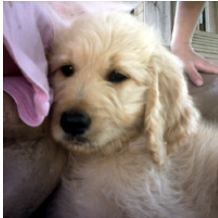


### Conditioned Reinforcers

A *conditioned reinforcer* is another important form of communication with animals. This is a sound or an action that the animal has been conditioned to associate with positive reinforcement. Whistling to call a dog to the trainer, the sound of food being poured into a bowl, or even the opening of a door can be all conditioned reinforcers. Even the sight or sound of a door opening before you walk into a room can be a conditioned reinforcer to a dog that wants to see you.



### Bridging Stimulus

One form of a conditioned reinforcer is called a *bridging stimulus* or a bridge. A bridge is a sound or action that tells the animal it has just done something right. Some trainers use a clicker, others a whistle, and some just use their voice and say, "good boy!" The simple action of moving your hand to give your dog a treat can also be viewed by a dog as a bridge. The bridging stimulus bridges the gap in time from when the behavior occurred and the presentation of the positive reinforcement. It is a signal that the reward is coming.

**Most of the definitions on this pamphlet were found at:**  
[www.naturalencounters.com/definitions.html](http://www.naturalencounters.com/definitions.html)

**An excellent book for an in-depth explanation of operant conditioning is:**

#### **HOW DOGS LEARN**

**by Mary R. Burch & Jon S. Bailey**  
**ISBN# 0876053711**

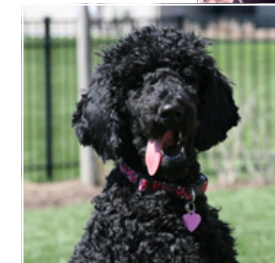
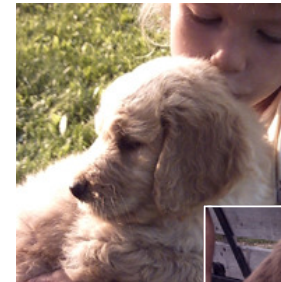
**A great reference for learning canine body language is:**

**ON TALKING TERMS WITH DOGS:**  
**CALMING SIGNALS**  
**by Turid Rugaas**  
**ISBN# 1929242360**



**630-673-3022**

## Definitions of Common Behavior Terms



***"Properly trained, a man can be a dog's best friend."* Corey Ford**

**We have found that it helps immensely to completely understand the following terms before beginning training. . .**

### **Operant Conditioning**

The training method we use involves a style of training known as **operant conditioning**. This popular method of behavior modification is based on the idea that the subject (the dog) is the operator. The dog has the control and can choose to participate in the training session or not. This method differs from *classical conditioning* where, as in Pavlov's dogs, the subject displays an involuntary reaction to a stimulus. In the operant conditioning training arena a dog can choose to work to gain something positive or work to avoid something negative.



### **Reinforcement and Punishment**

**Reinforcement** increases the likelihood an act will occur again and **punishment** decreases the likelihood that the act will occur again. **Positive** punishment is **adding** something to the



dog's environment (quick tug on a prong collar) and **negative** punishment is **taking** something out of the dog's environment (refusing to reward with a treat).

### **Positive Reinforcement**

**Positive reinforcement** is anything that occurs in conjunction with an act that tends to increase the likelihood that the act will occur again. Positive reinforcement is something the dog *wants*, such as food, security, comfort, play, etc.

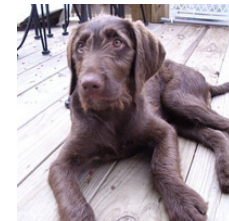
### **Negative Reinforcement**

Like positive reinforcement, **negative reinforcement** is also anything that occurs in conjunction with an act that tends to increase the likelihood that the act will occur again. However, negative reinforcement is something that the dog wants to *avoid*. People learn to buckle their seatbelt to avoid the annoying sound of the buzzer in their car. A horse learns to stop to avoid the pressure from a tug on the reins.

### **Punishment**

**Punishment** decreases the probability of an act occurring again. Punishment happens **after** the action, is not directly associated with the action, and the dog has no control. The dog cannot cease the action to avoid the punishment. Punishment has far less of an effect on changing behavior than reinforcement. A common example of this

is a person coming home to find that their dog has torn apart the garbage. The person yells at the dog and tells it to lay down in the corner. This is punishment. It is not directly associated with the action. The person does not know when the dog tore up the garbage; it could have been hours before. In addition, the dog has no control, it can't stop going through the garbage to avoid the punishment. Punishment should be avoided with most animals. Animals live in the here and now. How can they understand that they are being punished for something that happened in the past when the action of primary importance to them is what's happening now?



### **Cue**

A **cue** or a command is an important part of our communication with an animal. It is a sound or an action that tells the animal what we want it to do. Telling your dog to sit, or directing with the motion of your arm are cues. When training dogs, we use a variety of verbal cues and hand cues. When a cue is consistently associated with positive reinforcement, it becomes a **conditioned stimulus**.

