



CHARGING THE MARKER

The first step in developing a communication system with our dogs is teaching them a marker word. You can also use a clicker if you like. The marker word or click is how we communicate to our dog the moment they performed the correct behaviour and have earned their reinforcement. Since it's often difficult to deliver the reinforcement (food, toy etc) at the exact moment they did the correct thing, the marker word acts as a bridge between that moment and the reinforcement. The marker word is essentially a promise of a reward, and your dog will quickly learn what the word "Yes" or click means. Be sure you do not lie to your dog, if you mark you must reward, or your dog will lose faith in the mark and it will no longer be effective.

Once you choose your marker word (you can use "Yes" or "Mark" or any other one syllable word, or your clicker) you must "charge" it, just like a battery. Sit with your dog a few times over the next couple days with a handful of their kibble or treats. Say your marker word, then deliver a treat, repeat until all the treats are gone. It doesn't matter what your dog is doing, simply mark and reward. You are building an association for your dog, the expectation that when they hear the word they will get a treat. Make sure that you are not delivering the treat at the same time as you say the word, it should be mark - half second pause - treat. Also be sure that you are not moving when marking, do not be reaching for the reward while saying the marker or your dog will not be listening to you but only watching your hands.

Once you have "charged" your marker in this manner you can begin to use it in all your training and in real life. Anytime your dog does something you like you can mark it "Yes!", and then you have a moment to deliver the reward. This means you can reward your dog even when you don't have treats with you, the marker words allows you time to get the reward while still allowing your dog to understand what they did that earned it. Since it's still important that the reward be delivered relatively quickly (ideally within a few seconds) I recommend you keep a stash of treats nearby all the places you would need to reward your dog, such as near their crate, leash area, doorways, etc. In this manner your dog also learns that just because you don't have treats on you doesn't mean they aren't available and eliminates the "My dog will only do it if I have a cookie in my hand" problem.

As you are using the marker in real life remember that it is more important to be precise with the marker than it is to deliver the reward. The mark gives us time to get the treat to them, so focus more on getting the mark at the correct moment. Think of it as taking a picture of the exact moment your dog got it right.

Section: **Communication**

Difficulty: 

Prerequisites
- **None**

Goal: To teach the dog that the word "Yes" = treat.

QUICK STEPS

1.
Sit with your dog and a handful of treats.
2.
Say your marker word or click the clicker.
3.
Pause for half a second then deliver the treat.
4.
Repeat several sessions over a couple days, until your dog is clearly anticipating the treat when they hear the mark.

REMEMBER!

It doesn't matter what your dog is doing while you are charging your marker, you are just building an association between the word and the reward.