

What is animal training?

Animal training is the process of teaching an animal to perform a behaviour or task through learning.

Training should always:

- Promote animal welfare.
- Be safe for both the animal and handler.
- Be appropriate for the species.
- Be based on scientific learning theories.
- Use kind, ethical methods.

Good training builds trust between the animal and handler.

Learning theories

Classical Conditioning

Learning by association.

Example: A dog hears the lead being picked up and becomes excited because it associates the sound with going for a walk.

Operant Conditioning

Learning through consequences.

There are four parts:

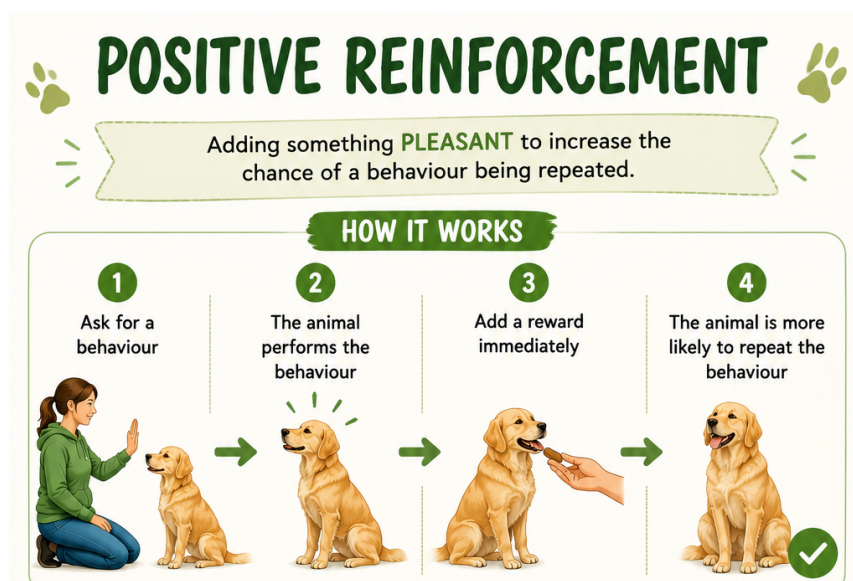
Positive Reinforcement

Adding something pleasant to increase behaviour.

Examples:

- Treats
- Praise
- Toys
- Clicker followed by a reward

This is the most commonly used training method.



Negative Reinforcement

Removing something unpleasant when the correct behaviour happens.

Example: Pressure on a horse's reins is released when it stops.

Positive Punishment

Adding something unpleasant after unwanted behaviour.

Example:

A loud noise to stop an unwanted behaviour.

This should be avoided where possible because it may damage welfare and trust.

Negative Punishment

Removing something the animal wants.

Example:

Ignoring a jumping dog until all four feet are on the floor.

Animal welfare during training

Always remember the Five Welfare Needs:

- Suitable environment
- Suitable diet
- Ability to show normal behaviour
- Appropriate companionship
- Protection from pain, injury and disease

Training should never:

- Cause fear
- Cause pain
- Cause unnecessary stress



Animal behaviour assessment

Before creating a training programme you should assess the animal.

Things to observe:

- Body language
- Temperament
- Confidence
- Fear responses
- Aggression
- Motivation
- Previous training
- Age
- Breed
- Health

Behaviour assessment methods

Examples include:

- Direct observation
- Behaviour checklist
- Ethogram
- Video recording
- Owner interview
- Practical handling assessment

Body language

Relaxed animal

- Loose muscles
- Soft eyes
- Normal breathing
- Curious behaviour

Stressed animal

- Pacing
- Lip licking
- Panting
- Whale eye
- Tail tucked
- Ears back

Fearful animal

- Hiding
- Trembling
- Avoidance
- Growling
- Defensive posture

BODY LANGUAGE

Animals communicate how they feel through their body language.

RELAXED & HAPPY



-  Loose body
-  Soft eyes
-  Ears in natural position
-  Wagging tail
-  Mouth open, relaxed

STRESSED / UNEASY



-  Whale eye (showing whites)
-  Ears back
-  Lip licking / yawning
-  Panting
-  Tail low or tucked

SCARED / FEARFUL



-  Cowering or hiding
-  Ears flat back
-  Trembling
-  Tail tucked
-  Growling or showing teeth



TIP: Always observe the animal as a whole. Context and changes in behaviour are important.

Designing a training programme

A good programme includes:

- Animal details
- Behaviour assessment
- Training goal
- Learning theory used
- Equipment required
- Rewards
- Training sessions
- Success criteria
- Review dates

Goals should be realistic and achievable.

SMART targets

Training goals should be:

S Specific

M Measurable

A Achievable

R Realistic

T Time-bound

Example:

"Teach the dog to sit on command within two weeks."

 SPECIFIC	 MEASURABLE	 ACHIEVABLE	 RELEVANT	 TIME-BOUND
Clearly state what behaviour you want.	How will you measure success?	Make sure the goal is realistic for the dog.	Why is this goal important?	Set a clear timeframe.
				
I will teach the dog to sit on cue.	The dog will sit reliably when I say the word "sit".	I will break the training into small steps and use positive reinforcement.	Sitting is a useful basic behaviour for everyday life and safety.	I will achieve this goal within 2 weeks.

Training aids

Examples include:

- Clicker
- Treat pouch
- Long lead
- Standard lead
- Harness
- Target stick
- Toys
- Whistle
- Food rewards
- Marker words ("Yes!")

Consider:

- Species
- Breed
- Age
- Size
- Temperament
- Training goal
- Safety
- Welfare

Not every aid suits every animal.

Rewards

Common rewards include:

- Food
- Praise
- Toys
- Play
- Affection (if the animal enjoys it)

Reward immediately after the correct behaviour.

Timing

Good timing is essential.

Reward the behaviour within one or two seconds.

Poor timing can accidentally reward the wrong behaviour.

Implementing training

During each session:

- Keep sessions short.
- End on a success.
- Stay calm.
- Be consistent.
- Use clear cues.
- Reward correct behaviour.

Avoid confusing the animal.

Reviewing progress

Ask yourself:

- Has the behaviour improved?
- Has the goal been achieved?
- Is the animal enjoying training?
- Is the programme working?
- Does anything need changing?

Modifying the programme

If progress is slow you may need to change:

- Rewards
- Equipment
- Session length
- Training environment
- Difficulty level
- Training method

Changes should always improve welfare and learning.

IMPLEMENTING TRAINING

Consistent, positive practice leads to learning and success.



1. BE PREPARED

Use the right equipment and high-value rewards. Choose a quiet, low-distraction area.



2. KEEP SESSIONS SHORT

Train for a few minutes at a time (5–10 minutes). End on a success.



3. BE CLEAR & CONSISTENT

Use the same cue, hand signal and tone of voice every time.



4. REWARD IMMEDIATELY

Reward the correct behaviour within 1–2 seconds.



5. REPEAT & PRACTISE

Repeat regularly and gradually increase difficulty and distractions.



REMEMBER: Be patient, stay positive and always put animal welfare first.

