



POSITIVE TRAINING • CLEAR COMMUNICATION • SMALL WINS

MARKER TRAINING

Help your dog understand exactly which choices earn rewards.



BEHAVIOR

Dog makes a good choice



MARK

"Yes!" or click



REWARD

Something valuable



MARKER = a promise. It tells your dog: "That exact thing you just did earned reinforcement." The marker is followed by something your dog values, usually a small food treat.

Why use rewards?

Dogs repeat behaviors that lead to good outcomes. When a desired behavior is followed by something your dog values, that behavior becomes more likely to happen again.



REINFORCEMENT ✓ WHAT WE WANT

The dog does the behavior first.
You mark it, then the reward follows.
This teaches which choices pay off.



BRIBING ✗ NOT WHAT WE DO

The reward is shown before the behavior
to persuade the dog to do it.
We don't want the treat to be required first.

Food is useful because it is quick and precise. As skills become well learned, attention, play, sniffing, going outside, and other everyday reinforcers can also reinforce good choices.

Choose a marker



"YES!"

Short, consistent verbal marker

OR



CLICK

A distinct clicker sound

Tip: Keep the marker consistent. If you mark, follow through with the reward.

Step 1 • Teach the marker

Your dog does not need to perform a behavior yet. You are simply teaching: marker → reward.

1

Prepare: 10–15 tiny treats; begin with NO distractions.

2

Mark: Say "Yes!" or click once. Do not show the treat first.

3

Reward: After the marker, give one treat.



How do you know it is working?



Your dog should orient toward you or expect a treat after hearing the marker. The sound is beginning to predict reinforcement.



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Step 2 • Mark the behavior you want

Watch for a behavior you like, mark the instant it happens, then reinforce. Think of the marker like taking a photo of the exact moment your dog got it right.

WHEN YOUR DOG...	YOU...
Has four paws on the floor	Mark while all four paws are down → reward.
Looks at you voluntarily	Mark the glance → reward.
Settles on a bed or mat	Mark the settling behavior → reward on the mat.
Notices a distraction and stays calm	Mark the calm observation → reward.



Timing matters



Mark while the desired behavior is happening. The reward can follow a moment later. Precise timing helps your dog understand exactly what worked.

Make training easier



SHORT & SWEET

1–3 minutes can be plenty.



START EASY

Begin with NO distractions.



REWARD PROGRESS

Reinforce small successes.



SMALL TREATS

Tiny pieces allow more repetitions.



SMART PLACEMENT

Place rewards where you want your dog to be.



WATCH COMFORT

If your dog is overwhelmed, make the situation easier.

Common mistakes

AVOID	TRY THIS INSTEAD
Marking after the behavior is over	Mark the instant it happens.
Showing the treat before marking	Mark first, then reach for the reward.
Repeating "Yes, yes, yes!"	Use one clear marker for one successful moment.
Using the marker just to get attention	Use it to identify behavior that will be reinforced.



REMEMBER: The marker is information, not a command. Rewards teach your dog which choices work. Clear communication + reinforcement + manageable training situations make learning easier.