

Introduction to Positive Training

If we do not want our dogs to jump up, pull on the leash, go bananas when visitors come by, poop on the new carpet, or chew up our favourite shoes...

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR DOGS TO DO?

MYTHBUSTER

Contrary to popular belief,
our dogs do **NOT** innately know what we consider to be good or bad behaviour.

Dogs do what is most reinforcing for them

and what is most reinforcing for them is influenced by their breed(s),
their genetics, their history, their unique personality, their environment,

AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR BEHAVIOURS.

This is **good news** for us! It means that there is **no such thing as a good or bad dog**. Sure, what one dog finds naturally reinforcing might align better with what we consider to be desirable behaviour than another, but no dog is deliberately out to break our, unique to us, house rules.

It also means that we can SHAPE what our dog finds reinforcing by following behaviours that we do like with consequences that our dog finds reinforcing!!

- Instead of jumping up; **we can reinforce sitting.**
- Instead of pulling on the leash; **we can reinforce walking by our hip.**
- Instead of going bananas when visitors come by; **we can reinforce calm behaviour.**
- instead of pooping on the new carpet; **we can reinforce going potty outside.**
- Instead of chewing our favourite shoes; **we can reinforce chewing appropriate items.**

Have you ever tried to break a bad habit?

One approach we have all tried is; focusing all our attention on eliminating the bad habit through reminding ourselves of the undesirable consequences of that bad habit.

The problem is that deep down, we still find that habit reinforcing enough that eventually it outweighs those undesirable consequences...and we fall back into it.

🐾 Introduction to Positive Training 🐾

WHAT IF we focused our energy on a good habit to replace our bad habit?
WHAT IF we could make our good habit something we actually desire to do?
Think: We can learn to LOVE doing the dishes!

Instead of focusing on (and fighting) what our dog truly finds reinforcing by punishing the behaviour in an attempt to suppress it; we can give them something new to do. We have the power to change what our dog actually desires to do... We can, with a little time and effort, define what they find reinforcing.

We do this through **Positive Reinforcement**.

*Positive Reinforcement might look like **magic** but it is actually **science**;
It is one of the four quadrants of **Operant Conditioning**.*

What is Operant Conditioning?

All training, whether **Positive (R+)**, Balanced, or Dominance-based training, occurs through Operant Conditioning; a learning process where voluntary behaviours are modified by their consequences. When talking about Operant Conditioning, terms that we assign a moral value to in our day to day life, assume a more **neutral** meaning:

Consequences = the good or bad result of an action	
Positive	The ADDITION of a consequence
Negative	The REMOVAL of a consequence
Reinforce	To INCREASE the frequency of a behaviour
Punish	To DECREASE the frequency of a behaviour

Introduction to Positive Training

Now, we can take a look at the 4 quadrants of Operant Conditioning:

1. **Positive Reinforcement:** the ADDITION of a consequence that will INCREASE the frequency of a behaviour.

Example: My dog sits so I **give him a treat** to **increase** the likelihood that he will sit again in the future.

[Positive Reinforcement Video Example 1](#)

[Positive Reinforcement Video Example 2](#)

[Positive Reinforcement Video Example 3](#)

2. **Negative Reinforcement:** the REMOVAL of a consequence that will INCREASE the frequency of a behaviour.

Example: my dog sits so I **stop pulling up on the leash** to **increase** the likelihood that he will sit again in the future.

! Disclaimer: We do not support the use of the techniques shown in these videos !

[Negative Reinforcement Video Example 1](#)

[Negative Reinforcement 000Video Example 2](#)

3. **Positive Punishment:** The ADDITION of a consequence that will DECREASE the frequency of a behaviour.

Example: my dog jumps on me so I **knee him in the chest** to **decrease** the likelihood that he will jump on me again in the future.

! Disclaimer: We do not support the use of the techniques shown in these videos !

[Positive Punishment Video Example \(Extreme\) 1](#)

[Positive Punishment Video Example 2](#)

[Positive Punishment Video Example 3](#)

4. **Negative Punishment:** The REMOVAL of a consequence that will DECREASE the likelihood of a behaviour.

Example: my dog jumps on me so I **withhold attention** to **decrease** the likelihood that he will jump on me again in the future.

[Negative Punishment Video Example 1](#)

[Negative Punishment Video Example 2](#)

THE 4 QUADRANTS OF OPERANT CONDITIONING

When training an animal, there is one behavior that we want to **reinforce** (increase), and another behavior that we want to **punish** (decrease).

We can add something good or bad (+ **positive**) or remove/delay something good or bad (- **negative**) to get the behavior we want.

IN THIS EXAMPLE: The reinforced behavior is **LOOSE-LEASH WALKING**.
The punished behavior is **PULLING ON THE LEASH**.

+R

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT
ADDING GOOD STUFF TO
INCREASE A BEHAVIOR



-P

NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT
DELAYING GOOD STUFF TO
DECREASE A BEHAVIOR



+P

POSITIVE PUNISHMENT
ADDING BAD STUFF TO
DECREASE A BEHAVIOR



-R

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT
DELAYING BAD STUFF TO
INCREASE A BEHAVIOR



🐾 Introduction to Positive Training 🐾

So what is **Positive or R+** training?

Positive training means that we use **ONLY** two quadrants of Operant Conditioning in training our dogs, specifically; **Positive Reinforcement** and **Negative Punishment** with a heavy emphasis on **Positive Reinforcement**.

Why the emphasis on **Positive Reinforcement**?

- Encourages the handler to focus on behaviours they like and want to see more of, instead of focusing on what they don't like about their dog.
- Teaches the dog alternate behaviours to replace the undesirable ones instead of simply suppressing the undesirable behaviour.
- Builds relationship and trust between handler and dog.
- Naturally creates a dog that responds with joy and vigor to handler cues.
- It's an extremely forgiving technique for the new or rusty handler/trainer.
- It's a safer way to work with dogs with an unknown or painful history as it is completely force free.
- **It can achieve results that would be impossible using the other 3 quadrants of Operant Conditioning; [click on the links below](#) and see for yourself!**

[Dogs Driving Cars](#)

[Dogs Trick Training](#)

[Dogs and Functional MRI](#)

[Dog Cooperative Care](#)

[Rat Trick Training](#)

[Giraffe Enrichment](#)

[Lion Voluntary Blood Draw](#)

[Gorilla Voluntary Blood Draw](#)

[Chimpanzee Cooperative Care](#)

[Shark Cooperative Care](#)

[Horse Trick Training](#)

[Grizzly Bear Voluntary Blood Draw](#)

[Cat Cooperative Care](#)

[Jaguar Cooperative Care](#)

[Cougar Cooperative Care](#)

Positive Reinforcement vs Positive Punishment

Using the example of 'come when called', also known as recall.

1. Using **Positive Punishment** (poorly executed):

Handler calls their dog, their dog ignores them, handler calls again, their dog continues to ignore them. Feeling slighted and annoyed, the handler marches over to their dog, scolds them, and clips on the leash making the dog less likely to recall in future and damaging their relationship.

2. Using **Positive Reinforcement** (poorly executed):

Handler calls their dog, their dog ignores them, handler repeatedly calls their dog until they come and then showers them with treats when they do.

In the above examples it demonstrates how **forgiving** positive reinforcement can be for the new or rusty trainer/handler. Though neither handler executed the exercise well, only one is walking away with the dog-handler relationship unscathed, feeling good, a happy dog, and one step closer to having a dog that comes when called.

Why is Positive Punishment so unforgiving for the new or rusty trainer?

Steve White's 8 rules of Punishment:

1. The punishment must be something the animal dislikes and something the animal does not expect.
2. The punishment must suppress the unwanted behaviour, otherwise it's just plain abuse.
3. The punishment must be of the perfect intensity. Too much and the dog will shut down. Too little and the dog develops resistance to punishment.
4. The punishment must happen immediately after the behaviour.
5. The punishment must be associated with the behaviour, not you. Otherwise your presence is a signal that punishment may occur, and your absence is one that it will not. The result? A sneaky dog.
6. The punishment must happen every time the behaviour occurs. Otherwise, you may put the undesirable behaviour on a variable schedule and make it even tougher to break.
7. There must be an alternative for the dog. Give him an opportunity to perform an acceptable behaviour in order to escape or avoid the punishment.
8. Punishment must never be used to the extent that punishment outweighs reinforcement from the dog's perspective.

In short, positive punishment is incredibly difficult to do 'correctly!'

At its best, and in our experience, it is rarely at its best, it achieves quick results while encouraging the handler to focus heavily on the behaviours they do not like in their dog and teaches the dog to suppress behaviours rather than learn appropriate alternatives.

Let's compare Positive Punishment and Positive Reinforcement at their best...

Using **Positive Punishment** (well executed):

Handler calls their dog, as soon as they realize the dog is not going to come (only a couple seconds have elapsed since the initial cue to come), and as they have worked extensively on their recall in the past and the handler believes the dog should know what is expected of them, the handler uses a shock collar to quickly correct the dog, the dog comes and is less likely to ignore the handler in future.

Questions:

- What is the handler's goal?
- How are both the dog and handler feeling?
- What is the handler learning?
- Is the dog-handler relationship strengthened?

Observations:

- Obedience is the goal.
- We can safely assume that the handler is disappointed in their dog's lack of obedience. It is also safe to assume that the dog nor the handler are feeling particularly good about what just happened
- At best, it encourages the handler to view their dog as an obedient robot and at worst; as a defiant animal looking to usurp their authority that needs to be taught a lesson. Fosters a sort of militant entitled attitude in the handler. The dog alone is held responsible. The handler is focused on the undesirable behaviour of 'ignoring' the recall cue
- The dog-handler relationship is not at the heart of the exercise. Teaches the handler to blame their dog for gaps in the dog's knowledge/ability. Creates a serious and tense training environment.

Introduction to Positive Training

Using **Positive reinforcement** (well executed):

Handler calls their dog, the dog ignores them, handler realizes that they need to work more on their recall in controlled scenarios before trying again outside at the park. Handler calmly walks over to clip the leash on and continues on their walk.

Later that day in the low distraction environment of the backyard the handler practices calling their dog and rewarding them with a special treat for coming so the dog is more likely to recall in the future.

Questions:

- What is the handler's goal?
- How are both the dog and handler feeling?
- What is the handler learning?
- Is the dog-handler relationship strengthened?

Observations:

- Building the dog-handler relationship and learning are the goals.
- We can safely assume that the handler and the dog are unbothered by this experience. No hard feelings from dog or handler.
- Fosters accountability, ownership, patience, compassion, learning and understanding in the handler (great life skills that aren't easily come by). The handler holds themselves accountable. The handler is focused on what they can do differently to prepare their dog for the next park adventure.
- The dog-handler relationship is at the heart of it all. Creates a fun/relaxed training environment

Introduction to Positive Training

So how does **Positive Reinforcement (R+) Training** work?

1. Identify the Undesirable behaviour

~ Example: My dog pulls on the leash

2. Meet with your vet to ensure that there aren't any underlying medical issues as these can oftentimes be at the root of an undesirable behaviour.

~ Example: My dog has Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency and often urgently needs to go potty, which could be contributing to her pulling on the leash. Treat the condition.

3. Ensure that your dog's mental and physical enrichment needs are being met as this can oftentimes make undesirable behaviours disappear.

~ Example: I will add an extra 30min walk and a brain game every day. My dog is still pulling on the leash and I know her physical, mental, and medical needs are being met.

4. Prevent the practice of the undesirable behaviour through management of the environment and or the dog in the meantime.

~ Example: Until I have taught my dog to loose leash walk, I will replace walks with other forms of exercise to prevent the practice of pulling on the leash.

5. Choose an alternative behaviour to teach your dog.

~ Example: I will teach the alternative behaviour of loose leash walking.

6. Break the alternative behaviour down into its simplest form.

~ Example: The simplest form of loose leash walking is one step of loose leash walking in my distraction free living room; I will start there.

7. Begin teaching the alternative behaviour through positive reinforcement.

~ Example: I will mark the moment that my dog does one step of loose leash walking in the living room with my clicker or a simple 'yes' then I will give her a treat to reinforce the behaviour.

8. Gradually build to where you'd like the behaviour to be in the end.

~ Example: I will incrementally ask for more steps of loose leash walking before marking and rewarding until we can loose leash walk all the way around the living room with ease.

9. Generalize the behaviour to various different environments.

~ Example: Now that we've mastered the living room let's practice in new locations until we've mastered them all!

🐾 Introduction to Positive Training 🐾

Conclusion

The main contrast between Positive Reinforcement and the other 3 quadrants of Operant conditioning is that we are teaching an alternative behaviour to replace the behaviour that is undesirable instead of simply suppressing or diminishing the undesirable behaviour.

So **step 7** in the above example is where the **Positive Reinforcement** of **Positive Reinforcement Training** is actually occurring.

To learn more about how to use **Positive Reinforcement** in your **R+ training**; reach out to a Positive Reinforcement Trainer in your area also known as a Force Free or R+ Trainer.

We also recommend these **R+** Youtube channels!

[Kikopup Emily Larlham](#)

[McCann Dogs](#)

[Dogs That - Susan Garrett](#)

[Zak George](#)