

OPERANT CONDITIONING

Operant conditioning forms an association between a behavior and a consequence. Dogs learn, “If I *do this* in this situation, I will *get that*.” Operant conditioning forms the foundation of the various dog training techniques Pawsitive Experts Dog Trainers use.

Understanding operant conditioning requires you to learn some new terminology. This terminology feels tricky at first because it gives new, different meanings to common words. The chart below helps to make sense of the terminology.

	+ (ADD something)	- (REMOVE something)
Something the learner likes (aka reward) (stimulus or event)	POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT	NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT
Something the learner dislikes (aka aversive) (stimulus or event)	POSITIVE PUNISHMENT	NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT

Tip: Understanding learning theory requires you to rethink the words “positive” and “negative.” These words no longer mean “good” and “bad.” Positive means “giving or adding something.” Negative means “removing or taking something away.”

Think of them as mathematical terms, rather than emotional terms.

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Using the chart on the previous page, you can see:

- 🐾 **Positive Reinforcement** = add something the learner likes
- 🐾 **Negative Punishment** = remove something the learner like
- 🐾 **Positive Punishment** = add something the leaner dislikes
- 🐾 **Negative Reinforcement** = remove something the learner dislikes

These are the Four Quadrants of Operant Conditioning. Operant Conditioning is a powerful learning tool because:

- 🐾 **Reinforcement** causes a behavior to be repeated (or increase in frequency).
- 🐾 **Punishment** causes a behavior to not be repeated (or decrease in frequency).

The table below applies operant conditioning to Dog Training.

	+ (ADD something)	- (REMOVE something)
A GOOD THING <hr/> (stimulus or event)	<p style="text-align: center;">Positive Reinforcement</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Adding something the dog likes when the dog performs a wanted behavior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases the likelihood the dog will perform the behavior • Teaches and motivates dogs to perform desired behaviors <p>Example: A dog gets a treat when the dog performs the "sit" behavior. The dog will repeat the "sit" behavior because the dog wants to keep earning yummy treats.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Negative Punishment</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Removing something the dog likes when the dog performs a specific, unwanted behavior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases the likelihood the dog will perform the behavior • Encourages the dog to substitute the unwanted behavior with a desired behavior <p>Example: A pet parent turns her back and ignores her dog that jumps on her when greeting. The dog learns to calmly keep all four feet on the floor during greetings!</p>
A BAD THING <hr/> (stimulus or event)	<p style="text-align: center;">Positive Punishment</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Adding something the dog doesn't like when the dog performs a specific, unwanted behavior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases the likelihood the dog will perform the behavior • Encourages the dog to control or stop undesired behaviors <p>Example: A dog is digging in the backyard. The pet parent loudly yells "NO!", scaring the dog. The dog learns to not dig in the yard when the pet parent is present.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Negative Reinforcement</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Removing something the dog doesn't like when the dog performs a new, wanted behavior</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases the likelihood the dog will perform a new, desired behavior • Encourages the dog to control or stop undesired behaviors <p>Example: A handler keeps a constant hard pull on the dog's leash until the dog moves into heel position. As soon as the dog moves into the correct position, the handler loosens the pull. The dog learns that walking in the correct position removes the uncomfortable pull.</p>

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Tip: Punishment refers to anything that reduces how often a particular behavior is repeated. In fact, recent scientific research finds that adding physical or verbal corrections (even a light pull on a flat buckle collar) stops the learning process. Punishment is a term which means the goal is to decrease a behavior from repeating. One of the best ways to manage a dog’s unwanted behavior is to simply ignore it (negative punishment). When a dog is ignored for displaying unwanted behavior, the dog has missed the opportunity to earn a reward. The pet parent (or Dog Trainer) must redirect the dog, encouraging the dog to perform a wanted behavior for which the dog will earn a reward!

Show What You Know!

Use the information about learning theory to match a letter from the left column with its definition in the right column.

Concept	Definition
A. Classical Conditioning	___ 1. A stimulus that a dog associates with a primary reinforcer.
B. Conditioned Reinforcer	___ 2. Adding something the dog does not like when the dog performs an undesirable behavior.
C. Positive Punishment	___ 3. Something the dog does not like is taken away
D. Negative Reinforcement	___ 4. Rewards (like food or praise) that dogs inherently like and are used to reinforce desired behaviors.
E. Operant Conditioning	___ 5. Something good happens as a result of a specific behavior and encourages the behavior to continue.
F. Positive Reinforcement	___ 6. When a dog forms an unconscious association between two stimuli.
G. Primary Reinforcer	___ 7. When a dog forms an association between a behavior and a consequence.
H. Negative Punishment	___ 8. Something good is taken away when the dog performs unwanted behavior.