

Rewarding

The reward can basically be anything your dog likes. It could be something your dog can do, taste, feel, smell, hear or see.

It is rewarding for your dog only if it changes his level of happiness or joy, which is measurable! Making a list of all the things your dog likes, will make it clear to you which items you can actually be used effectively as a reward, and which ones are not desirable.

EASY REWARDS to give: Most dogs enjoy eating and therefore food or treats can be an easy reward for you to give. Use a variety of small, soft, high-value treats. Crunchy treats take time to chew and leave crumbs to clean up. A 'trail mix' variety works well - your pup doesn't know what's coming! Cheese, liver, and other smelly treats are great choices.

Some dogs enjoy playing with toys or playing a good game of tug, and others like a belly rub as a reward. For your dog rolling in goose poop may be extremely rewarding, however, since you will experience that as unpleasant, it is not a reward you will want to grant your dog often, if at all!

You pick the reward and make sure it fits the performance level.

- An excellent and fast performance of a more difficult task will be the reason to give your dog a higher value reward. A rousing 10 seconds of tug, or their favourite rewards or treats.
- A medium response is the reason for lower value reward (kibble versus chopped liver)
- An average performance or below will NOT be a reason to give the high-value reward, but a gentle pat, or a:” good boy” if the dog enjoys that kind of action will do!
- A no-response performance means the dog did not attempt the behaviour, you can re-cue and reward if they respond with something lower value or praise. Then try again, the first time good response gets a higher value reward!

Why keep the reward away until after the marker?

Most dogs are smart, they are brilliant as a matter of fact! They will instantly know if you are carrying the reward on you and then will perform nicely. If you do not have the reward on you, they know and could potentially ignore your command.

More reason to start early by placing the rewards off to the side and NOT reaching for them until you have marked the correct behaviour! If your dog already has programmed you to “show them the money” before performing a request, you can change it now! Place small stashes of rewards randomly throughout the house and call your dog's name. Mark with YES when they respond and then ask your dog to come with you to find the reward!

You will discover your dog will give you a better response to your cues and has more desire to please!

When and why to change the reward from immediately and all the time to put the behaviour on a random reward schedule.

Variable or random reinforcement can make your dog really want to pay attention to you all the time. Why do people play slot machines and buy lottery tickets? You just never know when you will win! Or maybe a person they know has won before, which could be me, so playing the slot machines becomes addictive.

Dog training and offering good behaviour can become just as important and addictive to your dog! Start with great and high-value rewards for new behaviour, and give quickly and abundantly at first. Once the behaviour is becoming easier, reduce the reward to a lower value, and/or reduce the frequency of rewarding. Maybe ask for the behaviour 3 times in a row, or 5 times then 1, then 2 etc. before rewarding.

Science has proven that a behaviour that is put on a random reinforcement rate will become stronger and more enjoyed by the dog than if we do the same reward system all the time. One known problem with rewarding in the same fashion and interval all the time is that your dog will potentially tune you out as soon as they have received the reward, as in their view the exercise is fully completed when the reward has been delivered, and there is no need to pay attention or offer another behaviour at that time.

Another good way of reinforcing good choices is to offer your dog a “fine dining” experience occasionally and randomly. You know the difference between a “drive-thru” meal and an evening out at an upscale restaurant!! Not all the time, but unexpectedly, you will reward your dog with a deluxe presentation of rewards and treats. Example: SIT-> dog performs behaviour-> you mark -> You reach for the treat, but instead of giving just one, you pull out several small treats and have a good conversation with your dog while you hand over one treat, still talking, then offer the next one, maybe tease a bit in front of your dog's nose with the third one before you give it up, the fourth one could be tossed on the floor for your dog to go-get-it, etc.

Make it FUN, be unpredictable, and your dog's focus on you will soar and you will end up with a happier dog.

Of course, you could also combine rewards: food, tugging, patting etc., to make it into a wonderful experience.