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Shaping: An Easy Way to Teach Your Dog Something New

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Is your energetic dog driving you crazy, but you don't have the time or space for a marathon walk or game of fetch? Follow these steps to learn shaping—a [great way to train your dog](#).

It provides mental stimulation, which is just as important as physical exercise for a happy dog, and it can be just as tiring as a long walk outdoors.



Shaping is a method of training a dog to do something by waiting for him to offer a behavior and quickly rewarding it. First, your dog needs to know what a clicker or marker word means. Once he does (usually it takes no more than a day), you can start shaping behaviors. See section on Clicker for instructions on how to “charge” a clicker.

Now that you and your dog understand the clicker, start with something simple. Let’s say that you want to teach your dog to touch an object. Put the object on the floor between you and your dog. Watch him very closely; the very moment he has any interaction at all with the object, even the smallest glance, click immediately and reward. Then “reset” by tossing a treat a few feet away and wait for him to come back and do it again. It will probably take just a few repetitions for your dog to [figure out what he needs to do to earn that treat](#).

Now let’s make it a little harder: ask him to push the object. As he gets more excited about touching the object, wait just a little longer after the touch. Don’t say anything! He will get impatient with you and probably give it a shove. As soon as he does, click and treat. With each success, wait just a little longer until you get the behavior you want—

click! And treat.



A note on treats: they should be high value, something soft (no time for chewing a biscuit) and extra tasty, something your dog will really work for. Tiny pieces of chicken or other lean meat, cheese, or uncured hot dog bits work well. You can feed a smaller dinner if you've given lots of treats during training sessions that day.

Work with objects you have around the house. You can teach your dog to jump onto a box, get inside a box, pick up an object, push an object, and stand inside a hoop. Once you get started, you'll see that the possibilities are endless. Your dog will be offering every behavior he can think of in order to earn a reward. Short sessions are all you need; 15 to 20 minutes at a time is plenty. Always end on a successful note.