

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG One of the things I like to do at the end of every day if time permits is to go back and read all of the questions, comments, reviews about this podcast. And recently one came in on [Instagram](#) and here's what they wrote. "I love your podcast. Watched your videos on YouTube and I just ordered your books."

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"In one video, you were teaching Archer—" maybe meant Tater, I'm not sure. And... Oh I know! Archer, the puppy, of course. In [one video, I was teaching Archer](#) and I was only using treats. "In a different video, you were [teaching a dog to touch a stick with his nose](#), and you were using a clicker. I was wondering are you only using a clicker to teach some things and then how do you decide when to use a clicker for training? Thank you for putting out your podcasts and your videos. I appreciate it."

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Thank you for your note and your question. I thought, that's a great question. Let's make it the topic of a podcast and that's what we're doing today. Hello, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I'm going to help you to decide number one, is a clicker a good choice for your particular dog? Is using a clicker in training the best choice for you as a trainer? Is a clicker the best tool to choose for the behavior you're trying to teach right now? Because there are some behaviors, I would never use a clicker for.

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There are other behaviors I will always use a clicker for. Take a look at this behavior. It's a video of my puppy This! when she was quite young, hitting a button. Now, as you look at this behavior, I want you to decide is this a behavior that I would have used a clicker to shape. And if you know or think you know the answer and even if you don't, take a guess and leave it in the comments wherever you might be watching.

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And if you're listening, come on back and watch because I got a game for you to play later on. Do you think I use a clicker to train this behavior? And if you look really closely, what my puppy is doing is hitting a like button. And if you're watching this on YouTube, go ahead and mimic that behavior because that's feedback for myself and my team who spend hours putting these amazing videos together for you.

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Okay. So, let's jump right in and just say, "Well, what's a clicker Susan? I'm not entirely sure what that is." All right. A clicker is a, otherwise known as a marker or a bridge. Now, all bridges markers aren't clickers, but a clicker is used as a bridge or marker. And what a marker is, it's a condition reinforcer. It's something that is paired in the dog's world to mean something I like is about to happen. Like when you pick up a set of keys, that's a conditioned reinforcer for your dog that they're going for a car ride. Right. If your dog is excited when you pick up a set of keys.



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Okay. So, it's a conditioned reinforcer. Now we pair something amazing, something the dog really loves, and it doesn't always have to be food. With a click or a [verbal word](#), it could be a whistle, it could be a number of things. So, the dog understands when I hear that, it means what I just did was correct, and they anticipate they're either going to stop and get a reinforcement from you. Or your marker might mean that's good, keep going and you're getting that reinforcer at the end. All right.

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So, it is a marker that is the dog says, "I can anticipate now something amazing is about to happen." And it's a process that the dog learns to predict, they learn to predict the future. Now, if you are on this podcast, chances are you are pretty committed or somewhat committed or curious about being a trainer that uses primarily or exclusively reinforcement in your training. I don't think it's quite possible to be exclusively reinforcement, but that's a topic for another conversation.

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Okay. But I'm just, before I send you away thinking that we use physical or verbal punisher, we don't. Let's get stick to the topic of reinforcement. There's really four things you can do if you're using reinforcement. You can use it as a lure. In that case, the dog just chases the food and then when the food stops, you release the food to them.

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When the food stops moving, or when that you can manipulate the dog into the position you want. Not something I use a lot of and I'm going to tell you exactly what I use and when for all of these four things, how often I would do it later on the podcast. So, there's a lure. I'm not crazy about it because there really isn't a transfer of value.

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The excitement to train kind of stays with the reinforcement that's being lured around. Then there's just throwing the reinforcement without marking, just like my mentor Bob Bailey calls it 'Food Chucking'. But it might be a toy that you're chucking and you're not saying good, you're not marking anything, you're just throwing that.

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There are times I will definitely do that. Then the third thing is the use of a verbal marker. Now I used to use the word "Yes" until I spent time with my friend Shelley Wood down at dolphin discovery where I was, you know, a group of my students and I went, and we spent a week training manatees and sea lions and dolphins.

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If they're using a word as a marker rather than a whistle, they use the word "Good". And so, I started using the word "Good" and I like it a lot because it's short. And when it's short it helps the dog to understand exactly what it is that you are reinforcing. So, I absolutely occasionally will still say "Yes", I'll use the word "Excellent". If what I'm marking is a period of time that's longer, I can use a longer word. But most of the time "Good" is the closest thing that I can get out reliably that is short and sweet like a clicker. So, a lure, food, or reinforcement chucking, a verbal marker or a clicker, those are the four ways that you might deal out reinforcement to your dog.



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But after the verbal marker you would give a reinforcement, after a click you would give a reinforcement. However, verbal markers you could also use as a keep going signals. All right. Let's talk about the clicker though. Why do we have to use a clicker at all? First of all, let me just share with you what a clicker is.

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So, it's something that, this is something you can get— I got at a dollar store one time. It's just like a kid's toy, it's a little cricket. So those of you driving just makes a quiet noise. So, see, that's just quiet and it's nice for dogs who are a little bit afraid of the clicker. You can even go quieter than that and go to a pen that clicks.

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And then typical clicker, it's a little louder. And then this is a really loud clicker. Whoo. Sorry about your ears on that one. So that's a clicker. It's basically a kid's toy, but why do we like it? There's really two reasons why I love clicker. Number one, this little piece of plastic and metal comes with no judgment to the dog. Therefore, in training it can reduce stress. Because it brings in clarity that you can't get, or you often lose when using a verbal marker.

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For example, if a dog does something and it's close to what we want and we're trying to decide should we reward? And sometimes it would be like, "Yes? That's good enough. Okay. I'll give you a cookie." Or other times it might be "Yes! That's really super good. Oh my gosh! You're really good!" And so, our words tend to judge. And that judgment adds stress. And some dogs are super sensitive to stress. And so that judgment hurts your training.

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And so, if you are using verbal markers, it's really important that you either say "Good" and you can get excited, but don't "Yeah? That was sort of right." That's tough on a dog. So, number one, I love a clicker because it's nonjudgmental. Number two it's so darn precise. It's a tool that we as dog trainers keep in our toolbox when we want that kind of precision in what we're doing. I'll give you an example.

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There's a lot of things that you could cut something with. It's depending on what it is you want to cut. You might use a different cutting tool. Like you might use pair of scissors if you wanted to cut paper. That might not be, maybe let's call them-, you know, material. I might use my teeth if I want to cut a piece of thread. You might use a melon baller if you want to cut up some melon. You might use a butter knife if you want to cut butter.

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Do you see what I'm saying? There's a specific cutting tool, you know, but you tend to use cutting tools where they will be most effective and don't use them when they're going to cause you problems. A clicker is just like that. For example, if you were going to have brain surgery, you would prefer that your surgeon uses the most precise cutting instrument available to him. Don't take any extras, right? Like use the laser rather than the melon baller when you're going into my noggin. Right. It's kind of obvious. The same is true with a clicker. And I would think that's the thing that a lot of new to dog training- people don't recognize is the [power of the clicker](#). It is so darn powerful.



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It's like the laser for our dog training. And if you start respecting a clicker as the laser, and you're going to ask yourself, "Do I really need to isolate this fine, or would a melon baller do at this point in time?" So, you need to consider. Because of that precision, it isolates for your dog the exact moment that they did something.

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So, you see something, you capture it, and you say to your dog, "Ayt yeah. Like, freeze right there. That's what I like. I'm going to reward you for that exact thing." And so, it's so precise that if you pick the same thing over and over and over again, guess what, Bob Bailey my mentor says, 'what you click is what you get'.

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In reality, you need to think about it this way. What the dog thinks you've clicked is what you're going to get. And sometimes it's not what you wanted. Let me share a story of early, early in my clicker adventure. So, this would be back in the, probably in the early nineties and I was teaching my dog a send away in obedience or go out as we call it in North America. And I decided to train go out by getting my dog to put her paws on the wall. And eventually it turned into just hitting with one paw. And so, I was teaching it, I shaped her with a target stick, put her paws on the wall, everything was going good. And then I got behind her.

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I was using my clicker. Click, boom, click, boom. And she was— and then I decided I want to see how well she understands this. And I was going to not reinforce the first one. And so, I did it. I was training my Jack Russell Terrier at the same time. So, I did it with my Jack Russell and she, you know, when— I didn't, I wasn't too far away from the wall, maybe three or four feet, my Terrier went out, hit the wall and turned and looked at me and started coming back and then realize "I didn't hear a click."

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So, she turned around and she like hit the wall more emphatically like, "Hello, didn't you see I hit the wall?" And then I clicked. So, I was excited. Hoping to get the same response from my Border Collie. My Border Collie went up, hit the wall, but her paws didn't come off the wall. Instead, she looked over her shoulder at me.

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"Um, look I'm doing what you want. Right. Why aren't you clicking?" And then you know, the memory of [what you click is what you get](#), and I realized right then and there what I'd done. I had isolated a moment in time of a behavior that I really didn't want. So, the behavior I wanted my dog to do is go up, touch the wall, come back down.

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But because I clicked so many times at the exact moment she was touching the wall, to Stoni's brain the behavior was get up and touch the wall. So right then and there I decided okay I know what I'm going to click now. I'm going to click when paws come off the wall so that she will know that this part of the behavior is important as well. So, she was looking over her shoulder at me and I'm waiting for her paws to come down.



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And then she turns away from me and looks at her paws and then she looks up the wall. And you could see the little wheels turning like, "If my paws on the wall aren't enough, then I'll move closer." So, she moved her body closer. So, her elbows and her forearms could be on the wall. And then she looked over her shoulder and that didn't get a click. I'm trying not to break out in hysterics. Then she scoots her whole body so her stomach, her chest and all her paws and her legs are on the wall. Everything's on the wall, like in a freeze position, like she's going to get frisked. Right.

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And then looks back like, "Is this wrong?" Now I've just lost it. I'm just laughing my head off. And so that's why there are times you don't want to use a clicker. So, let's isolate now. I'm going to go back to those four things that I might do. And I'm going to first— so I'm going to tell you what those breakdowns would be.

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So, I would use a clicker maybe 25 to 30% of the time when I'm teaching something new. I would also use it when I'm refreshing a piece of something that is exact. So, it might be 20 to 30% of the time with my puppy and 25 to 30% of the time with an adult dog when I'm refreshing an exact behavior. Something like target out your back paw, reach your back paw out and hold your leg up in the air straight like a ballerina dog.

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I would click that because what I want is for my dog to lift up her rear leg, extend it behind her and hold it up straight. I might also use a clicker for something like put your head down on the ground, lay down with your head down and hold your head down. I want that position. It's kind of cute for pictures.

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But another thing I might do would be, Oh, teaching a dog when they're bringing a retrieve object. When they're retrieving something. I will separately teach hold. You put it in your mouth no matter what I do, you don't drop it until I give you your "thank you" cue. Right. So, what's common about all those things?

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It's a moment in time that I require the dog to hold freeze, do something that is frozen in time. All right. So, 25 to 30% of the time I might use a clicker. Probably 60 to 65% of the time I will use a verbal marker. And as I said earlier, most of the time it's the word "Good". And when I get excited, it might be "SUPA", "Excellent". And occasionally I fall back on what I used to use, and that is "Yes", but I try to use "Good".

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And I would use that for the majority of everything I train. Now food chucking, reward chucking without a marker word, I would use that when I don't want to disrupt my dog's flow. So, if I'm shaping my dog to move away from me, like runaway from me in a straight line, if I marked it with a click, they're going to look back when I'm throwing the reinforcement. And yes, the marker isolates that their head away was the right thing. But the placement of the reinforcement that they get when they're looking at me actually rewards the opposite. So, growing that behavior, we take a lot longer.



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And so, I would use food chucking for teaching my dogs to swim. A lot of dogs won't swim unless people throw things for them. I want my dogs when I say go for a swim, they go into the body of water and they just swim around. And I get that by chucking a toy over their head and they're swimming and they're not looking at me and all of a sudden something exciting lands in front of them.

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I would also use food chucking for teaching my dogs to back up. Because as the dog backs away if you mark that, they know my reinforcement's coming and so they're going to move forward. And that is in conflict with the behavior I'm trying to create. So, you see, I would use food chucking maybe 5% of the time and food luring probably less than 1 or 2% of the time. And I can't honestly tell you a time I might food lure, but it is when the behavior is super easy, and I can eliminate that lure really fast.

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And it's not something I routinely use because I can't even think of a time that I would use it. But I don't want to say I never lure because it's a tool in my toolbox that I might use. So, food chucking might be 5% of the time. All right. And verbal marker 60 to 65 and using a clicker 25 to 30 and I hope that adds up to a hundred.

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Okay. And so, there are those behaviors that I absolutely would use a clicker for. And I've already told you they are when I want my dog to target an isolated moment in time and hold it. And you could say, "Well then what about a sit?" "Yeah, my dog is sitting and it's holding a moment in time." No, because that's what I would call a gross behavior.

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There isn't anything about that sit that you want to isolate with your laser pointer. "Oh, I really liked the way you held your tail in the air and your ears forward at the time you were sitting." Now in agility with my herding breeds, they might get really slinky and low and so I might start clicking them for sitting up, but that is isolating a moment in time. That's different than a gross just sit there.

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A lot of people would click the end of a dog doing an agility run or they click the dog coming to them. So, the dog coming, like clicking them for coming to you is like clicking the end of something. Just reward them at that point. But you could mark if your dog is way off in the distance and you have a super loud clicker. When you call them, and they turn, and they give you that head whip and they start coming back to you. Bingo. You could click that because now they're on their way to you and they're coming. And so, you're marking the moment in time when they made that choice to come to you. Right.

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So that would be an isolation. Quite honestly, I would just say the word "Good" because I don't normally take a clicker with me when I'm out walking my dogs. It would be something that I would use specifically. All right. So, there are things that I absolutely would never use a clicker for. And I've told you, those are like the gross behaviors, the end of behaviors. Also included in that list would be like behaviors of motion, because just like touch the wall and come off, if you are always clicking a behavior of motion, you are going to turn it into a stationary behavior which I did with Stoni.



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Another example of that, I didn't learn my lesson. I needed to do it twice. Back before I came up with my 2x2 method for training weave poles, I was shaping three poles with my then dog Buzz. And I kept clicking when he got the entry right. I was so excited, click, click, click, click. And so, what he started do is slow down when he got right near pole one, until he came and he stopped right at pole one, and he kind of stopped with his face attached to pole one. And it was like, "Did you want me to hold my face here?"

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And he started these little monkey noises that he used to make. "Is this right? Is this right? Is this right?" So, boom Susan! You did it again. You took a behavior motion. You isolated a moment of time for it. And the dog thought it was a stationary behavior. So, behavior of motion, I rarely will use a clicker for - that would be something a super experienced trainer might do, because they would know to move that click point around the behavior motion and not always do it at the same time.

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Okay. How can you **improve your timing or your experience with a clicker**? What you got to do—I've got four things. Number one, you're going to [set up a video](#) and you're going to get a clicker. You can order them online. And you're going to work on your timing, *do not do this with a dog*. You know, training is mechanical skill.

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You need to do this without the dog at first. And so, take like a pair of socks or a stuffed animal. And what you're going to do is you're going to throw it up in the air and click the moment it lands on the table. And you're going to video that so that you can see when you slow it down, did your click happen at the exact moment that the socks hit the table? Do that 10 times. And then have somebody else drop the socks. That's really even more difficult because you can predict when you're throwing it up when it's going to come down, but somebody else might like, throw it down really fast and kind of freak you out and you weren't ready.

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Right. So, dogs do things unpredictably. So, you don't want just you throwing up that socks. Next thing you can do is come back to this video. And what you're going to do is you're going to take something a moment in time and use that as a click - make a game with your friends even. Invite your friends over to watch this video on YouTube.

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And I would suggest you take a moment where you can see my right hand comes into the screen in the video. When my full right hand, then you're going to click. So not clicking that, that was my left hand. Not clicking that it wasn't my full right hand. Boom clicking. Boom clicking. All right. So, the moment you see my full hand, you're going to click that.

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Now how are you going to be sure that it was a full hand? Well, you might notice I've got some bracelets on my right hand. Those of you who are listening to this, I'm helping you to for when you get back and you can get to this YouTube video. I have bracelets on my hand. So that might— when I see the bracelets, boom, that's what I'm clicking.



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Now that you've trained yourself how to isolate, or how to zone in, on the criteria that means that is correct. Now take something simple that you can do with your dog. And I would suggest you refer back to the video on this page where I teach [target training](#). You teaching the dog to target their nose to something or their paw to something.

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Okay. Something very simple. And teach that as your first behavior. And then when you have more confidence with your timing, because you reviewed your videos, then move on to something like teaching your dog to put their head on their paws or something that's a little bit more difficult. All right. Four things, do it with a pair of socks or stuffed animals.

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Have a friend throw and drop the per—the, not the, don't have your friend drop a person. That would be bad. Have your friend drop the stuffed animal. Come back to this video and look at how many times you see my full right hand in the screen, and you're going to click that and see how many times you can click that. Then teach your dog something simple and then move on to something more complex.

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I would strongly encourage all of you to use a clicker at least once a week during the lifetime of your dog. That's what helps keeps your skills sharpened and helps you to grow your understanding and become a better trainer for your dog. That's it for this week. I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Video: 5 Games for Puppies](#)

[Susan's Instagram](#)

[Blog Post: Three Different Types of Verbal Markers in Dog Training](#)

[Blog Post: To Click or Not to Click, that is the Question](#)

[Blog Post: When Clicking Goes Wrong](#)

[Blog Post: Practical Videoing Tips](#)

[Video: Target Training for Dogs Part Two - Step by Step Training Plan](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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