

New Dog Training Technique That Rivals Clicker-Training

Dogs who were taught by this method were more likely to learn a new behavior within 30 minutes, and to learn the behavior faster than dogs in a clicker-training group. And they are more likely to remember it later. Five steps to help you get started with a training that anyone can do.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs are capable of social learning, or learning by watching or imitating others
- A relatively new type of dog training, known as “Do As I Do” or DAID, uses social learning to teach dogs new behaviors
- Dogs taught using DAID were more likely to learn a new behavior within 30 minutes, and to learn the behavior faster, than dogs in a clicker-training group
- While DAID shows promise, researchers note its success may be attributed to combining social learning with operant conditioning, as dogs still receive reinforcement for correct behaviors
- Positive reinforcement remains crucial in any training method, avoiding punitive approaches, and can be effectively combined with DAID using consistent commands, immediate rewards, and short, engaging training sessions

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Social learning, or the act of learning via observation, was long considered to be a uniquely human ability. Then chimpanzees were found to possess the ability to learn by watching or imitating others, and soon it was revealed that many non-human animals, including dogs, can learn socially as well.

Currently, many positive dog-training programs focus on clicker training, which uses individual learning (operant conditioning) to teach dogs (when the dog does the desired behavior, a “click” sound is made, which lets the dog know he’s on the right track).

A relatively new type of dog training, known as “Do As I Do” or DAID, uses social learning instead, and research suggests it may be even more effective than clicker training in teaching dogs new tricks.

‘Do As I Do’ Training Method Outperforms Standard Clicker Training

Dogs are adept at imitating and observing humans, so it makes sense that social learning would be an effective method for dog training. The DAID method involves first teaching dogs to perform a set of behaviors displayed by a human when the command “Do it!” is said.

The command can then be used to direct dogs to perform novel behaviors learned by observation.

Claudia Fugazza, Ph.D., of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary, who created the DAID method, and colleague Ádám Miklósi, Ph.D., conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of DAID compared to clicker training.¹

Dogs were taught to open a sliding cabinet door (a novel behavior for all the dogs in the study) using either DAID or clicker training methods. Dogs in the DAID group were more likely to learn the behavior within 30 minutes, and to learn the behavior faster, than dogs in the clicker group.

Further, dogs taught using DAID were more likely to remember what they'd learned after 24 hours, including performing it in response to a verbal cue as well as in a new context.

One caveat, pointed out by Karen B. London, Ph.D., a certified applied animal behaviorist and certified professional dog trainer: the dogs also received reinforcement for their correct behaviors, which means they also received some amount of operant conditioning.²

So it could be more accurate to conclude that DAID in combination with operant conditioning may be more effective than operant conditioning alone. Still, the researchers concluded:³

“Our results show that the Do as I Do method is more effective than shaping/clicker training to teach dogs object-related actions within a relatively short time and suggest that this method might be also applied for training body-movements.

Importantly, the use of social learning enhances dogs' memory and generalization of the learned action and its verbal cue.”

What Other Types of Training Methods Work for Dogs?

Your dog's ability to learn is only limited by what you're willing to teach him. And, in reality, you'll probably use multiple methods of teaching, and that's ideal.

Like people, certain dogs may respond differently to different methods of learning, and you'll likely find what works best for you and your dog may be different from what works best for your friend or neighbor and their dogs.

In the video above, you can watch by interview with Dr. Sophia Yin, a veterinarian and world-renowned animal behaviorist. She believes training your dog comes down to rewarding the behaviors you want and removing rewards for unwanted behavior, all with the right timing.

Yin also teaches dog owners to learn how to read their dog's body language and make training a fun, positive experience. In teaching your dog to sit, for instance, you may use 30 positive reinforcements (i.e., treats) within a couple of minutes. And this is just one example.

Yin also discusses how she helps owners train their dogs to control their impulses, and the importance of training not just desirable behaviors but also teaching the dog that good behavior is a habit. You can find out more in the video above.

Positive Reinforcement Is Key

No matter what type of training method you choose, remember that positive reinforcement is key. The use of choke collars and other forms of punitive behavior training can harm your dog, physically and emotionally, and damage the bond between you.

In addition, negative training methods primarily teach your dog what *not* to do to avoid getting punished. What they miss is the important step of teaching your dog desirable behaviors in their place.

Working with a positive dog trainer can be helpful, but you can also try the simple positive-reinforcement training method that follows. This method can be used along with Do As I Do training to teach your dog good behavior and more using a fun, positive method.

If you're interested in teaching your dog using Fugazza's imitation DAID method, check out her book, "Do As I Do: Using Social Learning to Train Dogs." Following are the five steps to positive-reinforcement training that virtually anyone can do:

1. Come up with short, preferably one-word commands for the behaviors you want to teach your pet. Examples are Come, Sit, Stay, Down, Heel, Off, etc. Make sure all members of your family consistently use exactly the same command for each behavior.
2. As soon as your dog performs the desired behavior, reward him immediately with a treat and verbal praise. Do this every time he responds appropriately to a command. You want him to connect the behavior he performed with the treat. This of course means you'll need to have treats on you whenever you give your dog commands in the beginning.
3. Keep training sessions short and fun. You want your dog to associate good things with obeying your commands. You also want to use training time as an opportunity to deepen your bond with your pet.
4. Gradually back off the treats and use them only intermittently once your dog has learned a new behavior. Eventually they'll no longer be necessary, but you should always reward your dog with verbal praise whenever he obeys a command.
5. Continue to use positive reinforcement to maintain the behaviors you desire. Reward-based training helps create a range of desirable behaviors in your pet, which builds mutual feelings of trust and confidence.

Sources and References

^{1,3} [Applied Animal Behavior Science October 2015](#)

² [The Bark September 28, 2015 \(Archived\)](#)
