

# *Learning About Dogs*

## Competency Assessment Program (CAP)

Clicker Training is a fast growing teaching method that has evolved into thousands of different classes and interests around the world.

Essentially the definition of a "clicker trainer" is a person who trains using a clicker. Competency is not directly measurable by the description. Some clicker trainers are reaching for the sky and able to achieve astonishing results, some clicker trainers are simply adding the clicker to an existing program of training, which may or may not be coercive.

To gain access to this powerful method the teacher (clicker trainer) needs to be skilled, very self aware, observant, able to analyse, adjust the teaching to suit that particular dog at that particular time. As they develop their skills their understanding of the process deepens and they are able to transfer the learning to other animals, other fields of interest and have genuinely learned to communicate with another species through skilled use of the clicker.

I believe the true power of clicker training is seeded in allowing the dog to self teach and in particular through the method of capturing the behaviour. The canine ownership of the learning results in very secure cue association and reliability of quality. The dog truly becomes involved in the learning process, becomes highly motivated and teaches us poor humans a thing or two about learning.

The Competency Assessment Program (CAP) is designed to serve two purposes:

- ▶ to provide a clear pathway, with marked steps for learners to gain their skill, knowledge and understanding
- ▶ to provide a certification system validating the competency of clicker trainers

The assessment system is not intended to hi-light what a person has not achieved, but what a person has accomplished and give confidence at their achieved level.

Assessment is given at three grades:

- 1 **Pass.** Demonstrates some skill, knowledge and understanding, but many areas in need of further development
- 2 **Merit.** Demonstrates good skill, knowledge and understanding, some areas in need of further development
- 3 **Distinction.** Demonstrates excellent skill, knowledge and understanding, in need of little, or no further development

All criteria must at least achieve a 1 to pass.

Achievement in the lower level with Distinction or Merit is required to progress: ie to take Novice Level 2 you will need Merit or Distinction at Foundation Level 1.

Assessors are required to have Distinction in the higher class to assess, ie Distinction in Level 2 to assess Level 1, and will need to shadow assess to gain experience before being a certified assessor.

The assessor will be looking at the process of clicker training through the trainer's technique, ability to be flexible, meet the needs of the dog, develop positive learning experience for the dog and communicate effectively. At no time will the dog be under test. The dog is not expected to be perfect, the assessor will only be looking at the trainer's competency as demonstrated by the behaviours.

The trainer will be expected to take responsibility for selecting the exercises or behaviours to suit the dog and the environment and prove to the Assessor the requirements of the criteria for that level.

Achieving Foundation and Novice level is quite sufficient for most dog owners. They will be able to train the basic behaviours required of society, with reliability in a range of situations. For those wishing to

enter sports, train dogs for work or develop behaviour modification programs should follow the curriculum and be assessed at Intermediate and Advanced Levels.

## **FOUNDATION LEVEL 1**

This level is assessing the basic skills of handling the rewards, clicker, lure and target stick/hand. The trainer's ability to communication with the dog without coercion, their observation and decision making skills. Trainers would be expected to be able to add cues to behaviours and have shaped and lured simple behaviours.

### **The assessment criteria are:**

*The trainer demonstrating that they can:*

1. Handle food rewards safely and efficiently.
2. Deliver food rewards from hand or pocket.
3. Deliver from a reserve kept off the handler.
4. Operate the clicker in either hand with a non-visual movement.
5. Give reasons for their choice of reward.
6. Attach a verbal cue to a behaviour without supporting body language.
7. Give a cue without excessive body language or unnecessary repetition.
8. Teach the dog to respond to the cue without excessive hesitation.
9. Use a target stick or target hand, clicker and rewards and deliver food effectively.
10. Teach a dog to focus on the target and respond promptly to the target cue.
11. Give the click appropriately to effectively communicate the rewarded behaviour.
12. Withhold the click to gradually extend the duration of a behaviour.
13. Deliver the reward with fluency and good timing to encourage further learning
14. Free shape a behaviour that is interaction with a new object without giving the dog assistance from verbal or visual cues.

The demonstration is the evidence provided by the trainer of their competency in the criteria. Evidence must be sufficient and leave the Assessor in no doubt of the competency of the trainer. The demonstration should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Example demonstration. At no time will the dog be under test – it is the trainer's competency that is being demonstrated.

- 6 repetitions of a behaviour: such as a paw wave, sit, down from stand, spin etc
- 6 repetitions of another behaviour with only a verbal cue: examples as above (to ensure the behaviour is on verbal cue the trainer would be expected to use inconsistent body language when cueing)
- 6 repetitions of a third behaviour of a variable duration, where the length of the behaviour is appropriate to the skills of the dog – such as watching the trainer, a sit stay, target contact.
- demonstrate teaching a dog using target stick or hand
- demonstrate free shaping appropriate to the skills and experience of the dog: such as sitting in a chair and shaping the dog to tap a cone or bucket.

## **NOVICE LEVEL 2**

This level is assessing the trainer's ability to secure a solid foundation in achieving a consistent quality and reliability to cue and develop more complex behaviours in free shaping.

**The assessment criteria are:**

*The trainer has demonstrated that they:*

1. Have taught a behaviour through targeting where the target has been faded.
2. Have transferred a targeted behaviour to a new target or cue.
3. Have achieved and maintained fluency in at least 3 behaviours
4. Have achieved and maintained a consistent quality in at least 3 behaviours
5. Have maintained a consistent standard of 3 behaviours in different locations
6. Have maintained a consistent standard of 3 behaviours with distractions
7. Can attach a verbal cue to a behaviour where the body language is variable
8. Can attach a visual cue to a behaviour where the body language is variable
9. Can change the cue attached to a behaviour.
10. Can demonstrate the behaviour does not happen unless cued.
11. Can use a different reward.
12. Can shape a new behaviour that is a physical movement without luring or targeting
13. Can free shape a behaviour that is interaction with a new object without giving the dog assistance from verbal or visual cues.
14. Can continue with the free shaping by adding a physical movement to the interaction with the without giving the dog assistance from verbal or visual cues.

The demonstration is the evidence provided by the trainer of their competency in the criteria. Evidence must be sufficient and leave the Assessor in no doubt of the competency of the trainer. The demonstration should take no longer than 30 minutes.

Example demonstration. At no time will the dog be under test – it is the trainer's competency that is being demonstrated.

- 6 repetitions of a behaviour where the behaviour was captured through targeting and the target has been faded. The trainer must demonstrate the history of the learning. Examples such as: spin, paw tap, go out, touch,
- 6 repetitions of another behaviour to a single cue: such as a verbal cue to sit, down, paw, spin
- 6 repetitions of another behaviour to a single cue: such as a hand signal to sit, down, paw,

spin etc

During these 3 behaviours demonstrate:

- the dog does not respond unless cued
- the dog can perform the behaviours in different locations and with different body language: such as sitting in a chair, leaning on a wall, with hands in the air etc, and maintain the standard in the presence of a distraction
- you can reward the click with a different reward, such as physical or verbal rewards or a toy.
  
- Temporarily change the cue for one of the behaviours already demonstrated.
- Free shape a new behaviour that is a stand alone physical movement after the dog has been shaped to interact with an object: such as stand on a brick and wave a paw, place a paw on a cone and rest their head on the paw, stand on a box and turn around.

For assessment of Level 1 and 2 simultaneously the demonstration should take no longer than 30 minutes.

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### **INTERMEDIATE LEVEL 3**

The assessor will be looking for different collections of compound behaviours, advanced shaping and evidence of data collection and analysis.

**The assessment criteria are:**

*The trainer has demonstrated that they can:*

1. Maintain the fluency and quality of a behaviour when the click and/or reward are delayed.
2. Chain at least 3 individual behaviours where the chain is commenced with a single cue and reward is only given on completion of the chain
3. Chain at least 6 individual behaviours where each individual behaviour is cued and reward is only given on completion of the chain
4. Maintain the quality of each behaviour within a chain
5. Merge at least 3 behaviours that occur simultaneously into one new behaviour
6. Collect data and analyse the learning and results.
7. Free shape a new complex behaviour using targets and cues whilst not overtly directing the learning.

The demonstration is the evidence provided by the trainer of their competency in the criteria. Evidence must be sufficient and leave the Assessor in no doubt of the competency of the trainer. The demonstration should take no longer than 30 minutes.

Example demonstration. At no time will the dog be under test – it is the trainer's competency that is being demonstrated.

- Demonstrate the cue and quality of individual behaviours that comprise the chain or merged behaviour
- Demonstrate these behaviours maintain quality with a delayed reward by repeating each behaviour several times and rewarding on completion.
- Demonstrate how the chain is built.
- Demonstrate 3 repetitions the chain of 3 behaviours with an opening cue: *such as retrieve over jump, (pick up, jump whilst holding and sit in front), send out to mat, lay down and place paw over face; go to heel, reverse around handler and sit in front, go to bed (send to bed, lay down, pull up blanket).*
- Demonstrate 3 repetitions of a chain of 6 behaviours where each individual behaviour is cued: such as heelwork (sit to heel, set off, about turn, right turn, left turn, halt with the handler), freestyle (spin left, spin right, weave forwards, walk back, go around, take a bow), agility (jump, turn left, tunnel, turn right, A frame, go on), retrieve to location (go find object, collect object, identify location, carry to location, deliver on location, sit by location)
- Demonstrate 3 repetitions of a merge of 3 individual behaviours: such as heelwork (head carriage, trotting and maintained position), recall & retrieve over jump (recall, carry and jump), dog on a box, (on box, beg position, paws over face), pirouette, (stands on hind legs, front paws high, turn around)
- Shape a new complex behaviour with a combination of free shaping and cues and/or targeting that demonstrates different skills of the dog: such as moving backward to sit on a stool, figure of eight around 2 objects, roll over and wrap a blanket around, pack object in a suitcase and shut the case, push an object to a marked location
- A record book of details of shaping progress, training sessions, measurement of the progress of individual behaviours, analysis of different rewards, different locations, different distractions and the dog's response.

**Advanced Level 4**

*Trainers may be assessed in the field of behaviour modification or high level performance and working dogs.*

Trainers at this level will need to be able to make significant behavioural changes through the use of the clicker, with case history or video evidence. Trainers will need to be able to plan to develop specific learning programs in dogs with learning difficulties and be familiar with teaching emotional control, extinguishing and replacing behaviours.

OR

Trainers should be able to demonstrate a high quality performance or demonstration with durability. Trainers will need to be able to plan to develop a specific learning program for dogs in advanced performance work or working dogs.