1. Welcome

To get the best out of this opportunity we shall be looking in close detail at the processes to finish your training. Detail is best achieved by asking lots of questions:

   ↝ of our expectations,

> setting these too high in respect of our own skills, the dog's abilities, the time we can invest is a sure way to disappointment

   ↝ of ourselves,

> whether we have fully understood what we were trying to do, put the time in, been consistent, read the small print properly

   ↝ of the protocol,

> were there steps missed out or jumped over, were there assumptions, was this a protocol that appeared to work, but there were conditions that we now realise were contributory to the success that are missing now – such as what we did before was a dog that really helped us get through and covered the short comings.

   ↝ of the potential,

> are we asking as much as we should do? Could we be asking more?

You to be able to make videos to self-evaluate. Sometimes what we think it happening is not, and when we step into observer eyes we can see far more, and we can watch several times in slow motion to look at the fine detail. I know only too well how much the video process is a real challenge, but we cannot move on unless we have the material to chew over.

To begin I would like you to write a clear outline of the behaviour(s) you would like to finish or polish:

   ↝ a full description, what you want the dog to do, what cues,
   ↝ where it is likely to be required, the environment
   ↝ the future, where you want to go
   ↝ how you taught the dog and how you think the dog learned it – not the same thing!
   ↝ how long they have been able to do it

This does not have to be a crucial behaviour, such as a recall and if this is a composite of several skills, such as heelwork, it would be advisable to work on a component of the behaviour such as holding position, or finding the position, trotting up etc.

This process alone is a good indication of any gaps you have skipped over.

The behaviour can be something quite straight forward such as go to the target mat, a cantilever down, or a paw touch.

Building Stability

A behaviour should have good stable quality to be able to be considered ready to "finish".

Once we begin the finishing process what you have is what is going to be fixed. It would be unfair to then go back and tidy it up when you realise it is not quite what you wanted. Under those conditions, because you may have not realised with your "early-eyes" quite what you wanted as the final result, you would simply start again, with new cues and conditions.

In the early days of clicker training it was the recommended protocol to stabilise a behaviour by selectively clicking for the behaviours that were excellent, and ignoring those of lesser quality or not meeting requirements. A sit can be excellent – tight and tidy, or sloppy with legs at all angles. A retrieve can be fast and with a consistent grip or fast going out, slow returning with chomping along the way.

I found this protocol a poor recommendation as the lesser quality behaviours would still keep popping in. If at some time during the building process we took those lesser quality as adequate and rewarded them, then there is every chance they would re-surface. The protocol was "of its time", in the sense of measuring the quality of a behaviour was not important. Rates were measured : of the lever press by the rat, be it good, with the nose, with a paw or with the butt.

This "click for best" protocol seemed the lazy trainer's answer, but the evidence is really lacking that it works. Equally, differential reinforcement (feeding) has no supporting evidence, giving liver for best sits and kibble for mediocre is not my recommendation. The conditions of resurgence are often the very conditions we would least like it to happen – under stress.

Historically we have generally accepted that when something is first learned it is not as good as it is two years down the road. The quality of what we have taught should always be consistent from the beginning, "down the road" just means the behaviour needs less support and the dog has more experience. The novice dog should be as good as he is ever going to be just without the experience and with a lot of support.

If you are familiar with Obedience competitions, a dog competing at the lower levels in heelwork is expected to do the same standard as a Championship, but there is less of it, it is not as complex and you can talk and give verbal guidance.

I suppose we should be starting with the building process, but here we are – at the rear end finishing it!

WHAT DOES STABILITY LOOK LIKE?

I try to look for stability all the time, especially before I would click. I have made the error in clicking "approximation" and, guess what, I have an approximately good behaviour. Being nearly right is not the same as being right. We want the dog to only learn Being Right, so we minimise the amount they have to do to enable completely right. When we have lots of small completely rights, we start putting them together.

CONSISTENT

This means we see the same actions as close as possible. The dog does not vary how they do it.

We don't want a sit that is sometimes the rear end stepping forwards and sometimes the front end stepping backwards. We don't want a sit that tucks one leg under. We want the same action continued to the same outcome. This is not being pernickety, this is being fair to the dog.

The more variety in the way a dog can complete the behaviour the more likely we are to encourage hesitation. That does not mean the dog cannot adapt the behaviour to different conditions – that is flexibility. The dog that can perform the same sit action on carpet or grass, a shiny floor or a cold floor.

Variability will occur without our help. Usually these variations are minute and happen over a long time – consider your car driving skills. They need to meet the same requirements but you have adapted them to different cars, different traffic conditions over time.

If the behaviour is inconsistent, you need to clarify exactly what you want. You will need to look at the gap between what you want and what you have and be able to give the dog the skills to close that gap.

For example: the dog is sent to a target mat or platform but over runs 50% of the time "spilling off" the target.

The dog may not have the skill to run, anticipate when to stop and change their stride to hit the target with the correct momentum. If you have clicked for this, go smack yourself for me now. We are in danger of clicking poo because we focus too much on one thing "hitting the target" that we do not see the whole picture. You need to clearly verbalise EXACTLY what you will click before you pick up a clicker. To be able to be accurate with marker, the event you want to click needs to be predictable. To be able to click that perfect approach, you should be able to see the dog beginning to adjust their momentum.

Two elements may be causing the spill-off:

a) The target has no boundaries that the dog is aware of. Once I changed to a tub for the dog to stand their front feet in, rather than a flat platform, they become more conscious of preparing to stop.

b) The have only learned to walk to the target, not run. As we increase distance and confidence, the approach begins to change and they need to increase their skill level.

Either way we change the environment to secure the success, and at the same time may need to make a side step to teach additional stopping skills on other equipment.

2. Observation and assessment

Just because we want a behaviour to be performance, or street, ready, does not make it so.

We need a clear assessment process that gives us the benchmark to move forward and show us whether we are making progress or not.

I will grade a behaviour over the repetitions (the batches of 6) looking to give these levels:

> 0 = did not happen, or another behaviour happened on the cue
>
> 1 = Hesitant and missing strength
>
> 2 = Either strong but hesitant or no hesitation but missing strength
>
> 3 = Strong and without hesitation

With the addition of video we could break down these grades to give us a clearer idea of what is missing, and make a plan what to work on. But without video, you need to mentally "grade" a behaviour / repetition before you begin the next one to make the necessary adjustments.

Details definitions:

Strong:	The behaviour has a strength to it, that shows a puff of wind would not reduce the quality.
	It has a predictable nature, which means we can see the dog is going to do it, and do it well. There is a confidence in setting about doing it that is written on the way the dog prepares to begin. It is "full of knowledge"
	It is fluent – it flows through any steps without stuttering
Hesitant:	The dog needs processing time between the cue and the behaviour.
	This may be because we give so few cue-preparing indicators, or it is the first event. Watching your videos, you may give some "tell" that you are about to give a specific cue, which prepares the dog. We should not be giving any cues unless the dog is already in full focus on us.
	You may also see some hesitation in carrying through the behaviour but this is the non-flow we are measuring in strength.
	Over the repetition we should begin to see the dog anticipating the cues in the preparation.

Over the six, or batch of repetitions you will also measure:

Stamina	the reps are performed with the same stamina – the dog does not show fatigue physically, ie slows down, wobbles or shows instability, and mental

> fatigue: becomes aware of environmental noises that have been present from the beginning.

Consistent   There is very little variation in the behaviour.

The elements we are seeking are developed though our repetitions. To begin with, our criteria is to arrange the environment so that the dog is always performing, carrying out the behaviour, to the very best of their skill level.

If this means we need to use extensive support from cues to maintain the quality then we use them. That is not the same as continually telling the dog what to do because we are asking for the behaviour to sustain for too long.

There is a difference between propping it up as it starts to flag (adding more cues), and build strength by repeating the same quality of carrying it out. We want the dogs to learn that the behaviour only happens to one standard, not, as the standard begins to slide expect more support to come along.

The difficulty with the "added support" is that the behaviour will only performed to its best when the support is present and it has not matured to minimum support.

Example: Support for quality and not increased support when flagging.

We lure the dog to perform a transition between down > stand > down. The style of the behaviour we require is the lion-drop, and a clean rise to a balanced standing position.

The dog will be standing laterally across the front of me – facing one hand. To teach this I would use a lure in one hand and the other hand would suggest the movement, usually with a finger touch on their back.

This behaviour is a good example of a need of specific physical strength, flexibility and control. My lure and hands would remain in support over 2-300 reps whilst building the action with accurate muscle memory. This is 20 reps a day for 10 days. So the quantity will build quickly. If the dog starts to show signs of fatigue and I "push" a little more with the lure/bait or hand pressure, then we are increasing the support, which will become part of the cue for the behaviour. If you increase support to maintain the quality we are ignoring the fatigue and adding scaffolding to stop the behaviour failing. No, we have just gone too far – we need to see the signs sooner and end the session. This is where record keeping is invaluable to know that the dog is building in strength, not building in support.

Whilst the dog is building strength, consistency is assured. I will begin to see anticipation on the preparation / presentation of the cues. These are only the training cues: lure and light touch-prompt.

Once I see the strength and stability, a consistent movement rep after rep, then I will introduce the verbal cue: "drop". I separate the verbal cue by giving it during the cue-preparation time, and then follow up with the training cues.

Those training cues are stable, they will not increase or change. They have already proven that the behaviour can occur to the best quality under the learning conditions (which for me is up on the table or unit). These will only <u>reduc</u>e with time, not change or increase.

We will go through the change to performance cues in a later lesson.

Example: Heads up Heelwork, Recall

I often see folk teaching the dog to sustain a heads-up heel position or a run > to > me with lots of chat and encouragement. This gets the behaviour they want for the duration they perceive will be needed.

If the behaviour can only occur with the support from the reinforcement to maintain it, then we are asking for it for too long, or in conditions where the behaviour would fail without the support. These additional "keep going" cues will become part of the performance level and we begin to think the dog can do it.

Far better to change the conditions, let the reinforcer do its work – after the mark – and build the behaviour in shorter bites. The "bite" length of the behaviour is what will occur without increasing the cue-scaffolding.

If you have a lure in hand, cue the heel position, and with no further support the dog can maintain that for 6 or 60 strides, then that's what the dog can do, on that cue. But if that lure has to dip in for a taste, or bait, jiggle, then the increasing cue stops being the cue to start and becomes the cue to keep going.

By looking to grade each repetition you will be developing your observation skills to recognise when it is time to stop, and avoid propping up the behaviours.

You can make your own data sheets to collect the information.

Be clear that you record:

- The behaviour – with your original description to make sure you stay on track.
- The date
- The "batch number" to give you an idea of the number of reps you have already accomplished.
- The environment: where you are training and anything that is relevant to the dog (other dogs around, time of day)
- Cues:
- Reinforcers:
- Comments: this is where you may expand on your reasons for the grade given, any changes that occurred in the environment etc.
- Batch overall: any changes in the rep-rep result. This is often a feel for an increase in confidence or fluency.

	TRAINING RECORDS FOR	
Behaviour:	*Description of the behaviour, with details*	
Date:		
Start/end batch	*Batch 16 - 19*	
Environment	*Locations, time of day, any potential disruptions, and whether early in the training session or after other practice.* *Flexibility adjustments*	
Training Cues	*Lure in hand + guiding hand*	
Reinforcer:	*Sausage*	

	GRADE	COMMENTS
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
BATCH	*overall*	*Consistency, stamina*
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		

To begin observation skills use video. I would not be jotting down results as I am training. But once you are skilled at measuring the grades of the behaviours it will become easier to know when to stop, what to change and make notes for the next session.

BUILD THE FLEXIBILITY

During the strengthen process we need to be aware of building a degree of flexibility. Without it we shall have a behaviour that can only occur under very specific conditions.

Changes that I would include for the drop from stand.

- Dog facing across the other direction
- Different surfaces
- Different locations of the treat pot – sometimes from pocket (but always lured)
- Different times of day
- Different times within the session: beginning, middle or end
- Different clothing
- Different reinforcers – change of food, not to toy instead of food
- Standing a different way

Any minor changes to the environment that require the dog to make slight adaptations. This does not mean the behaviour should vary. If the dog starts to change the behaviour we have made one change too many.

HOMEWORK:

This "conditioning" exercises in both the physical and psychological sense, to build a strong behaviour.

My training sessions are roughly broken down into one third new behaviours, two thirds conditioning exercises of the building behaviours. I would then have roughly 1 session in 5 a "performance" session where I may be practising single behaviour that have already been conditioned one after the other, in small sequences. I also change my reinforcer protocols in this session.

The bulk of the training is in the foundation skills of building strength. Without strength, conditioning exercises, no behaviour is going to reach performance level. If you do nothing else for the rest of the course but build conditioning exercises you will be most of the way towards performance quality.

You certainly want a video of the before and after for comparison.

3. Cue Technology

Let's kick off with some cue facts.

In the ABC cycle cues are part of the antecedents:

ANTECEDENT BEHAVIOUR CONSEQUENCE

What also becomes part of the Antecedent package can include:

- The clothes we are wearing – do they look like the training outfit
- The treat the dogs can small – if treats are available or not
- The time of day – that we normally do these behaviours
- The place we are – not only the room, but the spot in the room and which way we are facing
- What we have been practising a lot – the currently fresh behaviour

The terms stimulus, stimuli, prompts, signals can also be cues.

A CUE IS AN OPPORTUNITY, NOT A COMMAND

For us, the cue is defined as "an opportunity for reinforcement". Which means it cannot be a cue unless the dog is aware and remembers that on success reinforcement is available and that reinforcement is desired. (A good reason to keep the reinforcers variable)

DOG CHOOSES THE CUE

This is a sneaky, uncomfortable reminder:

THE **ANIMAL** SELECTS THAT WHICH IS RELEVANT
AND DOES **NOT** RESPOND TO THAT WHICH HAS **NOT** BEEN SELECTED

So it does not matter what you intended to be the cue, the dog will select what is relevant to them – a head nod, an intake of breath, a lifting of the target.

CUE SEEKING

Gone are the days when we tell the dog to pay attention, or need to say their name before a command. But those habits are still hanging in the air around us, even if we don't use them.

We are looking for a dog that gets significant reward for seeking cues. The cue to seek a cue is usually the eating of a treat, this prompts the dog to desire more (because our tiny treats are never enough in quantity and the next one may also develop wings and fly).

So our training always starts with that first, freely delivered treat. It cues the dog "we are in training" and as they orientate to us, we mark it and reward with another treat. I prefer to toss this treat away from me so that I can assess the dog actively seeking a cue.

We should ONLY give a cue when the dog is in this seeking state – focused on you with an enquiring look.

By giving a cue when they are seeking a cue reinforces cue seeking.

GENERALISATION AND OTHER JUNK

This is often referred to as the dog able to perform the behaviour under different conditions. Perfect in the kitchen: poor in the park.

This is down to the influence of two elements:

- ❧ Reinforcement availability in the environment

    – if the park offers better reinforcement than you then the behaviour you have taught to be reinforced with treats will simply not happen, because treats are not desired in the park.

- ❧ The Antecedents are not the same

    Remember that the dog may select that success occurs when you have chicken, when you are within 2 feet, when you are in the kitchen, when you are wearing your dog coat, when the other dogs are not present.

    And yes, they can select ALL those parameters.

The plan is to attach a minimal amount of relevant stimuli, and make all other stimuli varied.

In other words:

    Train in different rooms, different treats, different clothing, different hand feed the treats, different clicker, variable distance, variable place of reinforcer, facing different directions, holding a tray / kettle / bunch of flowers.

These can all be achieved by getting out of consistent irrelevant habits, where the only consistent antecedents are those you can take with you to the final performance arena – ring, park, field etc.

TEACH A DEFAULT BEHAVIOUR

The default is the behaviour we want the dog to do if:

- ↬ They could not hear the cue properly
- ↬ They could not remember what it is, means to do
- ↬ They may be in conflict, often a cue requires the dog to change from doing one thing to do another, the other could be less comfortable or less rewarding. Remember a cue is a choice to respond.

They are likely to recognise it is a cue, and we do not want them just doing "anything". We teach this default from the cue seeking opening, then perhaps giving cue-like phrases "cheese on toast" and before the dog has a chance to respond, we click, and treat.

Personally I teach the dog to also do the default behaviour on silence.

CHOOSING A CUE

Choosing cues will take serious thoughtfulness.

Phonetically is needs to be distinguishable from other cues, unless there are clear environmental cues that can assist the dog in understanding the difference. Phonetics are personal and depend on the way you say the words, the emphasis etc.

> For instance I use a cue for sit-from-stand, and a different cue for sit-from-down. I consider them both different actions. You can use the word "sit" for both, but the burden is loaded onto the dog to have to consider: *if I am standing that means plant my butt, if I am lying down that means push up my shoulders*.
> In competitions the most commonly failed movement is down to sit.

Cadence and Pitch need to be consistent. You cannot say the word several different ways and want them to have the same meaning. Any change in timing or volume will often mean urgency and not be recognised unless you have learned to say the word with volume and maintain the cadence. Usually when we shout a word louder we change it significantly.

Pairs of words usually needs to be quite different, such as turn to the left turn to the right, or left paw or right paw.

Modifier cues can be used, "paw-left, paw-right", "mat-left, mat-right" (left and right being the modifier) but the response will be more delayed than if each action has an individual cue.

Equal consideration must be given to choosing signal cues – again visit a drama or dance class and learn how differently the movement of your hand conveys different understanding.

We were given a demo by a dance teacher: she walked into the room, sat on a chair and (pretended) to drink from a cup. She repeated the action and we had to write down what we thought she was drinking. The first was coffee and the repeat was tea. 85% got it right – just the way she held her imaginary cup told us it was tea or coffee.

If you are training either prey or predators (dogs) they are exquisitely equipped to read nuance of body language. Hence the increased effectiveness of body language cues over verbal cues. But Chaser demonstrated that a dog can learn vocalisation. (Remember he trained 5 hours a day from when she was 8 weeks old – mostly by association if you notice)

Dedicate a note book to cues.

What was the teaching or temporary cue, because you may need to come back to this, and you do not want any confusion with something similar, and the performance or final cue. .

I had a cooker delivered and kept the box for training the pups to run through it as a tunnel. The cooked brand was "Beko." At that time no one knew quite how to pronounce it, so we stuck with "Beeko". An excellently distinctive word, great phonetically, for cueing whilst running. (It is Turkish and now understood to be "Becko").

Begin with the behaviours you have to have a cue – decide the optimum format (verbal, visual, environmental) and check the functionality for the recipient. (Gordons do not have good close up eye sight, collies can read sign language for deaf people).

TEMPORARY CUES / FINAL CUES

Or teaching cues and performance cues.

Let's be brutally honest, many of us do not get something perfect from the beginning. We learn as we go, particularly because each dog is different. But if I were to add "heel" to teaching my new pup heelwork, and didn't get it as good as it could be, that word has been attached to a low quality, low standard, possibly confusing behaviour. We also added clicks and treats, so it has been reinforced. When we are under stress we will revert to first learning.

So I like to think about the teaching process being on temporary cues, which will not be around when the behaviour is in its final performance situation – park or ring.

As a note, a behaviour that you have shaped by the dog responding to what you click can often have no teaching cue. The shaping session itself become the cue, unless you plan ahead and have a unique environment for the behaviour. If you lose this behaviour at some time in the future you will have to re-shape it.

You temporary / teaching cues are likely to be Targets, objects that the dog will learn cue a specific response. This is often a specific action in relation to a specific part of the body:

Platform: all four feet + standing + looking at you

               Can be in front, at a distance, at either side

Pot: Front feet only + standing + looking at your

               Can be in front, at a distance, at either side

               Is likely to be the foundation for pivot or rotation of back feet.

Food in a Cup on a stick:

eye focus, follow the cup

The blessing of using objects as targets is that if we screw it up we can just change them in for another object. If you screw up a hand target it gets tricky disposing of it.

You will build the behaviour, maybe over two weeks, months or years and when you have no further changes or strength to add you will change to the final or performance cue.

CHANGE THE CUE

To change the cue we use the classical conditioning, of giving the new cue, then the old cue which cues the behaviour. Over several repetitions we begin to drop the old cue, but it will serve to support the dog through the transition, so don't dump it too soon.

We then begin to focus our click on the attachment process rather than the completion of the behaviour.

CUE: KEEP GOING, BUILDING DURATION

This is often referred to as Keep Going Signal. The original concept was a sound that indicated the animal was to travel towards a selected target and the signal cued continuation. When the signal ceases the animal should stop, re-orientate to other available targets until another signal picked up and continue in that direction.

This interpretation was morphed into a cue to "maintain what you are doing", which may vary from heelwork, searching, or maintaining a stay position. The original KGS was defined as "keep going in this direction towards the sound target."
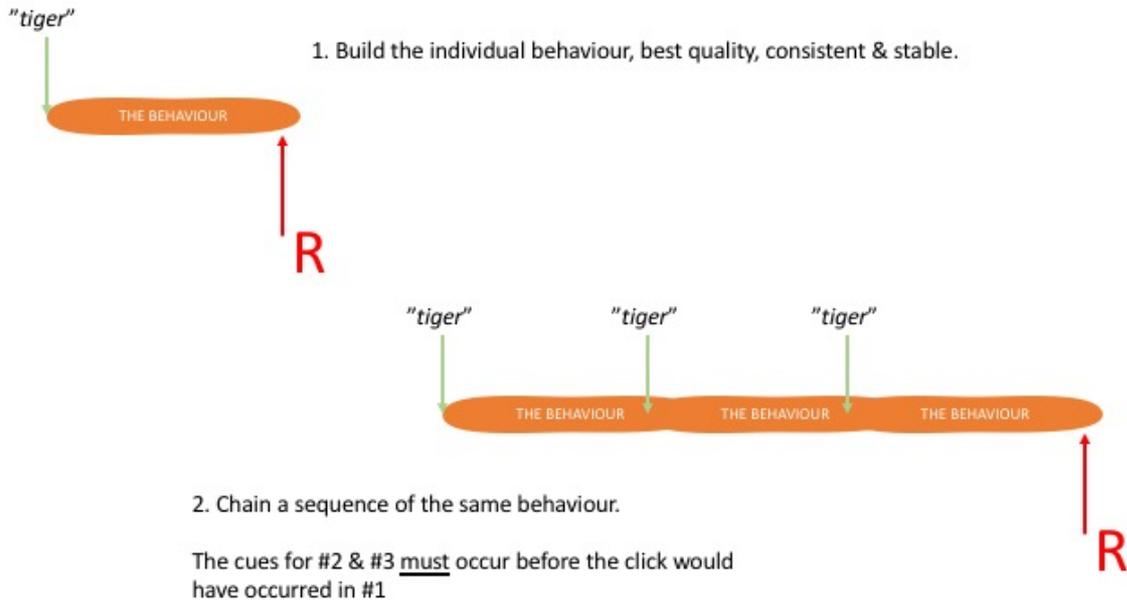
If a behaviour needs a cue to keep it going then we should be looking as why that is necessary. The original use is interesting to explore, but you have to remember when the signal stops so will the behaviour. It would be interesting to explore your use, or how you consider you use it.

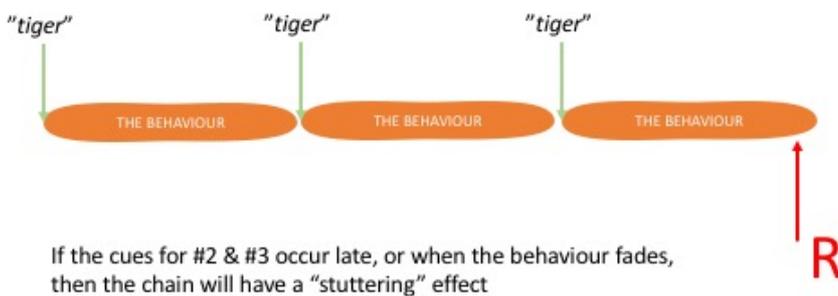Keep going should not be used to mean "try again".

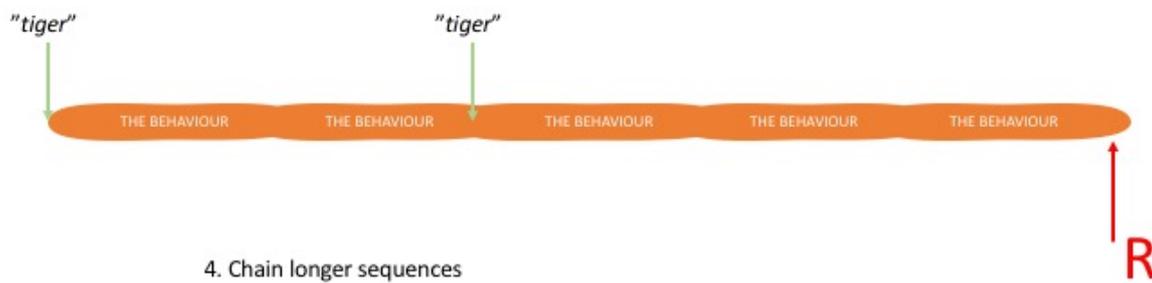# CHAINING WITH CUES, BUILDING DURATION AND SEQUENCES

We often want to extend the behaviours or link behaviours together into sequences or chains. You can use the cues as prompts to link the behaviours.

If you want to extend a behaviour, such as heelwork, you can take the individual components and link them together to make a longer behaviour. Our component is 6 steps of the behaviour on the cue "tiger", on step 5 of the first repetition we cue the behaviour again, we now have 12 steps of the behaviour.

"tiger"

1. Build the individual behaviour, best quality, consistent & stable.

THE BEHAVIOUR

R

"tiger"   "tiger"   "tiger"

THE BEHAVIOUR   THE BEHAVIOUR   THE BEHAVIOUR

2. Chain a sequence of the same behaviour.

The cues for #2 & #3 <u>must</u> occur before the click would have occurred in #1

R

But if we cue the first component, get to the 7th step of the behaviour, which is showing deterioration and the cue the component again you will achieve 13 steps of the behaviour but the topography often shows the dip in quality.

"tiger"   "tiger"   "tiger"

THE BEHAVIOUR   THE BEHAVIOUR   THE BEHAVIOUR

If the cues for #2 & #3 occur late, or when the behaviour fades, then the chain will have a "stuttering" effect
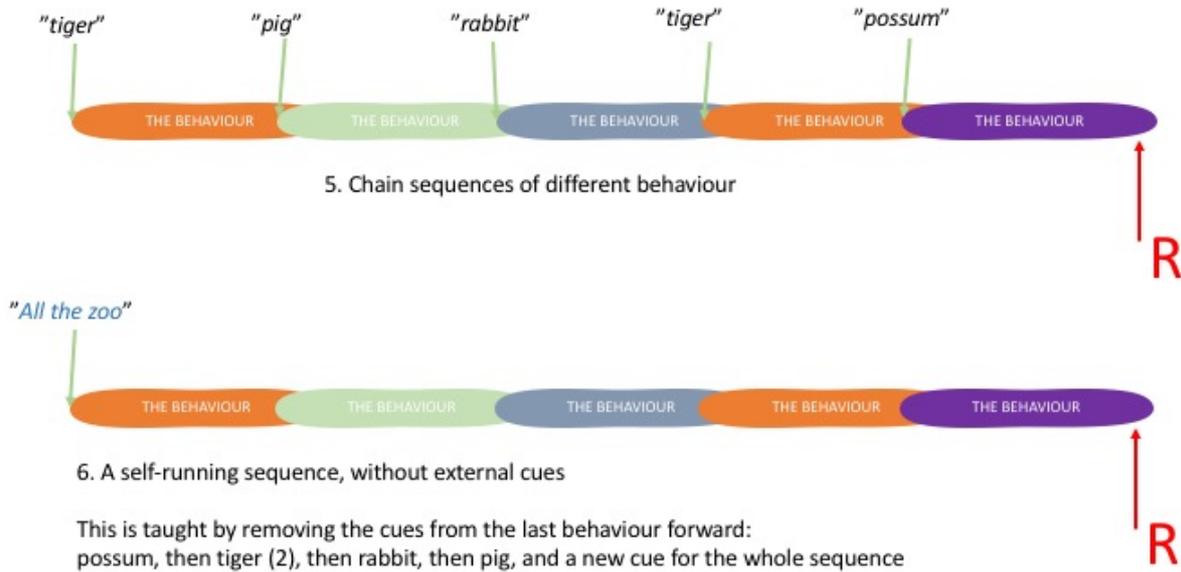
R

4. Chain longer sequences

Cues can become markers in the sense that they have a long history of association with reinforcement. When they occur they can act as a marker for the behaviour occurring at that time.

Cues are powerful enough to be able the shape a new behaviour OR effectively reinforce an error.

The classic pattern: greet the dog, dog jumps up, cue "sit", (on the jumping behaviour) dog sits and receives social approval (reinforcement).

As much as possible you need to plan when you give a cue in relation to the existing behaviour. Dog orientates to you: cue (an opportunity for reinforcement), orientating to you gets reinforced in the package. This is how we build cue seeking.

This can often bring into question use of the dog's name …… if it is used the majority of the time when the dog is not paying attention to you, you are taking risks. In reality we use it among many other behaviours, but we must make effort to use it also in joyful behaviours.

We can also build mixed sequences and chains within sequences.

5. Chain sequences of different behaviour

6. A self-running sequence, without external cues

This is taught by removing the cues from the last behaviour forward:
possum, then tiger (2), then rabbit, then pig, and a new cue for the whole sequence

To assess if a cue has the potential to be a future marker, simply shape another behaviour with it.

4. Disruptions

Now we have our head flush with cues and all that they travel with, we can look at disruptions.

A disruption can be defined as anything like to disrupt the quality or progress of the behaviour. This can vary from an emotional change – such as a loss of confidence or over arousal, to an external event in the environment, which may be you or something completely out of our control such as a light bulb popping.

The traditional view would be to bunch all these events that are less important than our desire to achieve the perfect behaviour as "distractions". That terms does contain a certain arrogance that our desires are always the most important at any one time.

Noticing a distraction is a perfectly normal survival instinct. If you paid no attention to the sound of a twig snap or a rustle of a leaf you would have been killed and your genes taken out of the gene pool.

We shall regard all disruptions as cues.

- ❧ Do you listen to the cue of being a little tired by sitting down or pushing through?
- ❧ Do you respond to the smell of bacon by leaving the ring or carrying on?
- ❧ Do you watch another dog chase a ball or keep running towards your owner?

To breed dogs that do not pay attention to such events would not be logical, unless we can give them a mechanism for choosing when to respond and when responding is not worthwhile because something better is offered, and more reliable.

Every cue is an opportunity for reinforcement, most of the events that disrupt a behaviour come under the same rule. We just have to make the opportunity for reinforcement that we have paired with the behaviour stronger that the likely disruptions. I doubt any of us are expecting the dogs to continue with a light bulb popping, but we shall look at the recovery from such an event. Once recovery has occurred that event is unlikely to cause future disruption.

MULTIPLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

At some time all of us have needed to work or drive a car or perform in some way in an environment that is calling away task attention. We learn to tighten our focus and concentrate on the task we are doing and exclude the non-essential.

An office with many conversations happening around us, driving in complicated traffic whilst the passengers are chatting etc. Our brain still hears all those events but we have trained ourselves not to respond. But if something in that chatter is important (like a fire alarm, or we hear our name mentioned) then our brain will direct that into our task and cause an interruption. The part of our brain that is listening to all these distractions needs practise at working out what is worth listening to and what can be dismissed at this time. This takes a LOT of brain power and practise and it can be quite tiring, sometimes extremely tiring.

I think we are now recognising that for some people this skill is almost completely absent.

TEACHING BRAIN FILTERING

Once we understand that a dog can learn how to "respond filter", we need to teach them how to do it, and that it is worth their effort. We focus on recovery.

To set up the learning:

- ☞ The dog must have a long history of a marker commencing the reinforcement process. This marker needs to be really clean, no overlap to pocket dipping, and the dog should respond to it with an obvious change in behaviour.
- ☞ The reinforcement process needs to last for at least 10 seconds. That can be 9 seconds of anticipation and 1 second of consumption. The anticipation is the opening of the pot, travelling over to the reinforcement station, searching your pockets, breaking up the treats etc.
- ☞ The choreographed disruptions should be familiar to the dog during training and at no time present a threat.

Initially I would arrange the disruption to occur immediately after the click and during the anticipation of delivery. If the dog chooses to respond to the disruption and seek it out as a

reinforcement opportunity, then we have clear information that what we considered a reinforcer for the behaviour was not strong enough under those conditions. If the dog then returns to us for our reinforcer it is no longer available, it is only one or the other.

Interestingly, if such a disruption is set up further away, then the attraction, or access to it as a reinforcer, diminishes bring back our reinforcer at a higher hierarchy of choice.

I would expect the dog to acknowledge that a disruption has occurred, by a flick of the ear, or eye, but they should be able to demonstrate response-filtering by maintaining concentration to the reinforcement delivery from us that is in progress.

As soon as we have delivered the reinforcer we will often see the dog <u>then</u> choose to respond to the disruption if it is still available. That is a good indication of implementing a response choice.

I will plan this pattern until we see there is no visible response to the disruption. It should reduce over the repetitions very quickly. Sometimes the response is only noticeable by a slight hesitation or loss in fluency, not necessarily evidence of hearing it. If the dog has taken 5 reps for the response to be unnoticeable, the behaviour is back to our base line, then add another 10 reps, with breaks, before we change the pattern.

During those 10 reps where the response to the disruption is to seek our reinforcer, these disruption begin to become cues TO reinforcement.

Bring it on!

Now what used to be a risk moment starts to becoming a spur towards reinforcement.

Once this has occurred you can alter the timing of the disruption to during the cue, or during the behaviour. All disruptions should be on a fade-in basis, where the base behaviour is well established. This is why we need to have many reps of a good quality before we train against disruptions.

OUTSIDE OUR CONTROL

There will be unscheduled disruptions that are beyond our control. Under these conditions we focus on recovery, and reinforce the dog for returning to continuing the behaviour.

If this is a single event, just carry on. If it is a continuous event that the dog cannot return to expected standard, then we need to stop completely.

Between the two we want to take this as an opportunity for building a response-filter and make it worth their while to choose to focus on our expectations under difficult conditions.

Do be careful of teaching the dog to seek disruptions and getting paid. This often comes under the protocol of "look at that and do not respond". The successful "looking without unnecessary response" is marked and reinforced, but we are marking "looking", which can quickly graduate into seeking and scanning the environment.

Any of these protocols should be on a continuum where the dog is progressing towards not looking at all beyond a mild, non-alert interest. We are seeking a dog that would not hesitate to respond to our cues under these conditions.

This is a complex concept to get your head around, but for every cue "rule" remember they also apply to every distraction or disruption:

THE **ANIMAL** SELECTS THAT WHICH IS RELEVANT
AND DOES **NOT** RESPOND TO THAT WHICH HAS **NOT** BEEN SELECTED

That means we need to teach what to select and what to not select: response filtering

5. Stamina

Once we being to look in detail at the terms we use to describe learning, training, performance and all the rest, it becomes clear that we need greater definition to be able to measure what it is, whether it is improving or changing – and for either of those, some sort of measurement system.

"Seems better" is not really good enough, we need good data, that tells us what we need to know.

By having a base line of your initial 3 x 6 reps, you can go and focus on specific training, then come back and perform the 6 reps to measure the changes.

One thing that never fails to smack me in the face, is that when I think the dog is ready, when I think the training is done, if I look back a year later, I realise … IT WAS NOT DONE. It never is.

It is done in the conditions we ask for it, which very often do not translate to the real world or performance conditions.

Our processes are very much about teaching the dog how to do what we want them to do, pairing a cue with that behaviour, building the strength and fluency and then continually changing the conditions under which it happens. Preparation for those conditions is our responsibility.

"Losing focus", or "lack of stamina", are often terms we hear when the dog does not seem to improve at the rate we predict it should.

Personally I try to build the behaviour in the optimum conditions to be the best it can be long before I test that behaviour or "take it on the road". I want the dog to have a long, strong conditioned response to the cue to enable a bounce back when disruptions occur.

The other route, where behaviour is exposed before it is strong, can build an uncertain behaviour where the dog has learned to expect discomfort and disruption. This is why the measure of fluent and stable is so important. These are the two elements that are most likely to display changes.

The policy will be to build above and beyond reasonable performance conditions, so that performance conditions present the easier option for the dog.

You can build stamina either with intense short term focus or less intense, long term focus.

I would use heelwork as an example:

Intense, short-term focus:

> Duration, 60 seconds, changes and repositioning (different sides, turns, speeds) at least 25 – 30. I perform this with a lure* to maintain the engagement – food in either hand or a toy, at the end of the 60 seconds we have party time for another 60 seconds. I choose a piece of music that I know last sixty seconds.

if the lure disrupts the behaviour – then excellent you have a built in opportunity to use the lure/toy to drive the accuracy required.

If you are building this intense training, then work in batches of 20 seconds, and gradually build the duration, or work 3 short batches with party time between,

Take data on this – you need to have a planned schedule to build and monitor progress, and a pattern that pay-off will be reliable and worthwhile.

Alternative behaviour may be a repeatable pattern, I use leg weaving, and expect at least 30 without a break. But again, these build in batches.

This intense training will focus the dog mentally on seeking the cues, remembering the cues and responding to the cues with speed and without fail. If they fail, show disappointment and begin again but pay sooner. No repeat cues!

The second focus training will be looking for duration. If I am expecting a routine of 4 minutes, then I will build to achieve a simple, plain, hardly any changes for 6 minutes. In heelwork, this would be simple mileage over the set time, heel on the left – giant circuits, not stopping or turning. It could also be trotting on the cup etc.

You will need to build a sense of "keep going, nearly there, just one more" yourself, so that the dog will build the expectation of the super party.

All these type of training:

> Disruption training: learning to tight focus and dismiss irrelevant
>
> Cue seeking, fast changes: accessing memory skills, changing responses or energy
>
> Duration: to keep going and trust the outcome

Are a complete package that we blend into performance, but they can be trained as individual skills – for both us and the dogs.

6. Measuring improvement

We all keep tabs in different ways on how we measure improvement. But at times we can be a bit lazy and just think "that's get better" and we tend to forget when it was a pile of poo.

Journaling, or taking notes on your training that describe a clear picture of what is happening at that time are a good way to be able to look back and see how far you have come.

It doesn't matter whether your performance is in a competition environment, in the field or around your front door, taking notes and keep clear records are essential to efficient and effective training. To be effective we need to identify exactly what it is we need to enable the dog, or us, improve on, rather than just repeating the same thing – when we go into auto mode we tend to repeat the things we like, rather than address the things we need to.

When I look back at my notes, I become aware of the things I used to be focussed on but now I take for granted are OK. Things that previous Gordons would give me nightmares about that I have "sorted" with Merrick. Just the other day I went over to the barn with her, off lead, quick pee, and she was 100% connected to me all the time. This is very collie like, but extremely un-Gordon like when pheasant are on the ground. The opportunity to get into the barn for training was the highest priority, and my behaviour told her when that was likely to happen – which demonstrated in her awareness of me all the time. In 2000 I was asked to give a demonstration at a Gordon Celebration event, secured at a glorious country house, on the lawns alongside a lake. Under no circumstances would I have been able to do that with Mabel off lead, the call of the lake would have far exceeded my training, but I can visualise that being possible with Merrick.

Training has progressed, I now make much more effort to work for the separated, and slightly delayed reinforcers. I have no illusions about the consistency of expectations from her, but it is a long way from previous expectations and getting better all the time.

What progress have you made …. and more importantly can you identify what you have done to achieve this? Otherwise it is just dumb luck and superstition?

Much sport training is based on copying someone who is successful, or takes their lucky key ring with them to competitions, or wears red knickers on the day. There is very poor scientific support for the outcomes of achievement. Which can make learning and improving in the sports, or any performance, arena jolly hard work.

What method or protocol may be successful is impossible to quantify or provide evidence for unless there is good data to support it. "Good data" is often about subjective measuring, regularly on the elements that can be measured.

I hope from doing this course you have an idea about how important this is and have some good data to go forward with?