

Let's talk about multiple markers

Mary Hunter, Behavior Explorer

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During training sessions, do you use a deliberate marker signal?

- A) All the time or almost all the time
- B) Mainly when teaching or shaping new behaviors
- C) Sometimes, it just depends
- D) Rarely or never

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What do you use as a marker signal?

- A) I primarily use a click (including tongue click)
- B) I primarily use "yes" or another verbal marker
- C) I use several different markers (3–4 markers)
- D) I have many marker signals (5+ markers)

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B → Click → R+

Animal does
a behavior

Trainer delivers
a marker

Trainer gives
a reinforcer

Training myth: The click ends behavior!

We often get unwanted behavior because we focus on what happens BEFORE the marker, but we don't pay much attention to what happens AFTER the marker.

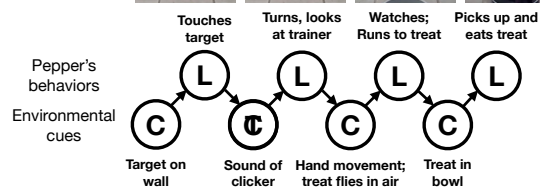
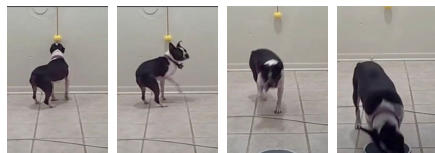
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Reinforcement as a chain of behaviors



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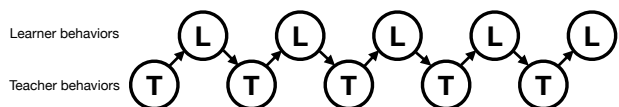
Pepper's chain



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Reinforcement System:

Describes an interconnected chain of behaviors between a teacher and a learner during reinforcement.



(A reinforcer doesn't magically appear!)

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What's the function of the marker?

B → Click → R+

Animal does
a behavior

Trainer delivers
a marker

Trainer gives
a reinforcer

- A reinforcer signal (click, marker, bridge, etc.) has two functions:

- **Confirmation:** It tells your learner: "Yes! You did it!"
- **Cue:** It tells your learner what to do next

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Let's look for cues and behaviors

- Marker word = "Yip"
- What does Red do when Mary says "Yip"?
- "Yip" is a cue to lower his head into the bucket

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“Toss” is a cue for what behavior?

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Thanks to Maia Huff-Owen and Cliquot

“Beep” is a cue for what behavior?

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“Get it” is a cue for what behavior?

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Thanks to Diana Simonsen and Valen

What happens if the cue changes?

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Thanks to Diana Simonsen and Valen

What happens if the cues change?

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What happens if the cues change?

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Do you need multiple markers?

If you want the animal to perform a different behavior in response to the marker, you should teach a different marker.



“Get it!”

“Yes!”

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Do you need multiple markers?



Remain in place while I bring a treat

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Do you need multiple markers?

If you want the animal to perform a different behavior in response to the marker, you should teach a different marker.



Mouth click

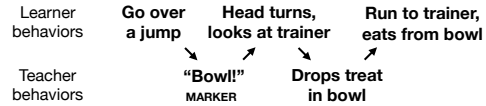
Remain in place, look at MH

Mary's next behavior...

Cues Apollo's next behavior

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Do you need multiple markers?



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More examples and further considerations

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How to select a reinforcer signal

- Detectable: Will your learner perceive it?
- Discrete: Will it be distinct from other events?
- Ready: Can you deliver it easily & on time?
- Consistent: Will it be the same each time?

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While trainers may or may not want to use a clicker, they should be aware that conditioned reinforcers will develop. Rather than letting conditioned reinforcers develop haphazardly, communication during training may be clearer if the trainer teaches and maintains a well-defined and consistent conditioned reinforcer, such as a clicker, that can serve as a discriminative stimulus for collecting the reinforcer.

Peiris, P. L., & Rosales-Ruiz, J. (2022). Some detrimental effects of conditioned reinforcement on the maintenance of dog behavior. *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*.

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Mary and Henry



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Mary and Henry



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Homework

- Record a training session or find a recent video
 - If you are using a marker, what is your marker?
 - If you are not using a marker, what is serving as a marker?
 - What does your animal do in response to the marker?
- If your marker and food delivery overlap...
 - What happens if you do a session without the marker?
 - Or, what happens if you add a slight pause (1/2 a second)?

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Chewie: Bowl versus no bowl

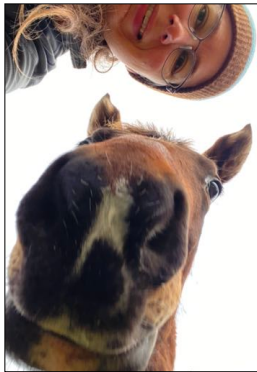


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In summary

- Your marker is a cue
 - For what behavior?
- Do you need a different marker?
 - If you want the animal to perform a different response to the marker, you should teach a different marker.

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