

How Animals Learn



Shannon Coyner

Registered Veterinary Technician

Certified Professional Dog Trainer- Knowledge Assessed

Karen Pryor Academy Certified Professional Trainer



Every Behavior has a cue/trigger and a consequence

Woman sees spider
Woman runs away
Woman is safe from spider



Person reaches toward dog
Dog shows teeth/person moves away
Dog is safe from person



The ABC's of Behavior

- **A**= The ANTECEDENT (cue/trigger) is what puts the behavior into motion
- **B**= The BEHAVIOR is the activity/ skill/ action that is performed
- **C**= The CONSEQUENCE of the behavior (can be a wanted or unwanted)

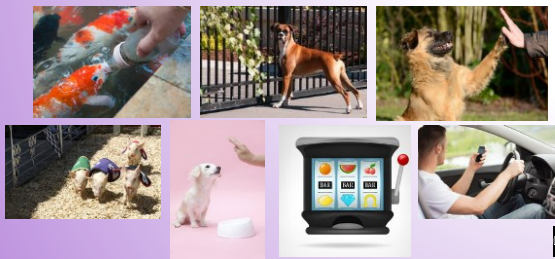


What exactly is the antecedent (cue/trigger)?

- The cue is what “unlocks” the behavior and sets the behavior into motion.
- The word “sit” before a dog sits
- The action of patting a leg before dog comes
- The green light before you push the gas peddle
- The red light before you push on the brake



Antecedents/ cues are everywhere



What exactly is the Behavior?

- The action/ skill/ activity of interest performed by the subject
- The action of “sitting”
- The action of “barking”
- The skill of jumping over a jump
- Stopping or accelerating a car



What exactly is the consequence?

- Consequences either reinforce (increase the behavior) or punish a behavior (decrease the behavior)
- Reinforcement can be treats, toys, attention, praise, etc.
- Punishment can be denial of attention, removal of a toy, stopping fun, pain, discomfort



Recognizing the consequences

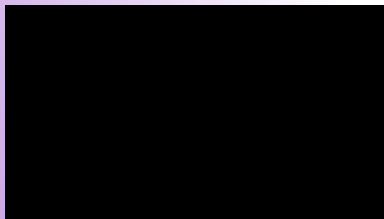


Teaching a Behavior using ABC's

- Determine the behavior you want to teach
 - SIT
- Teach the behavior (no specific antecedent/cue) using reinforcement
 - Lure into position and reinforce desired behavior (treat/ click and treat)
- Add the antecedent/cue
 - Once the animal understand the behavior and is likely to perform the behavior add the cue as the behavior is happening
- Test the antecedent/cue
 - Use the cue, if the animal performs the behavior- reinforce
 - Use the cue, if the animal DOES NOT perform the behavior- ignore and go back to adding the cue



Teaching a behavior in action



How behaviors are learned without specific training?

- A natural cue or activity may occur
 - The mail person delivers the mail
- Animal practices or tries a behavior
 - The dog barks at the "intruder" (mail person)
- A consequence that reinforces the behavior occurs
 - The "intruder" (mail person) leaves (VERY reinforcing)
- The animal practices the A, B and C presents itself



Another example

- A: You pick up your leash to take your dog on a walk
 - B: Your dog runs to the front door
 - C: You take your dog for a walk and the walk is fun
- OR
- A: You pick up your dogs leash to take your dog for a walk
 - B: Your dog hides under the bed
 - C: You pull your dog out from under the bed and go for a walk (and your dog is scared the whole time)
- *** This can happen if your dog is not socialized or if something bad happened during a previous walk



How to change an unwanted behavior



- Determine the unwanted behavior
- Identify the antecedent and the consequence
- Options
 - Teach a new behavior that is cued by the same antecedent
 - Prevent the antecedent
 - Remove the reinforcing consequence
 - Add an undesired consequence



Options for changing behavior



Teach a new behavior that is cued by the same antecedent

• If dog runs to the door and barks when the door bell rings

- Teach dog to run to a bed or crate when the door bell rings

• If a dog jumps on you when he approaches you

- Teach dog to sit when he approaches you

Prevent the antecedent

• If dog barks at the mail person

- Move the mail box away from the door

• If the dog growls when he chews on a bully stick

- Stop giving bully stick



Options for changing behavior



Remove the reinforcing consequence

• Dog barks at you when you play fetch

- Stop throwing the ball if dog is barking (throw ball only when dog is quiet)

• Dog begs when you are eating dinner

- Prevent dog getting any food or attention while at the table

Add an undesired consequence

• Dog jumps on you

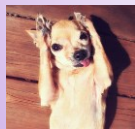
- Turn your back and ignore the dog until he sits

• Dog pulls when on walks

- Stop moving forward until dog relaxes and looks at you



There may be times when you are not sure how the cue started or what the initial consequence was



There are many ways to teach a new behavior or to change an unwanted behavior

- Scientific studies have shown that using positive, force free training techniques are more efficient than using punishment or pain.
- Not only are they better for increasing confidence but they also can strengthen the human-animal bond.
- Punishment must be approached very carefully. If punishment is used it must be timed perfectly, should not be used excessively and must not be too extreme. In addition, punishment should never be associated with anything EXCEPT the unwanted behavior.

PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE AVOIDED WHENEVER POSSIBLE AND SHOULD NEVER CAUSE PAIN!!



If you think your dog may be experiencing fear or anxiety- contact a trainer that understands anxiety and fear or a Behaviorist



Questions??