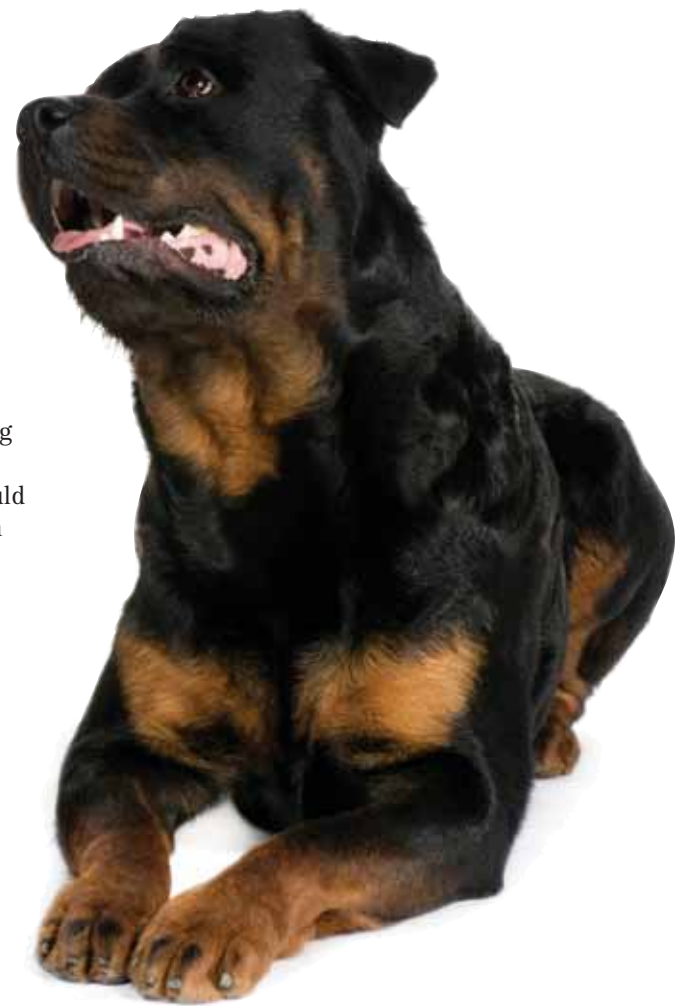




# Clicker Training

## Teaching Sit and Down



**W**ith positive reinforcement training, we are always telling our students to stop thinking about what they want the dog to not *do* but instead to think about what they would prefer the dog do in a given situation. Is he jumping on guests? Teach him to politely greet them by sitting in front of them. Begging at the dinner table? Teach him to be in a Down-Stay nearby instead. Teaching your dog to reliably respond to your cues for “Sit” and “Down” is the first step.

These behaviours are easily taught, but may require patience at first. Instead of physically putting the dog into position, saying the command and hoping he makes the connection to the behaviour, you will be helping him to discover it. Have a bunch of tiny soft treats ready. You are going to use one as a “lure” to help him to get into the position you want. The lure is only used at the beginning - I will show you how to quickly fade it so your dog learns to respond to just the signal, whether or not food is present.

### Teaching the Sit

Stand (or kneel, if he's little) in front of your standing dog. Put a treat in your hand and hold it, palm up, just in front of his nose. Tempt him a bit with the treat and then move your hand slowly from his nose straight up and back (just a bit) over his eyes, keeping it slightly out of reach. Most dogs will rather quickly sit so they can better reach it, but you might need to be patient and wait for a moment. When he does sit, immediately C&T (click and treat) and praise. Please remember that the click has to come at the exact moment his rear hits the ground, so he learns that that is what got him the treat. At this point you want to give the treat right away, too. It's OK if your dog gets up after the click - the click actually ends the exercise each time. If he doesn't sit at all, maybe keeps backing up, trying to get the treat, then just turn away and ignore him for a few moments (of course, don't give him the treat). Then try again, from the start.

Notice that I never said when to say, “Sit.” That's because it is best to wait until the behaviour is being performed reliably for a hand signal before adding the verbal cue. That way he doesn't connect the word with the wrong behaviour. Also, dogs learn the hand signals much more easily, so tend to ignore the verbal commands that go along with them. It's best to teach them separately.

Once your dog is sitting, step back a bit to encourage him to stand up so you can practice again (you can also lure him into a stand if you like).

### Teaching the Down

The Down is very similar to the Sit. Lure him into a Sit and kneel in front of him. Use a treat to lure him into the Down position. Holding your treat hand palm down, start the treat at his nose then slowly move it to the floor and out a bit towards his toes so he needs to lie down to get it. Be careful not to go out so far that he needs to walk forward to get it.

Most dogs do the Down more easily at first from a Sit, but for some dogs doing it from a standing position is easier. If you'd like to try that, then drop the treat from his nose to the ground as before, but as you are reaching the ground go backwards (between his legs) a little bit instead of forward. Hopefully he will drop into the “Sphinx” position.

If he doesn't get it after several tries, then try some behaviour shaping. Instead of holding out for a complete Down, you will instead C&T the very beginning of it - when he just drops his shoulders a little bit. C&T that a few times, then the next time hold out until he drops down a little bit more before you C&T. Continue until he has to lie all the way down to get the C&T. Jackpot time!

To get him back into a sitting position, lure him up the same way as when teaching the Sit - by turning your hand palm up and luring him up. When he lifts up into a sit, C&T.

Once your dog is down, you can then practice “doggy push-ups”. You know, Sit-Down, Sit-Down, C&T-ing each one. But don't forget to also practice plenty of Sits and Downs from a standing position.

### Losing the Lure

OK, so your dog is popping up and down like a little jackrabbit for that tasty lure, right? Now you are ready for the next step, which is to “lose the lure”, teaching your dog to respond to just the hand signal. If this is not done properly you will end up with a dog that will perform the behaviour only if he sees a treat. Hardly what we want. Instead, by carefully phasing out the lure, you teach him that it is not the sight of a treat that gets him a reward, but response to your command.



Luring above the head into a Sit



Luring into the Down or Drop Position



Luring back up to a Sit position

Review a few times, luring him up and down with a treat in your hand, C&T-ing each response. When you lure up for the Sit, remember to have your hand palm up. When you lure for the Down, have your hand palm down. Next step is to have a treat in your hand. As before, that treat will still act as the lure but will NOT be given to your dog. Have a bunch of little treats in your other hand, too. Lure him into a Sit (or Down), click, but then give him a treat from your other hand. He doesn't get the lure treat from the signal hand at all. Don't forget to click as soon as he Sits (or Downs), just before giving the treat.

Practice quite a few Sits and Downs, as well as Sits from a Stand that way. Very soon he will perform the behaviour then quickly look toward your other hand. That's good. What a clever dog!

Remember, if you know you did plenty of reps of the previous step (at any point in the training of any exercise) and your dog just doesn't respond correctly, then look away for a moment, giving him time to think about it. It's funny when they start offering all sorts of behaviours, hoping for the reward. They lie down, offer a paw, bark. Just smile and think about how clever your dog is to try all of those things, and wait for him to get it right. Then click and jackpot!

The next step will be to go to using your signal hand to just give the signal (the same luring motion but without a lure). First, review a few times with the lure but giving the treat from your other hand as explained in the last step. The last time, give him the lure treat, then right away do the same motion but with an empty signal hand. As long as your hand motion (the signal) remained the same, your dog will most likely respond as before. C&T and praise very enthusiastically. Remember, palm up for sit, palm down for down. Practice this until your dog responds reliably to each signal.

Now, if you are still kneeling or bending down to give the Down signal, it's time to start standing up. You will need to do this in small increments so your dog still understands the signal, getting a bit more upright each time until you are standing

upright. Although at first your signal will need to be quite exaggerated, you can slowly shape it to be much more subtle. The signal should eventually just be a slight downward motion with your palm down for Down, and a slight upward motion with your palm up for Sit.

The next steps are to vary where you are when you give the signals. Work on standing a bit further away each time as well as standing at different angles (and beside your dog) before giving the signals. Remember to practice each of these more advanced things separately so each will be stronger.

## Phasing Out the Clicker

So when do you stop using the clicker for these exercises? Whenever you feel that the dog has really learned the signals and is very reliable in responding to them. Does that mean at that point you never need to reinforce the behaviour? Certainly not! Make an actual treat reward less common. Instead, get the response then praise enthusiastically, praise quietly, throw a ball, play tug of war, give his dinner, open the door to go outside - whatever. The best trainers are variable and unpredictable. The dog never knows what he's going to get or when. That makes it all the more fun for him.

If, after time, you start getting less of a response, just go back to positively reinforcing more often for a short time to refresh his memory. You never 100% stop using treats or rewards. A behaviour that is never reinforced will go away. A behaviour that is reinforced variably will stay strong. Have fun!

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Mary Woodward is a dog trainer who runs Greenwood Dog Training School.  
For more information go to [www.clickerlessons.com](http://www.clickerlessons.com). See Urban Animal issue 12 for the beginning of this series and tips on initialising the clicker, issue 13 for teaching the very important step of getting your pet to learn attention and issue 14 for tips on how to teach your canine targeting.

# Sit Happens

## Tips and Techniques with Trudi Thorpe



Photo by Animax

Hi, Trudi,

We have a kelpie x called Simon who is about 18 months old (he's a rescue so we're not sure exactly) and he's being incredibly naughty. He is outside in the back garden when we're at work, which has been fine until now, but he's decided that he's going to slowly destroy everything in the garden. So far he's eaten plants, dug holes, ripped apart the outside table setting, and now he's started on the fence itself!! He has a variety of toys scattered around the backyard that he takes little or no notice of, preferring instead to attach himself to a pot plant or a piece of furniture. Having a dog was not supposed to include a home renovation!! Can you please help as this is now very urgent? If we can't make him stop destroying things we may have to get rid of him.

Desperately yours,

Margaret and Anthony

Hi, guys,

Sounds as if you are experiencing some unwanted and unrelenting excavations in your backyard, but as frustrating as this may seem, there are a couple of things to consider here. Firstly, Simon is not being naughty - he is simply being a dog, doing natural dog things like digging and chewing. Consider also that being left in the backyard every day - day in, day out - is downright booooring! Even the vast selection of toys scattered around the backyard are boring. Don't forget that most toys are only fun if they have a human attached to the other end!

Another important thing to consider is that the backyard is no longer just "the backyard" anymore. We as humans have evolved over the years in our understanding of and interaction with our dogs and have become more aware of basic wants and needs. Where we used to just leave our dogs in the backyard without a second thought, we are now taking a holistic approach to the overall happiness of our hounds and to balancing their behaviour, when we are home and when we are not. Environmental enrichment is where we think logically about enriching the environment in which our dogs live. What are your dog's options when you are out? What games can he play by himself? Which toys are interesting to play with without you and which are old has-beens? I often ask owners to put themselves in the scenario of having been locked out

of the house for eight hours whilst waiting for keys to be delivered by a partner who is working. Sit in the backyard and look around. Could you live in this situation day in, day out, or would you be bored? If the answer is you would be bored, then there is a good chance that your dog is bored too!

Enriching the environment in which our dogs spend the majority of their day involves thinking about toys that evoke problem-solving techniques, such as treat balls or Kongs, which engage the dog and keep them entertained. Rotate toys daily so that Simon always has a new selection of toys to play with. Toys need not be expensive, but a little imagination goes a long way - e.g. drink a 2-litre bottle of soft drink and then, after carefully removing the lid and the little plastic ring around the top of the bottle, squash it in the middle and throw it outside to be played with. Alternatively, put treats in the bottle and then suspend it off a tree on a thick elastic tie close to the ground so that Simon can jump and grab the bottle, sending treats falling from heaven as he lets it go. Or get some rope and tie a knot in the middle and throw it outside to be played with. Or get a treat ball and put his breakfast into it so that he has to work at eating it. Dogs love cardboard, so put a huge cardboard box out there for him to crawl in and around, or rip apart. If he chews it up, simply rake the cardboard up when you get home - better than your favourite pot plant! Invest in two of those half-shells where you put sand in one side and water in the other. They are inexpensive and provide hours of fun for your dog. Hide treats in the sand so as to encourage Simon to dig in the digging pit rather than in your garden. Make sure that you use sand rather than soil as sand is a different texture than soil and easier to dig in.

Thing is that our dogs need to be kept busy and entertained when we are away from them, and with just a little thought and imagination there are many ways that we can enrich the environment in which our dogs live, and in doing so we can save our plants, our backyard and ultimately our sanity.

**Trudi Thorpe** runs a dog behaviour and training company, dogLOGIC, based in Sydney. As Trudi says "DOGS, DOGS, DOGS... A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 18 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.  
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