



## Shaping Behavior

Shaping behavior is done by breaking a behavior down into small steps called successive approximations. All the steps, when put together in order, result in a completed behavior. You reinforce each step of the behavior before moving onto the next step. You can think of it like climbing a ladder. The goal behavior is at the top of the ladder, but to get there you must take each step on the way up to succeed.

Shaping is particularly useful when you are working on complex behaviors. From the cat's perspective, it is a fun game in which they get to participate more directly in deciding which step to take next. It is also a game that involves a lot of mental activity on both sides of the training relationship – both the cat's and the human's brains will be put to good use in a shaping session.

### CREATING BEHAVIOR WITH SHAPING

#### STEP 1: Create a shaping plan

Decide on what your goal behavior will be. Once you have a goal behavior selected, break that behavior down into small parts. For example, our goal behavior is to approach the front of the kennel.

The steps for a shaping plan include:

1. Look toward front of kennel
2. Turn head toward front of kennel
3. Turn body toward front of kennel
4. Stand up
5. Move one paw toward front of kennel
6. Take a step toward front of kennel
7. Take two steps toward front of kennel
8. Arrive at front of kennel

If the cat is fearful, you can still shape behavior! You can shape behaviors such as

- Turning head or body toward front of kennel
- Moving toward front of kennel
- Eye contact
- Moving location in the kennel

If the cat is very active or vocal, you can still shape behavior! You can shape behaviors such as

- Sitting or lying down
- Fetch
- Moving location in a kennel
- Sitting in a box

#### STEP 2: Click, then Reinforce Each Successive Approximation

As soon as the cat completes the first step in the shaping plan, click then reinforce. Click, then reinforce that step about 3-5 times. After the 5<sup>th</sup> time reinforcing the first step, wait for the cat to decide what to do next. If you have a well-thought out shaping plan, your cat will likely move onto the second step. Then, click, then reinforce ONLY the second step about 3-5 times. Move through each of the steps in your shaping plan in order until you have created a completed goal behavior.

Each shaping plan you make is just a guide, not a rule! Each cat will respond differently to a shaping session. Some cats may go from the first step to the fifth step in one intuitive leap! Other cats may get stuck on a certain step and need you to either a) break down that step into even smaller pieces, or b) go back to the previous step for a few repetitions to

regain their momentum. In the end your shaping plan is a road map. Regardless of the route you planned, your cat may take a scenic route to get to the final destination (goal behavior). Let your cat drive the process and enjoy the ride!

#### **STEP 3a and 3b: Putting behavior on cue**

After the cat is performing the complete goal behavior consistently, start associating the cue with the behavior. The cue is the visual or verbal signal that identifies specific behaviors for the cat. The cat will not make the association between a cue and the behavior until we teach her.

##### **STEP 3a: Cue as cat is completing behavior**

As soon as you can predict with certainty the cat will complete the behavior you have been clicking/reinforcing, give the cue as the cat is completing the behavior. For example, if you are capturing "sit", you will say "sit" as the cat begins to bend her knees to sit. As soon as she completes the sit, click, then reinforce. You will want to do this at least 10 times before using the cue before the cat completes behavior.

##### **STEP 3b: Cue before cat begins behavior**

Say the verbal cue "sit" before the cat has started to bend her knees to sit. If you have created a reliable association between your cue and the behavior, your cat will sit when you use the cue.

Once you have the behavior on cue you are ready to start the next behavior. Keep on training!



## Luring Behavior

Luring is a method of training that uses a reinforcer as something for the animal to follow. By following the lure (food, treats, or toys) the animal is encouraged to engage in a specific behavior. Once the animal completes the behavior, you click and reinforce. Luring can be a good choice of training method for behaviors that are based on position (sit, down, stand) or require some motion on their part (jumping through a hula hoop).

### CREATING BEHAVIOR WITH LURING

#### STEP 1: Hold the lure in your hand

You will want to have soft food on the wooden spoon or a treat in your hand that your cat enjoys. When your cat smells or sees the food, you will move your hand to encourage the behavior you want. For example, for a “sit”, you will want to move the lure up and over the cat’s head. This will tip the cat’s head up and likely they will start to bend their knees and end up in a sitting position. For jumping through the hula hoop, you would start with the lure on the same side of the hula hoop as the cat. Move the lure through the hula hoop with your hand and the cat should follow your hand and then end up on the other side of the hula hoop with the lure.

If the cat is fearful, you can still lure behavior! You can click, then reinforce behaviors such as

- Turning head or body toward front of kennel
- Moving toward front of kennel
- Standing up (from a sit or down)
- Moving location in the kennel

If the cat is very active or vocal, you can still lure behavior! You can click, then reinforce behaviors such as

- Sitting or lying down
- Agility courses
- Moving location in a kennel

#### STEP 2: Click and Reinforce

As soon as the cat completes the behavior by following the lure, click, then reinforce the behavior.

#### STEP 3: Fading the lure

***This is a very important step!*** Prior to adding the cue for the behavior you will need to fade the lure. This should occur quickly! After you ask for the behavior with a lure 5 times, you should take the lure out of your hand. Then, engage in the same hand motion you used. When the cat completes the behavior without the lure in your hand, click, then reinforce!

#### STEP 4: Putting behavior on a cue/new cue

After the cat is performing the behavior consistently, start associating the cue with the behavior. Most often, the cue for behaviors that have been taught by luring will be the hand motion used when holding the lure (this becomes a visual cue for the cat). However, you can add a verbal cue or change your visual cue if you prefer after your cat is reliably completing the behavior.

### Adding a new cue to the hand (lure) motion

Adding a new cue to a lured behavior involves classical conditioning. In order to do so, you will

- Present new cue (verbal or visual), then immediately...
- Present old cue (this is generally the hand motion used when you were using the lure)
- Wait for cat to complete behavior
- Click, then Reinforce

Over time, you will begin to put a few seconds between the new cue and old cue. The cat will anticipate that the old cue is coming and begin to complete the behavior. When this happens, slowly fade away the old cue by making it less noticeable to the cat. Once the cat is responding to the new cue by completing the behavior upon presentation of the new cue, you can eliminate the old cue completely. Now, you will have multiple cues (one old, one new) that can tell your cat which behavior will earn their click and reinforcer.

### Cue before cat begins behavior

Give the cue before the cat has started to bend her knees to sit. If you have created a reliable association between your cue and the behavior, your cat will sit when you use the cue.

Once you have the behavior on cue you are ready to start the next behavior. Keep on training!





## Targeting Behavior

When you are teaching a cat to touch a part of his body to a specific object, the behavior you are teaching is called “targeting behavior.” In this program it will be touching his nose to an object you choose (ex: target stick, straw, finger). Sometimes you will be working toward getting proximity to the object, not actual contact with the object.

### TEACHING THE BEHAVIOR

#### STEP 1: Clicking for Interest in the Target/Touching the Target

To start teaching this behavior, hold the target object within a head-stretch or a turn for the cat (about one inch away). When you place something near a cat’s face he usually sniffs it. At that moment you click, then reinforce. Repeat this until the cat is stretching to touch the target readily.

- If the cat is fearful and turns away, then you can take a few different avenues to complete step one.
  - Hold target far enough away from cat that it doesn’t cause severe fear-reaching (hiding head, turning completely away).
  - When the cat takes a quick glance at the target (eyes make contact with the target object) click, then treat.
  - Since your starting point will be *looking* versus touching, you will need to work up to stretching to touch the target.
    - These steps may look different for each fearful cat, so if you’re not sure how to proceed, speak with your trainer-mentor.

#### STEP 2: Taking a Step to Reach the Target

Once the cat is readily performing the targeting behavior at the step one level, then move the target object a bit further away so the cat will now have to take half of a step toward the target or stretch further to reach it. Continue on step 2 until the cat is continuously performing the behavior you are clicking.

#### STEP 3: Choosing the correct level of distance increase

Now that step 3 is mastered, move the target object even further away from the cat. If you move it too far too fast, the cat will let you know by not attempting to touch the target. He may appear to give up, although this is not accurate. In fact, the cat doesn’t know what to do. If he isn’t responding, move the target back toward him until he is responding again. Try increasing the distance by a smaller amount in your next attempt.

Keep working further and further away until the cat is performing the behavior all over the kennel, going from one level to the next or from a shelf to a corner (however your kennels are designed).

## TEACHING THE CUE

After the cat is performing the behavior consistently in the kennel, start adding the cue. The cue is the word or physical motion that tells the cat which behavior you would like him to do. The cat will not make the association between a cue word/motion and the behavior until we teach him the cue. For the target behavior the presentation of the object will naturally be the physical cue; you can say the word "target" for the verbal cue.

### STEP 1: Cue with target object

Directly (just a second or two) before the cat touches the already presented target object with his nose, give the verbal cue of "target." After the cat has performed the targeting behavior, click, then treat. Continue this for a number of repetitions (4-10).

### STEP 2: Cue then target object

Say the verbal cue ("target") and *then* present the target object. After the cat has performed the targeting behavior, click, then treat. Continue this for a number of repetitions (4-10).

### STEP 3: No treat without the verbal cue!

Once step two is going well, you should no longer click, then treat for the cat when he offers the behavior unless he does so WITH THE VERBAL CUE.

Once you have the behavior on cue you are ready to start the next behavior. Keep on training!



## Capturing Behavior

Capturing is waiting for the cat to perform a behavior without a cue. When capturing behavior, you are not directing the cat in any way. You are simply observing the cat and choosing to click, then reinforce when they complete a behavior that you want to see happen again. Capturing is a method that works well when you are reinforcing behaviors that a cat does naturally.

### CAPTURING BEHAVIOR

#### STEP 1: Observe the cat

In whichever environment you find the cat, observe the cat to see what she does. Your cat may be in a kennel, in a cat condo, or even in a room specifically for training time. Any behavior that you would like to see again is eligible for capturing!

If the cat is fearful or appears to avoid interaction, you can still capture behavior! You can click, then reinforce behaviors such as

- Turning head or body toward front of kennel
- Brief eye contact
- Slow eye blinks
- Touching a toy
- Moving location in the kennel

If the cat is very active or vocal, you can still capture behavior! You can click, then reinforce behaviors such as

- Sitting or lying down
- Meows (you can even choose to only reinforce the softer sounding meows!)
- Playing with a toy
- Brief eye contact
- High five through the kennel door

#### STEP 2: Click, then Reinforce

After you have observed the cat and you know the types of behavior that your cat is likely to engage in, make a list (even if just in your head) about behaviors you would like to see more of in the future. As soon as your cat completes a behavior on your list, click, then reinforce! Then work on only that behavior for the rest of your training (capturing) session.

#### STEP 3a and 3b: Putting behavior on cue

After the cat is performing the behavior consistently, start associating the cue with the behavior. The cue is the visual or verbal signal that identifies specific behaviors for the cat. The cat will not make the association between a cue and the behavior until we teach her.

##### *STEP 3a: Cue as cat is completing behavior*

As soon as you can predict with certainty the cat will complete the behavior you have been clicking/reinforcing, give the cue as the cat is completing the behavior. For example, if you are capturing "sit", you will say "sit" as the cat begins to bend her knees to sit. As soon as she completes the sit, click, then reinforce. You will want to do this at least 10 times before using the cue before the cat completes behavior.

##### *STEP 3b: Cue before cat begins behavior*

Say the verbal cue "sit" before the cat has started to bend her knees to sit. If you have created a reliable association between your cue and the behavior, your cat will sit when you use the cue.

Once you have the behavior on cue you are ready to start the next behavior. Keep on training!