

# VSA Learning Guide

## Module 8: Positive Training Tools & Methods

### Before the module lessons:

#### Overview

While understanding canine ethology, cognition, communication, management, enrichment, learning theory, and functional assessments can help people solve their 'dog behavior problems', understanding how to teach dogs what you do want them to do is an important part of the solution. One essential training tool is the creativity of the trainer and his or her ability to develop a training plan, choose a training method, set up the environment, teach the dog, and proof the behavior.

At VSA, we teach the positive training methods of capturing, luring, and shaping. These concepts will serve as valuable tools in your training toolkit, and will help you teach any behavior to any dog. Once the dog understands the behavior, you can add a cue, train to fluency, and evaluate your training along the way. Like with any skill, practicing your training mechanics will help build a foundation to provide clarity for both your learners: clients and their dogs.

#### Module Problem

A client calls wanting help with their adolescent doodle, Dandy. They live on a busy street in London, and they just want to walk their dog to the local park on weekends. The problem is that Dandy pulls and pulls on leash, and the clients are worried that she'll escape her collar.

Answer these questions in your head before proceeding to the module lessons:

- Perform a functional assessment for the pulling behavior.
- What management tools could you recommend?
- What is the goal behavior?
- What would be your training plan? How would you teach this behavior? What would the cue be?
- What criteria exist for this goal behavior?

#### Learning Objectives

- Teach desired behaviors to dogs using capturing, luring, and/or shaping
- Explain and demonstrate the processes of adding cues to behaviors and testing for stimulus control
- Explain and demonstrate the process of proofing behaviors

#### Key Terms

- Marker & Clicker training
- Event marker
- Rate of reinforcement
- Reinforcer
- Behavior chain
- Capturing, Luring, Shaping
- Cue
- Stimulus Control
- Fluency

#### Module Outline

- Chapter 1: Positive Training Tools
- Lesson 4: Training Fundamentals
- Lesson 5: Developing a Training Plan
- Lesson 6: Capturing
- Lesson 7: Luring
- Lesson 8: Shaping
- Lesson 9: Choosing a Training Method
- Lesson 10: Cueing
- Lesson 11: Proofing
- Lesson 12: Fluency

## After the Positive Training Tools chapter:

### Chapter Summary

As professional dog trainers, choosing an appropriate tool is key. Trainers use tools for management, enrichment, setting up antecedent, and training. Tools can come in many forms: collars, leashes, stuffed dogs, treats, training plans, training techniques, etc. When asked about the most effective tool to teach loose leash walking, VSA Faculty member, Aly Lecznar says, "your brain". What she really means is the individual's ability to teach the dog a skill, and to use creativity when solving the 'problem' of pulling on leash. It is tempting to rely on physical tools to bend dogs to our will; however, as positive trainers, we prefer to use tools to set dogs up for success and teach them what we do want them to do.

VSA does not recommend the use of: prong collars, choke chains, shock collars, and citronella collars. These tools rely on discomfort or even pain to punish desired behavior. Using punishment can create fallout, including heightened levels of stress that lead to even more problematic behavior, including aggression. If using a collar to hold an ID tag, for adornment, or for dogs that walk at your side, VSA does recommend flat collars or martingale collars for thick-necked dogs.

Leashes can be an effective management tool to keep the dog and others safe. Finding the right material, clip, and length depend on the purpose of the tool. VSA recommends fixed length leashes as opposed to extendable ones which teach dogs to pull and can cause injury. Handling a leash properly increases safety and helps reduce leash pulling. Harnesses can also be used as a management tool and a training tool. Front-clip harnesses are a good way to manage pulling. Back clip harnesses that allow free motion of the dog's body are great for everyday use, and pulling harnesses are good for sport and fitness training. For dogs that are much larger than their humans, or other limited circumstances, a head halter may be used to give the handler more control over the dog's head. These tools should be introduced via conditioning, and used with caution to avoid injury to the dog.

### Key Concept Questions

- Consider the different scenarios in which a prong collar might be used. Which operant conditioning quadrants are at play during these scenarios? Performing a functional assessment might help.

- Consider the different scenarios in which a choke chain might be used. Which operant conditioning quadrants are at play during these scenarios? Performing a functional assessment might help.

- Consider the different scenarios in which a shock collar might be used. Which operant conditioning quadrants are at play during these scenarios? Performing a functional assessment might help.

- If a client was using an aversive tool, what would be the first question you would ask them?

- Are there any other terms or ideas in this lesson that are new to you? Write down any unfamiliar terms and their definitions in your learning journal. Be sure to review these before module tests.

### **Summary Question**

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

### **Synthesis Question**

- Aversion is in the eye of the beholder. Reflect on what you learned during the Enrichment module. Considering the dog's need and wants how might a harness and leash be aversive? What could you do to lessen this aversion?

## After the Training Fundamentals lesson:

### Lesson Summary

The goal of positive training is to set dogs up for success, let them know exactly what they did that was successful, and reward their success so that it will occur more often. To communicate this to the dog we wait for behavior, mark behavior, and reinforce behavior otherwise known as **marker training**. Trainers can capture, lure, and/or shape behavior, and laying a training mechanics foundation is key.

The first step to any training is to create a training plan. Thinking through each part of the training, the environment (antecedent), the desired behavior (behavior), and the planned reinforcer (consequence), will help clarify the training for both trainer and learner. Before the training, set up a safe learning environment and prepare all training tools. During training, keep sessions short, stay positive and patient, and measure rate of reinforcement. After training, end sessions on a good note, give the dog a break, and evaluate the progress. Keeping training records, and having a backup plan can help set yourself up for success.

While plans can help in goal alignment, clean training mechanics can help clarify what you want from your learner. Using a signal, or **event marker**, that identifies the moment in time when the desired behavior occurred can help clarify training. A good event marker is short, distinctive, previously neutral, and easy to use. Trainers often use clickers, verbal markers (such as 'yes'), whistles, and lights or taps (for deaf and/or blind dogs). Using a clicker or marker provide clarify and consistency for both the learner and the trainer, however they do require coordination. When using a clicker, or **clicker training**, every click must be followed by a treat since the click is the promise of food. The treat must be delivered after the click, and it helps to only click once. Some dogs may displays signs of fear when they hear the clicker. Muffling the sound, using a different clicker, or using a verbal marker can help. No matter the event marker, training mechanics should remain solid. Be mindful of movement during training as any stimulus can become a lure, prompt, or cue.

While marker mechanics are important, reinforcement mechanics are what the dog will focus on in the beginning. In positive reinforcement training, trainers produce a stimulus, event, or condition that serves to strengthen the behavior it follow; in other words, to reinforce the behavior. **Reinforcers** include food, toys, praise, and real-world rewards. The dog, not the trainer, decides what makes a good reinforcer for that dog. Many trainers use treats since all dogs are motivated by food. Delivering the treat directly to the dog's mouth is a good way of speeding up training trials, whereas tossing a treat can help reset or engage the dog. It is important to deliver reinforcers within 3 seconds of the event marker, and to have reinforcers that are quickly consumable. After the reinforcer is delivered, the trainer should reset to the neutral position to prepare for the text trials antecedent. Clear and concise training mechanics will help facilitate effective learning.

## Key Concept Questions

- Think about another skill that you have attempted master in your life. How important were the fundamentals or mechanics of that skill? How often did you practice and how long did it take you to master that skill?

- Recall the attributes of an effective event marker. Which stimulus do you plan to use when working with your own dog? What about clients?

- Write how you would describe the purpose of an event marker in your own words.

- What are three things to remember when offering a reinforcer?

- Are there any other terms or ideas in this lesson that are new to you? Write down any unfamiliar terms and their definitions in your learning journal. Be sure to review these before module tests.

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Any stimulus that increases the frequency of a behavior can be a reinforcer. Reflect on the Enrichment module: what stimuli could you use as life rewards?

## After the Developing a Training Plan lesson:

### Lesson Summary

When helping clients solve behavior 'problems', developing a custom proposal to achieve the desired goal behavior, or **training plan**, will help you, the client, and the dog. Training plans are used by dog trainers and owners alike to map out their intended moves in order to accomplish training goals. Plans can come in many forms, written or verbal, and can be tailored to meet the needs of the owner and/or trainer. The parts of a training plan include 1) determine a goal behavior, 2) set up the training environment, 3) train behavior, and 4) proof behavior.

When developing a training plan there are many questions to consider related to the current antecedent, behavior, and consequence, and the future or desired ABC's. By conducting a functional assessment, and planning the desired ABC's for the situation, trainers can help clients determine a goal behavior. Clients often think in terms of behavior they do not want and our job as trainers is to help them focus on what they do want to teach their dog. In order to teach the behavior we can set up all parities for success by designing an antecedent, or environment, that is most conducive to our plan. The next step in the plan is to actually train the behavior by teaching the desired behavior, adding a cue, and training to fluency. Once taught, we can proof the behavior by testing for stimulus control and verifying our training. Putting these steps together creates a custom training plan for our learners.

### Key Concept Questions

- Do you often plan ahead? Think of one situation in which the outcome would be more successful if you planned ahead. Compare and contrast this situation with dog training.

- Think about a behavior 'problem' that you are experiencing with a dog that you know. Consider this scenario and answer the questions to consider on slide 10 and 12 to determine a goal behavior.

- How would you set up the training environment for the scenario above? What would the goal environment look like? How many steps would it take to move from distraction-free to the goal environment?

- What training tool would you use? Would you need other people or dogs?

- What are the advantages of developing a training plan? Are there any disadvantages?

- If your client insisted on repeating what she does not want her dog to do, what could you say to help her focus on what she does want her dog to do?

- Are there any other terms or ideas in this lesson that are new to you? Write down any unfamiliar terms and their definitions in your learning journal. Be sure to review these before module tests.

### **Summary Question**

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

### **Synthesis Question**

- Consider what you learned in the Canine Communication & Dog Body Language module. What dog body language signals would cause you to adjust your training plan? What about human signals?

## After the Capturing lesson:

### Lesson Summary

Trainers can implement many different techniques in order to teach new behavior. One technique is to observe, mark, and reinforce behavior that the animal displays spontaneously, or **capture** behavior. Capturing is easy for both trainer and learner, and it refines and reinforces key training skills. Built upon a single criterion, capturing provides a clear picture of the goal behavior, and generally produces quick results. However, not all behaviors can be captured and the technique requires decent timing and reflexes.

In order to capture behavior, trainers should prepare the environment, their observation skills, and their training tools (event marker and reinforcers) – the behavior can occur quickly! During a capturing session, trainers should use a clear, consistent event marker, and consider who to deliver reinforcers. After capturing behavior, trainers can add a cue, test, and proof the behavior. Capturing is an easy training method that can be a valuable tool in any trainer's toolkit.

### Key Concept Questions

- How could you explain the concept of capturing using your own analogy or example?

- Describe a scenario where you might observe, mark, and reinforce (capture) human behavior.

- What behaviors do you think would be easy to teach using the capturing?

- In your own words, write down the pros and cons for capturing behavior.

Pros:	Cons:
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## Setting Up for Capturing Activity Questions

- Which items did you choose to remove from the kitchen? Which did you add? Why?
- Did you remember all of the training tools you would need for the session?
- Were there items that you did not consider? If so, write these down in your learning journal for better remembering.

## Capture a Behavior Activity Questions

- What went well? Which behavior did you choose and why?
- Did you create a training plan or did you just wing it?
- Did you clear the environment of distractions?
- Was one minute too short?
- What could have gone better? If not, how can you help set yourself up for success next time?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?
- Did you talk to your dog during the session? Did you move about? If so, do you think these stimuli helped or hindered your dog's learning?

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Consider what you learned in the Enrichment and Management modules. Describe how a dog owner may intentionally, or unintentionally, capture behavior when playing with their dog or using management.

## After the Luring lesson:

### Lesson Summary

Another positive reinforcement training method involves using a stimulus to guide the learner to perform the desired behavior. This stimulus can be food, a toy, or any reinforcing stimulus used to **lure** the dog into a position or action. Once the dog has performed the desired behavior, the behavior is marked and reinforced with the luring stimulus. Luring is easy for both trainer and learner and encourages trainers to show their learners what they do want them to do. This technique can also be helpful in distracting environments. Drawbacks of luring include the encouragement of dogs to move and follow lures, and the need for mobility/flexibility from trainers. The important distinction between capturing and luring is that in luring the reinforcer is presented during the antecedent; whereas, in capturing the reinforcer is presented after the behavior. The set up for a luring session is similar to that of capturing.

In order to lure a behavior, trainers should plan how to lure the behavior, and when they will remove, or fade, the lure. The initial steps are to allow the dog to sniff the lure (or simply show the dog the lure), guide the dog with the lure, mark the behavior once achieved, and reinforce the behavior. The key to luring is to use the lure as few times as possible, while quickly switching to a visual or verbal cue. Hand position, or the way in which the lure is presented, is also important since dogs possess keen observation skills.

### Key Concept Questions

- How could you explain the concept of luring using your own analogy or example?

- Have you ever used luring with your own dog? Did it 'work'? Why or why not?

- What behaviors do you think would be easy to teach using the luring?

- Compare and contrast capturing and luring.

## Setting Up for Luring Activity Questions

- Which items did you choose to remove from the mud room? Which did you add? Why?
- Did you remember all of the training tools you would need for the session?
- Were there items that you did not consider? If so, write these down in your learning journal for better remembering.

## Lure a Behavior Activity Questions

- What went well? Which behavior did you choose and why?
- Did you create a training plan or did you just wing it?
- Did you clear the environment of distractions?
- Which reinforcers did you choose? Will you use the same ones next time?
- Was one minute too short?
- What could have gone better? If not, how can you help set yourself up for success next time?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?
- Did you talk to your dog during the session? Did you move about? If so, do you think these stimuli helped or hindered your dog's learning?

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Recall the key learnings from the Cognition module. What do we know about canine cognitive abilities that would indicate a strong preference for visual cues and luring? How can we use this to our advantage as trainers?

## After the Shaping lesson:

### Lesson Summary

When attempting to teach complex or precise behaviors, trainers will reinforce successive approximations toward a goal behavior, or **shape** behavior. The process is called shaping because the behavior is molded or shaped into the final goal behavior. Shaping is also referred to as “free shaping” and requires slicing the final goal behavior into thin slices (also called “thin-slicing”), teaching each slice one click at a time.

In order to shape behavior, trainers first observe, mark, and reinforce behavior followed by increasing their criteria and repeating the process until the goal behavior is achieved. Shaping encourages critical thinking, and promotes the offering of behaviors. Shaping generally requires a distraction free environment and it may be overkill for some behaviors. Drawbacks of shaping include possible stress for both trainer and learner if used poorly. To avoid this fallout, making a shaping plan can help define the final goal behavior, break down the behavior in to easy-to-achieve steps, and aid in creating a back-up plan. A counterintuitive trick to shaping a multi-step plan is to teach the behaviors in reverse, or back-chain the behaviors. Reversing the order of the behaviors ensures that each subsequent behavior can reinforce the last. Shaping teaches trainers how to split their criteria into smaller steps, rather than lumping criteria leading to frustration. Shaping is a powerful tool that can help teach almost any behavior to any learner.

### Key Concept Questions

- How could you explain the concept of shaping using your own analogy or example?

- Does shaping relate to a concept that you already know and use? Describe how you may have shaped human behavior, even if you didn't realize it.

- What behaviors do you think would be easy to teach using the shaping?

## Make a Shaping Plan Activity Questions

- How many steps did you have in your shaping plan?
- What would you do if you got stuck between steps? Could you 'thin-slice' the behavior even further?

## Clicker Train a Human Activity Questions

- What went well? Which behavior did you choose and why? Would you choose that behavior again?
- Did you create a training plan or did you just wing it?
- Did you clear the environment of distractions?
- Did you distribute reinforcers or just pretend? Be sure to practice this skill!
- Did your learner achieve the goal behavior?
- What could have gone better? If not, how can you help set yourself up for success next time?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?
- What key learning can you take away and use in your work with dogs?

## Shape a Behavior Activity Questions

- What went well? Which behavior did you choose and why? Would you choose that behavior again?
- Did you create a training plan or did you just wing it?
- Did your learner achieve the goal behavior?
- What could have gone better? If not, how can you help set yourself up for success next time?

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Reflect on the Positively Philosophy, Canine Communication & Dog Body Language, and Learning Theory & Functional Assessments modules. Did you see any signs of stress during your shaping session with your dog? Do you think shaping could be considered 'aversive' in certain situations? How could you help sessions stay positive?

## After the Choosing a Training Method lesson:

### Lesson Summary

With three different positive training methods in your training toolkit, how will you decide which one to use? Capturing, luring, and shaping each have their benefits and drawbacks in different situations, and it is important to consider the context when choosing a method. To determine which method will be best for a certain situation is it important to ask yourself: who, what, where, and why? By asking 'who' is training, a trainer can consider the individuals involved: the dog, the handler, and the trainer. Each individual will have different strengths and limitations that could impact training. By asking what the desired behavior is, trainers can choose a training method that is more appropriate for that behavior. When considering where the training will take place, the environment may lend itself to one method over another. The final consideration when choosing a training method is why the behavior is being taught. If a certain level of precision is expected, then one training method may be more effective than another. By considering the 'who', 'what', 'where', and 'why', trainers can help choose the most appropriate 'how'.

### Key Concept Questions

- Consider an ideal client in your area, what strength and limitations do you foresee in regard to their ability to train? What about your own? Which training method would suit both?

- Re-read your answers to the questions above regarding the easiest behaviors to teach with each method. Make a list for future reference.

Capturing:

Luring:

Shaping:

- Consider the environment where you plan to teach locally. Which method would be the most appropriate in that environment?

- Think about the ideal client again, and consider why they might be training that behavior? Are you planning to work with agility handlers, service dogs, or busy pet dog owners? How might this impact your choice in training method? Which would be the simplest, most effective method?

- Put it all together: Describe three different scenarios that you think you may encounter in your service area. Think of an imaginary client, dog, behavior, and situation and pick a training method for each.

**Scenario 1**

Who:                      What:                      Where:                      Why:                      Method:

**Scenario 2**

Who:                      What:                      Where:                      Why:                      Method:

**Scenario 3**

Who:                      What:                      Where:                      Why:                      Method:

**Activity Questions**

- Did you select the same methods as VSA? If not, why? Remember that training methods are tools in the toolkit, and different trainers utilize them in different scenarios. There may be different 'correct' answers!

**Summary Question**

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

**Synthesis Question**

- Reflect on the Positively Philosophy module. What type of trainer do you want to be? Consider your service area (potential clients), your strengths, and the training niche you seek to occupy. What training method will be your go-to, or will you utilize them all?

## After the Cueing lesson:

### Lesson Summary

One role of a trainer is to help clients improve their ability to communicate with their dog. Once clients have taught their dog what they do want them to do, they will need a way to communicate this request. As positive trainers, we use a word or action, or **cue**, to ask for a behavior to be performed. A cue can be anything the dog can perceive whether it be a visual (hand/body movement, environmental), verbal (word or phrase), auditory (sounds like bells or whistles), or olfactory (scent) signal.

To add a cue to a behavior, trainers usually want to be sure that the dog is reliably performing the behavior. It is important to choose an appropriate cue for the situation, so planning is recommended. Trainers can add a cue in several ways: 1) wait until the behavior is occurring regularly, and then inserting the cue right before the behavior occurs, or 2) saying the cue just as the behavior is starting with or without a lure. The bottom line is that it is generally best to wait until a behavior is at least somewhat understood before attempting to add a cue to the behavior.

Sometimes it may be best to switch cues, in case a cue has been associated with something aversive (or poisoned), or if another cue is desired. To switch cues, trainers use the new cue then the old cue followed by marking and reinforcing the behavior. Changing from one cue to another is called a **cue transfer**. As discussed during the Introduction to Functional Assessments lesson, dogs learn cues, or antecedents, whether they are taught by humans or not. Every behavior has an antecedent and a consequence. If handlers do not teach a cue they desire, the dog will learn another. To ensure mutual understanding, it may be beneficial to write down a glossary of common terms, especially if there are multiple people in a dog's life.

### Key Concept Questions

- How could you describe the concept of cueing to a client in your own words?

### Test the Cue Activity Questions

- Did you use one cue or several? If several, which one(s) did your respond to?
- Were you surprised by the results? Are you unsure which cue your dog is responding to? Recall that the different types of cues. Many clients lean over while saying 'sit' or 'down' and when asked to lean without verbally cueing, the dog often reliably performs the behavior! Smart pups!
- What implications would having multiple cues for one behavior have on a dog and his/her training?

## Environmental Cues Activity Questions

- Which behavior did you select? Had you considered this as a cue before?
- What is the reinforcement history of this behavior (how often has this behavior been reinforced in the past)?
- Do you want to change the cue for this behavior? How might you do that?

## Add a Cue Activity Questions

- What went well? Did you successfully add a cue?
- Which cue did you choose and why?
- What could have gone better? If not, how can you help set yourself up for success next time?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?

## Transfer a Cue Activity Questions

- What went well? Did you successfully transfer a cue?
- Which new cue did you choose and why?
- What could have gone better? If not, how can you help set yourself up for success next time?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Recall what you learned during the Learning Theory & Functional Assessments module. Think of three behaviors that your dog performs that annoy, frustrate, or confuse you. Perform a functional assessment for each and determine the cue. Remember this cue could be environmental (visual or auditory) and/or may not be consciously signaled by you.

## After the Proofing lesson:

### Lesson Summary

An important part of an effective training plan is assessing whether the dog is able to perform the behavior under the desired circumstances or not. A phenomenon that occurs when an organism behaves one way in the presence of a given stimulus and another way in its absence is also known as **stimulus control**. Trainers use stimulus control to check for understanding after putting a behavior on cue. To check for stimulus control trainers consider the following four statements: 1) when given a specific cue, the dog always perform the desired behavior, 2) when the cue is not given, the dog does not perform the desired behavior, 3) when give a different cue, the behavior does not occur, and 4) when give the original cue, the dog does not perform an alternative behavior. If the dog does not respond as desired, re-teaching should be considered.

Once a behavior has been tested for stimulus control, a dog-handler team may still have miscommunications. If there are every any doubts, the handler can verify the training. **Training verification** is one strategy to help check the learner's understanding throughout the training plan. Such a test can rule out a lack of understanding demonstrated by a dog that does not perform a previously taught behavior on cue. To verify training, trainers can ask the following questions: 1) do I have my dog's attention, 2) how effective is my reinforcement, 3) does my dog understand the cue in this context, and 4) what should my next step be? By asking yourself these questions, you can identify where your dog's misunderstanding occurred during training.

### Key Concept Questions

- Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you felt misunderstood? If so, describe how you felt and the root cause of the misunderstanding. Reflect on these thoughts when you experience a lack of understanding with a canine learner.

- How could you explain testing stimulus control to a client in your own words?

- Describe a scenario in which you think testing for stimulus control would be key?

- If you could rephrase the training verification questions in your own words, what would they be?

## Testing for Stimulus Control Activity Questions

- What went well? Were you able to successfully test for stimulus control?
- Did you have an answer for each question? Did the cue/behavior combination “pass” the test?
- What other knowledge or experience does it remind you of?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?

## Training Verification Activity Questions

- What went well? Were you able to match the training verification situation with the appropriate response?
- Have you ever asked yourself these questions when working with a dog?

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the ‘take-home’ for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Consider the Learning Theory & Functional Assessments module. Describe a scenario that may require testing for stimulus control and/or training verification. Think of a ‘problem’ behavior that your dog, or a dog that you know, displays. Perform a functional assessment of this behavior and test for stimulus control and/or ask yourself the training verification questions. Do these questions provide any insight to a solution?

## After the Fluency lesson:

### Lesson Summary

If a handler wants a reliable behavior, it's important to train a dog to perform the behavior in a wide range of situations, or ensure that the behavior is **fluent**. Fluency in language is considered to be achieved only when pronunciation, grammar, writing, and speaking come together. Just as fluency in dog training can be achieved when the dog can perform the behavior in any location, in front of anyone, anything, or despite any circumstance. A fluent behavior has defined precision, latency, speed, duration, distance from a stimulus/handler, and level of distraction. Each of these criteria can have its own parameters, and each aspect should be trained independently to be successful. By training a behavior to fluency, trainers verify that the behavior will be reliable in a wide variety of situations.

### Key Concept Questions

- Describe a skill that you feel confident performing in front of anyone, anytime, anywhere? How many hours of work did it take you to work to fluency? How many fluent skills have you learned?

- Choose a behavior that you would like your dog to perform. How could you describe each aspect of fluency for that behavior to a client in your own words?

Precision:

Duration:

Latency:

Distraction:

Speed:

Distance:

- Write how you might explain the importance of working on one aspect of fluency at a time to a client in your own words.

- For which behaviors do you believe training to fluency will be most important?

## Training for Fluency Activity Questions

- What went well? Were you able to increase your training criteria?
- What could have gone better? Were you able to focus on one aspect of fluency at a time?
- What other knowledge or experience does it remind you of? Can you think of a real life example of the importance of training one criterion at a time?
- What might you need to learn for better mastery, or what strategies might you use next time to get better results?

## Summary Question

- What is this lesson about? What was the 'take-home' for you? Take a few minutes to write your own summary of this lesson:

## Synthesis Question

- Eloise has a 2 year old Standard Poodle named Einstein who loves to play in their 1 acre back yard. When in the yard, Einstein enjoys chasing squirrels, barking at the neighbor's dog along the chain link fence, and playing ball. Eloise enjoys playing in the backyard with Einstein as well, but she has trouble getting him to come inside when called. Eloise has taught Einstein to touch his nose to her hand when she says "here", and she reports that he will perform the behavior with 100% reliability when in the kitchen for a treat (although sometimes Einstein just sticks his nose out and doesn't touch her hand all the way). However, when Einstein is in the backyard it is his or miss whether he will run into the kitchen to touch his nose to Eloise's hand for a treat. What aspects of fluency will Eloise need to work on in order to achieve the desired behavior of Einstein coming in from the yard to touch Eloise's hand? It may be helpful to perform several functional assessments based on difference scenarios.

## Before the module test:

### Module Summary

Choosing the right tool for the job is an important part of setting a dog up for success. While referred to 'training tools', the best tools a trainer can use to 'train' a dog are creativity in antecedent arrangement and developing training plans, and an effective reinforcer chosen by the learner. Most pieces of equipment should be used as a management tool rather than relying on a physical force for training. For management purposes, VSA recommends flat collars, martingale collars (for dogs with large necks), front-clip and back-clip harnesses, head halters (for safety in certain situations), flat leashes, and long lines. Any tool can be used aversively since aversion is in the eye of the learner. It is important to condition dogs to all new equipment and ensure that they are used properly. Proper leash handling can help with consistency during training as well as keep the dog and the handler safe.

Clean training and effective mechanical skills are important and help set your dog up for success in the learning process. Developing a training plan can help provide clarity, and prevent a miscommunication before they arise. Training plans are highly variable, but they are meant to organize a trainer's thoughts and serve as a proposal to achieve a desired goal behavior. At VSA, we organize training plans into the following steps: 1) determine goal behavior, 2) set up the training environment, 3) train behavior, 4) proof behavior. Training plans help bridge the gap between the problem behavior and the desired goal behavior.

When teaching a dog a new behavior, it is helpful to let them know exactly when they have performed the desired behavior by **marking** that moment in time using a clear, consistent stimulus. This previously neutral stimulus, also called an **event marker**, must be followed by a reinforcing stimulus, or a **reinforcer**, in order to strengthen the association. Common reinforcers include: food, toys, praise, and real world rewards. Clickers, whistles, lights, and the word 'yes', are examples of effective event markers used in marker, or clicker, training. The three steps to marker training are: wait for behavior, mark behavior, and reinforce behavior. These three steps are demonstrated during the positive training method known as **capturing**. Capturing is taking a snap shot of behavior, by observing and marking that behavior, and then reinforcing that behavior. Capturing is simple and easy for both human and dog, and has few drawbacks.

If a trainer is struggle to help a dog focus, or if it would be easier to show the dog what to do, the trainer can prompt the dog to perform the behavior using food or a toy. **Luring**, or lure-reward training, uses a prompt to get the dog to perform a behavior. Once the behavior has been successfully lured, marked, and reinforced, the lure is faded into a similar gesture without the lure. Luring is fun and easy for both dogs and humans, and while it is excellent for distracting environments and diverse audiences, it does not always teach dogs to solve problems on their own. The key to luring is understanding when to fade the lure and transfer the cue to a visual gesture or verbal word.

When a behavior requires multiple steps, a trainer might consider breaking down the behavior and mark/reinforce for successive approximations of the behavior, or **shaping** the behavior. Shaping is the teaching of a behavior that begins by marking and reinforcing portions of that behavior, and then gradually increasing criteria each step until the entire goal behavior is achieved. Using shaping, an innovative instructor can teach almost any behavior. While most dogs and humans are capable of shaping, it is not always the easiest method for both parties. Poor thin-slicing and planning can lead to stress in both teacher and learner, so shaping should be used carefully.

Choosing a training method is an essential part of the training plan. By selecting the appropriate method, you can set the dog-handler team up for success in their particular situation. When choosing a training method, ask yourself the following: who is training, what behavior are they training, where are they training, and why are they training? Different individuals will respond uniquely to the three training methods, and an individual might not be suited for all of the methods. It is important to evaluate the situation from all perspectives before selecting the appropriate training method.

Once a dog is reliably performing a behavior, it is helpful to name the behavior and be able to elicit the behavior when desired. Rather than using the work command, which implies, “do this or else”, positive trainers refer to these stimuli as **cue**, or an opportunity for reinforcement. Cues are an essential part of dog training, but most cues are not taught formally by humans. If no cue is provided, then dogs will find one themselves. Choosing the appropriate cue is important and depends on the dog and handler’s preference, and different types of cues are better in certain environments. There are several different strategies when adding a cue including before the behavior is learned (not recommended), as the behavior is learned (luring), and after the dog has learned the behavior (recommended). If a cue has been poisoned, or another cue is desired, it is possible to transfer a cue by saying the new cue followed by the old cue, mark, and reinforce.

Confirming your dog’s understanding of a cue is an important part of the teaching process. Trainers check for understanding by testing for **stimulus control** to see how the dog responds to the cue given a certain situation. Checking for stimulus control can help verify that a cue is understood by both learner and teacher. Lack of understanding is frustrating and often results in unpleasant responses such as yelling, unintended training, or just giving up. To avoid this frustration, trainers using a **training verification** strategy can help reduce lack of understanding, increase success, and strengthen the bond between learner and teacher. If the trainer wishes for the dog to perform the behavior in a wide variety of situations, the behavior can be trained to **fluency**. Fluency refers to a dog’s ability to perform the behavior to a certain level of precision, latency, speed, duration, distance, and distraction. Each aspect of fluency should be addressed one at a time to avoid confusion. While few handlers strive to achieve all aspects of fluency, as trainers, we should practice achieving fluency.

## Key Terms

**Marker training** – teaching a desired behavior by pointing out the desired behavior to the learner using an event marker and reinforcing that behavior. Verbal marker training uses a word to marker behavior.

**Rate of reinforcement** – how often the behavior is being reinforced (often measured in treats/minute)

**Event marker** – a signal that identifies the moment in time when a desired behavior occurred.

**Clicker training** – an animal training method based on behavioral psychology that relies on marking desirable behavior and rewarding it.

**Reinforcer** – the stimulus, event, or condition that serves to strengthen the behavior it follows.

**Behavior chain** – when a behavior serves as a reinforcer for a behavior that immediately precedes it.

**Training plan** – a custom proposal to achieve the desired goal behavior

**Capturing** – a positive reinforcement method for teaching new behavior that involves observing, marking, and reinforcing behavior the animal offers spontaneously.

**Luring** – a positive reinforcement method for teaching new behavior that involves a lure used to guide the animal to perform the desired behavior.

**Shaping** – a positive reinforcement method for teaching new behavior where the trainer reinforces successive approximations toward a goal behavior.

**Cue** – a word or action attached to a specific behavior the dog has learned to elicit the behavior.

**Stimulus control** – a phenomenon that occurs when an organism behaves one way in the presence of a given stimulus and another way in its absence.

**Behavioral momentum** – the tendency for an animal to keep offering behaviors in a training session once a rhythm is established.

**Training verification** – a strategy to help check the learner’s understanding throughout the training plan.

**Fluency** – a dog’s ability to perform the behavior in a wide range of situations.

## **Module Problem & Solution**

A client calls wanting help with their adolescent doodle, Dandy. They live on a busy street in London, and they just want to walk their dog to the local park on weekends. The problem is that Dandy pulls and pulls on leash, and the clients are worried that she’ll escape her collar.

Here are VSA’s suggested answers to the questions asked at the beginning of this module. There are probably a variety of appropriate answers, so these are just a recommendation.

- Perform a functional assessment for the pulling behavior.

**Antecedent: London/park sights, sounds, smells**

**Behavior: Dandy pulls on lead**

**Consequence: Decreased distance to more London/park sights, sounds, smells**

- What management tools could you recommend?

**If the dog is much larger and stronger than the client, a front-clip harness may help. This also may help if the client seems hopeless or irritated by the situation. If not, a well-fitted back clip harness that allows for freedom of movement will be fine along with a six foot flat leash. If the client has a tendency to drop the leash (which is extremely dangerous in an urban environment) a hands-free leash might help.**

- What is the goal behavior?

**The goal behavior is up to the client, but ideally Dandy would walk next to her handler with a loose leash.**

- What would be your training plan? How would you teach this behavior? What would the cue be?

To follow the four steps of developing a training plan:

- 1) Determine goal behavior (see above)
- 2) Set up training environment – start in the home with treats and no distractions, increase criteria to a few distractions on the floor, going “half-way” outside, to a driveway/patio/backyard/front yard/hallway/corridor, then walking outside, and eventually walking from the park and then to the park.
- 3) Train behavior – using capturing, say ‘yes’ and give a treat Dandy likes (eventually using ‘go sniff’ as a reinforcer) whenever she is at the client’s side. Add the cue or ‘let’s go’ or whichever cue the client chooses
- 4) Proof behavior – so that she is able to perform the behavior on cue in the desired environment to the desired level of criteria

Functional Assessment	Training Plan
<b>Antecedent</b>	<b>Environment:</b> living room -> London/park streets
	<b>Cue:</b> “Let’s go” or whatever works for the client
<b>Behavior</b>	<b>Desired Behavior:</b> Walking by the client’s side/leash loose
<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Reinforcer:</b> treats -> desired sniffing locations

- What criteria exist for this goal behavior?

Looking at aspects of fluency:

Precision – walking within a few feet of the client’s side, may need to get more precise if the client is not consistent

Latency – within a few seconds of cueing

Speed – walking at the client’s speed

Duration – starting out with one treat for every second with the goal of probably one treat for every city block, or whatever the client wanted/was reasonable for Dandy. This behavior would be cued and reinforced for the length of their walk. The client will need to build up to the duration of walking all the way to the park.

Distractions – lots, London and park sights, sounds, and smells (lots of stimuli!)

Distance – tied to duration, could coach client to count steps or seconds, whichever comes most naturally to them.

## End of Module Practice Test

1. VSA recommends the following collars (select all that apply):
  - a) Prong collars
  - b) Martingale collars
  - c) Choke chains
  - d) Flat collars
  - e) Shock collars
  - f) Citronella Collars
2. VSA recommends the following leashes (select all that apply):
  - a) Leather or faux leather
  - b) Extendable leashes
  - c) Long lines
  - d) All of the above
3. VSA recommends the following harnesses and halters (select all that apply):
  - a) Front-clip
  - b) Back-clip
  - c) Harnesses that tighten when pulled
  - d) Head halters
4. Place the marker training steps in the correct order:
  - a) Reinforce behavior
  - b) Wait for behavior
  - c) Return to neutral
  - d) Mark behavior
5. Setting up a safe learning environment, clearing distractions, and preparing tools are all steps to take:
  - a) Before training
  - b) During training
  - c) After training
6. Ending with a jackpot or play, evaluating the session, and giving the dog a break, are all steps to take:
  - a) Before training
  - b) During training
  - c) After training
7. Keeping sessions short, staying positive and patient, and measuring rate of reinforcement, are all steps to take:
  - a) Before training
  - b) During training
  - c) After training
8. An effective event marker is:
  - a) Short/quick
  - b) Distinctive
  - c) Easy to use
  - d) All of the above

9. The guidelines to clicker training include (select all that apply):
- a) Every click must be followed by a treat
  - b) Click to get the dog's attention
  - c) The treat must be delivered after the click
  - d) Keep clicking even if the dog is displaying signs of fear
10. Clicker training works because the association between click and treat is classically conditioned.
- a) True
  - b) False
11. The difference between verbal marker training and clicker training is:
- a) A difference in philosophy
  - b) Effectiveness alone
  - c) Verbal marker training can be aversive
  - d) The type of event marker used
12. A stimulus, event, or condition that serves to strengthen the behavior it follows is operantly described as a:
- a) Punisher
  - b) Reinforcer
  - c) Reward
  - d) Motivator
13. Using one behavior to reinforce a previous behavior is known as:
- a) Over shadowing
  - b) Extinction
  - c) Chaining behaviors
  - d) Least reinforcing scenario
14. The first step to a training plan is to:
- a) Train behavior
  - b) Stop behavior
  - c) Determine a goal behavior
  - d) Manage behavior
15. To set up a training environment, trainers should:
- a) Remove all distracting stimuli
  - b) Meet the needs of the dog
  - c) Ready props and reinforcers
  - d) All of the above
16. Match the training method with its description:
- a) Capturing
  - b) Luring
  - c) Shaping
  - d) 'Pulling' the dog into a desired position using a reinforcer
  - e) 'Grabbing' a behavior that the dog offers spontaneously
  - f) Teaching the behavior in gradual steps

17. Match the training method with its protocol:

- a) Capturing
- b) Luring
- c) Shaping
- d) Wait for behavior, mark behavior, reinforce behavior, increase criteria
- e) Wait for behavior, mark behavior, reinforce behavior
- f) Lure behavior, mark behavior, reinforce behavior

18. Match the training method with its example:

- a) Capturing
- b) Luring
- c) Shaping
- d) Handler feeds every time the dog lies down around the house
- e) Handler moves the reinforcer toward the floor, and the dog follows with his nose
- f) Handler marks/reinforces dog for dipping head, dropping chest, and eventually lying down

19. \_\_\_\_\_ tends to be the easiest method to teach in a group class environment because it is more resistant to distractions.

- a) Capturing
- b) Luring
- c) Shaping
- d) All of the above

20. Match the type of cue with its example:

- a) Visual
- b) Verbal
- c) Auditory
- d) Olfactory
- e) Whistle
- f) Hand signal
- g) Scent
- h) Word

21. When conducting a functional assessment, a cue should be part of the:

- a) Antecedent
- b) Behavior
- c) Consequence
- d) A cue is in its own category

22. Place the steps to transferring a cue in order:

- a) Old cue
- b) New cue
- c) Reinforce behavior
- d) Mark behavior

23. A phenomenon that occurs when an organism behaves one way in the presence of a given stimulus and another way in its absence is also known as:

- a) Behavioral momentum
- b) Extinction
- c) Training verification
- d) Stimulus control

24. Match the aspect of fluency with its description:

- a) Precision
- b) Low latency
- c) Speed
- d) Duration
- e) Distractions
- f) Distance

- g) The behavior is sustained for as long as the handler asks
- h) The behavior occurs at the desired pace
- i) The behavior is performed in the desired manner
- j) The behavior is performed regardless of what is going on in the area
- k) The behavior is performed immediately, rather than after a delay
- l) The behavior is performed no matter how far away the handler is

## End of Module Practice Test Answer Key

- 1. b, d
- 2. a, c
- 3. a, b, d
- 4. b, d, a, c
- 5. a
- 6. c
- 7. b
- 8. d
- 9. a, c
- 10. a
- 11. d
- 12. b
- 13. c
- 14. c
- 15. d
- 16. a:e, b:d, c:f
- 17. a:e, b:f, c:d
- 18. a:d, b:e, c:f
- 19. b
- 20. a:f, b:h, c:e, d:g
- 21. a
- 22. b, a, d, c
- 23. d
- 24. a:i, b:k, c: h, d:g, e:j, f:l

## Additional Resources

- Train Your Dog Positively by Victoria Stilwell
- Getting Started: Clicker Training for Dogs by Karen Pryor