

The lure is what the dog is following to get into position. This is usually a treat, but could be a hand or toy. When we speak of “fading the lure” we are teaching them how to get the dog to respond without following anything. Discontinuing use of the clicker for a behavior and/or randomizing rewards are separate from fading the lure.

The following are the steps to fade the lure. When the “lure hand” is referenced, it’s the one that is moving (whether empty, making a hand motion, holding a treat, etc.) and the “other hand” (is probably holding the leash, clicker, and maybe treats).

1. Lure the dog into position with a treat in the lure hand, then click and feed the treat that was in the lure hand.
2. Lure the dog into position with a treat in the lure hand, then click and feed (using the other hand) the treat that is in the other hand. This means you started with treats in both hands. Assuming that the treat is being held in such a way that the hand closely resembles the final hand signal.
3. Lure the dog into position with an empty lure hand, then click and feed the treat from the other hand.
4. In remaining reps, gradually decrease any excessive body movements on the part of the handler, then click and treat with the other hand. Excessive body movements are if you’re bending to the floor for “down” or leaning over the dog for “sit”.

One of the most common problems is when pet parents lure the dog with an empty hand and the dog performs the behavior, the dog is praised but not given the treat. The dog quickly learns that he will only get a treat if he sees it in the hand. This is the mindset we’re trying to change. The dog should always be expecting a treat, but should never know when or where it will come from. You should also be prepared to “pay” the dog with something he or she is willing to work for. You should not have to “bribe” the dog with a treat to get him or her to do something (meaning after the first few reps, you should not have to have a treat in your hand to get him or her to work).

It is easier to fade the lure early in the training, rather than waiting. With each new behavior start fading the lure as soon as the dog is ready.

When using the clicker, it is best to use it until the behavior looks just like you want it... the dog performs quickly and correctly with only a hand signal and/or verbal cue. Once that is happening, the dog clearly “knows” the behavior and therefore doesn’t need the clicker (a teaching tool). You can just continue with praise or a verbal marker and whatever reward you’re using. The clicker doesn’t need to be “faded” but rather can just be quit “cold turkey” for any particular behavior. It can always be used to improve a performance that has gotten sloppy or of course, used when introducing new behaviors.

It’s also important to randomize the rewards. This includes not only using different types of rewards, but also having the dog do multiple behaviors to get the reward, and changing where the reward may come from. Make sure to choose something that the dog wants, not something you want to use. This means, if you have a dog that won’t work for “praise” don’t use it as a reward. Often, the best reward is a privilege. Yes, this involves managing the dog so he cannot help himself or herself to the privilege, but it works wonders for teaching the dog to respond to you even with distractions. For instance, if the dog wants to say hi to a person, have him or her sit and then let him or her say hi (make sure he cannot get to the person until he or she complies). Thinking of distractions in the environment as potential rewards, rather than things competing for your dog’s attention, opens up a whole new level of reliability in your dog.

