



Guide Dogs for the Blind

GDB R+ Vocabulary/Terminology

Approximation: A piece of the criteria or a small step toward the desired behavior. If you set your criteria, and the dog is having trouble reaching that criteria you may have to mark an approximation in order to keep the dog engaged and help them move toward the desired behavior.

Capture: When a dog offers or performs a behavior naturally without a cue you capture the behavior with a mark. You can capture behaviors at any time.

Clean Handling: The handler/trainer follows steps to execute clear and consistent information to the dog. These steps include: precise timing with a mark, moving hand to bait bag for food reward after the mark, correct food placement, etc.

Criteria: Trainer-defined goal or objective that the dog needs to reach in order to receive a mark. The criteria can include the actual behavior, or the behavior with added distance and/or duration. This will change as the dog learns, typically the criteria increase and more is expected as training sessions progress.

Cue: A physical, verbal or environmental stimulus that elicits a behavior. A “request” for behavior to the dog. This is how you deliver information to the dog and can be with a hand signal, a leash, or a word. It can even be something in the environment, such as a normal relieving spot.

3 D’s: Distance, Duration, Distraction: Each is a way of increasing the difficulty when teaching a new behavior. Typically you would begin with the 3 D’s at a low level (you are close to the dog, only expect them to do the behavior for a short period of time, where there are few distractions) then you would increase each of these things, one at a time, as the dog learns and masters a skill.

Fixed Pressure: Providing an unmoving position/stance as when tethering (a tie down provides fixed pressure). During the ground tether exercise the handler’s feet on the leash create the fixed pressure. When applying fixed pressure with the leash in the hand the handler keeps the arm fixed at their side, at the seam of their pants (arm/hand in contact with hip/leg to prevent inadvertent movement). The leash pressure is not increased or decreased by the handler. The dog controls the increase or decrease of pressure.

Foundation Positions: The foundation positions taught in puppy raising are sit, down, and stand.

High Value: Something that is motivational to the dog in order to get them to perform desired behaviors. In R+ dogs are mostly working for food, so high value refers to a food that is more motivational than kibble. Example: Natural Balance Rolls, jerky treats, cheese, etc. High value treats need to be approved by CFR for use.

Jackpot: 4-5 pieces of kibble given at once for an exceptional effort or for a learning breakthrough.

Lure: In luring (and pezzing, a type of luring) the handler uses food to guide the puppy through the motions of a behavior. We use it to introduce behaviors (such as obedience positions) then we gradually wean the puppy off the food lure. A puppy doesn’t ‘know’ the behavior until it responds to the cue without the food lure in sight.

Mark: An audible sound used as a bridge to connect the desired behavior with the reward. The mark is made at the precise moment the criteria are met for the desired behavior. GDB raisers use the verbal mark, “Nice”. Another common marker is a clicker, which is not used by GDB raisers.

Modeling: A technique used to get a behavior by physically guiding the dog into a position.

Proofing: Teaching a dog to perform a behavior consistently in the presence of distractions.

Rate of Reward: This refers to the frequency which you mark and reward the dog when training. Typically when you are first teaching a behavior, the rate of reward is very high. If a dog loses interest or becomes disengaged in the trial, it could be because the rate of reward is too low. An appropriate rate of reward is key to success.

Reset: Restart a repetition of a behavior. During a training session, if the dog becomes distracted or disengaged in the learning, you may need to refocus the dog to get them back on track. You can reset by walking to a different location, using your voice or body to start the behavior over again. Planned and unplanned distractions can be used to reset the training session.

Recess: Give the dog a break! Allowing them to get silly, engage in play, and give some freedom to release stress. Recess can be utilized after a training session or a stressful situation. Dogs on recess should still not be allowed to practice inappropriate behaviors such as mouthing or jumping up on people.

Reinforcement: Behavior strengthened by a positive consequence. In our R+ program, food is most often used as positive reinforcement for desired behavior.

Reinforcement History: Length of time dog has received reward from specific handler for specific behavior.

Shaping: Think of the game “Hot/Cold” when shaping behavior. Break down the desired behavior into smaller pieces and reward each one by marking it. You then begin with simple criteria and slowly progress or shape the dog’s behavior into the final desired behavior.

Stimulus Control: Teaching the dog to respond to specific cue or stimulus and not offer the behavior without the specific cue or stimulus. Having a behavior under stimulus control is defined by conditions; each one may have to be approached as a separate training task. Example: sit.

1. The behavior always occurs immediately upon presentation of the conditioned stimulus (the dogs sits when given the verbal cue).
2. The behavior never occurs in the absence of the stimulus (during training or work session the dog never sits spontaneously).
3. The behavior never occurs in response to some other stimulus (If you say “down” the dog does not offer a sit instead).
4. No other behavior occurs in response to this stimulus (when you say sit the dog does not respond by lying down or by leaping up).

Target: The dog touches a specific object with some part of the dog’s body when the object is present.

Trial: The number of times or duration that you practice or execute a certain behavior in one session. You signal the dog that the trial is over by saying “that’s enough” or “OK”. You can pair this verbal cue with a physical one by wiping hands together or drawing them apart as if to say all done, no more.