

# I Just Came to Pet a Dog: What Clicker Training Taught Me about Everyday Life

When I was about eight years old, I found out that a clicker training program had started in the community room of my apartment building. At that age, I really loved dogs; I got excited just seeing them. During the clicker training program, I learned how to do small things like petting dogs and training them. Then, step by step, I learned bigger things.

My neighbor, Evelyn Pang, and I were asked to write brochures about clicker training for children. The first brochure, *Teaching with a Clicker: How to Train People and Animals with a Clicker and Treats*, and the second brochure, *Teaching with a Clicker: How to Teach Your Dog Good Manners and Tricks*, were posted on the Latham Foundation's web page, [www.latham.org](http://www.latham.org) and the Pryor Foundation's web page, [www.thepryorfoundation.org](http://www.thepryorfoundation.org). Then they were included in a book by Lynn Loar and Libby Colman called *Teaching Empathy: Animal-Assisted Therapy Programs for Children and Families Exposed to Violence*, published by the Latham Foundation in 2004. Once the brochures were written, we had enough material to write a book. We added a chapter on calming signals, a second chapter on safety around dogs, and a glossary and our book was finished!

Throughout your life you'll eventually encounter hard tasks that you can't solve right away. Clicker training may have been the furthest thing from your mind to solve these tasks. You may think it is only a form of positive reinforcement used to train dogs, learn a sport or play with other people. The use of incremental steps is what makes clicker training so successful. When you are training a dog to sit down, you have to look for a smaller step that may lead to the sit, like the movement of the legs or the lowering of the hindquarters. The dog will eventually know what you are looking for and do the movement. After he accomplishes this movement, you can shape the behavior so that the dog will sit when told. As long as you teach him step by step, clicker training will always be fun and exciting!

The use of incremental steps is also helpful in everyday life. For example, when you have been assigned an essay that you can't seem to write, you can start with a thesis statement that you can put as part of your introduction. You then use your thesis statement to think of ways to back it up. Everything is easier when you have your thesis statement! It helps you with the different topics that you can put in the body of your text.

Next, conclude by summarizing all you have written in your text and also restating your thesis. Finally, reread the essay to check for mistakes in spelling or grammar

to make the essay better. This process of writing a basic essay also uses incremental steps. You use these small steps even when you don't notice it, and by using these small steps you will have written a better essay which will help you get an A in English.

I've encountered many situations in which using incremental steps were the only way to solve my problem. When I'm playing a hard piece on my piano, I usually can't play it with both hands and make it perfect by just playing it once. I begin by looking at the music to see how fast or slow the piece is, which sharps or flats are used and where I have to repeat. Then I start playing with my right hand first and then my left. After doing the same movements with my right and left hand separately, I'll eventually play with both hands. Then I shape the behavior so that I can play the piece with better dynamics, or slower or faster depending on the piece.

I'm in 10<sup>th</sup> grade now, and thinking about going to college. It could be overwhelming, but I believe that if I use incremental steps to do the difficult tasks in college and the process of getting into a college, it won't be as hard. I'm really glad that I got the privilege to learn how to clicker train. It taught me to go step by step, to be patient and to slowly improve, and I hope to gain more knowledge in the future.

By Hilary Louie

These are only a couple of examples of tasks that apply clicker training to other parts of life. It may not seem like much, but if you ever come across a difficult task you should think about how you can use incremental steps to accomplish it. When you break it down and look at smaller parts, it's always easier than trying to do the whole task in one "click."



Hilary Louie was born in San Francisco, California in 1993. She went to China for a few years and came back to the Bay Area to enter kindergarten. She is now in the honors program in middle school. She loves to play the violin and basketball, but not at the same time. She speaks English and Cantonese fluently. She plans to go to college after high school. Hilary likes clicker training and loves training and playing with dogs and just having fun.



## What kids are saying about **Good Dog!**

Dear Evelyn  
Pang and  
Hilary Louie,

Hi. This is Michelle. Thanks for sending me your finished book. Just so you know, I really enjoyed reading it and learning more about dog behavior and how to train them. I really appreciate that you two thought of sending me a copy...and with both of your signatures too!!! Eeek! So cool! I never, and I repeat never, had a book signed by its author before...until now. Wow! I will cherish this book forever! I mean it!

Anyway, I thought that you guys did a really good job with **Good Dog! Kids teach kids about dog behavior and training**. The book uses precise, yet simple language easy for all ages to understand. The glossary is helpful and I especially liked the test questions that were included at the end of every chapter. All in all, I loved this book and I'll treasure it forever.

Thanks a lot,

Michelle Ma  
San Francisco Bay Area

See the Fall '08 *Latham Letter* (pages 21-22) for a review of *Good Dog* by Barbara Boat, Ph.D. and information about how to order.

