

Condition a Bridge

Teaching your cat a *bridge* (an audio cue) helps you communicate effectively with your cat. This infosheet outlines the steps to equip your feline friend with this skill.

WHAT IS A BRIDGE?


A bridge is an auditory signal used to mark the precise moment when your cat performs a desired behaviour. It is an effective way to communicate exactly what you want your cat to do. A bridge is the positive feedback that will encourage your cat to repeat an action.

The sound of the bridge will mean nothing to your cat until it is paired with a primary reinforcer, such as food. Once the bridge sound is conditioned, your cat learns that the sound predicts a reward to follow; this process is known as *classical conditioning*. You can use a clicker or the sound of your voice to create a verbal bridge, for example, the word "yes".

It is important to remember to begin conditioning your bridge in an environment with very little distraction, such as in your lounge room. Over time, gradually increase the level of distraction.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Step one:** Sound your bridge (click your clicker/say your bridge word).
- Step two:** Immediately offer your cat a treat.
- Step three:** Repeat this exercise in a range of positions and locations to generalise the response.

TIP  Make sure you're using the right kind of treat! Try a series of different treats to find something that really motivates your cat!

Go to a Place

This is a simple but effective exercise that can be taught to encourage your cat to move to a bed, scratching post, or carry cage.

Often cats may prefer to move to a required place themselves, instead of be picked up and placed there. This exercise helps you to give your cat choice while giving instruction at the same time.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Step one:** Use toys, treats or your own movement to encourage your cat to the place, when your cat moves towards the place, bridge and reward.
- Step two:** Wait until your cat has put paws onto the place, bridge and reward.
- Step three:** Once your cat is willingly approaching the place, have him remain on the spot for just a couple of seconds before you bridge and reward.
- Step four:** When your cat is consistently going to the place, add the verbal cue and fade the lure.
- Step five:** Once your cat is responding to the verbal cue, gradually increase the distractions and distance in small increments when asking for the behaviour.



Come When Called Touch

Teaching your cat to come when called is a very handy cue for your cat. In fact, it is essential in emergency situations.

A lot of practice is needed to master this cue in high stimuli environments. Begin teaching your cat this behaviour in a low distraction environment.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Step one:** Present your cat with a tasty treat and take a few steps backwards.
- Step two:** In a bright, friendly tone call your cat's name and encourage him to walk towards you, when he takes a few steps, bridge and reward.
- Step three:** Add the verbal cue "come" or "here" and begin to fade the lure.
- Step four:** Once your cat has learnt to come when called you can then begin to practice in different areas of the house with increased distractions.

TIP



Practice before feeding your cat their meal

Teaching your cat to target your finger can be useful to move your cat off the bench, or onto the chair.

Begin teaching your cat this behaviour in a low distraction environment, such as a quiet room inside the house with little activity.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Step one:** Hold your finger in front of your cat's nose. When he or she investigates your finger with his or her nose, bridge and reward.
- Step two:** Repeat the exercise in short sessions until your cat actively seeks your finger target out and touches it.
- Step three:** Add the verbal cue
- Step four:** Gradually increase the distractions and distance in small increments when asking for the behaviour.

TIP



Train before meals for your cat be most responsive.

Sit

By training your cat to sit, you will be teaching him to be calm and polite for whatever he wants, rather than him jumping, clawing, or meowing.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Step one:** Sit in front of your cat.
- Step two:** Begin with a treat in your hand, hold it just in front of your cat's nose.
- Step three:** Slowly guide your hand up and back over your cat's head.
- Step four:** As the cat's head goes back, and his bottom goes down into a sit position, bridge and reward.
- Step five:** Add the verbal cue and fade the lure.

High Five

Cats naturally lift their paws in response to the food being offered therefore this behaviour can be slowly shaped into cute trick!

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Step one:** First ask the cat to sit.
- Step two:** Hold a treat just above your cat's head, as your cat raises his paw to reach for the food, bridge and reward.
- Step three:** Add the verbal cue "high five".

Training Cats

Training cats helps to build confidence in shy and fearful cats, and teach a range of fun and practical skills.

WHY TEACH IT?

The use of positive reinforcement-based, force-free methods is the most effective way to modify behaviour of all animals and in most cases people for that matter! Providing insight and advice to adopters or members of the public on positive reinforcement-based, force-free methods will set our animals up for success and create the foundation for a strong and trusting relationship.

IMPORTANT

Avoid telling your cat off for inappropriate behaviour. This is the least effective way to train animals. It will not give your cat the information he or she needs to perform the desired response. Punishment training can also increase the risk of anxiety and aggression in your cat.

RECOMMENDED HIGH VALUE TREATS

- Tuna
- Cooked chicken
- Ham
- Dine sachets
- Salmon
- Cheese
- Canned cat food
- Commercial cat treats
- A toy or game

More questions? Need help?
Email our professional behaviour trainers
on petsquad@dogshome.com

Enrichment

Cats living indoors need mental stimulation and physical exercise. A boring environment can contribute to problem behaviour and anxiety. Environmental enrichment is an important key factor for indoor living.

SOCIAL CONTACT (OTHER SPECIES)

Some cats may enjoy social contact with other pets. If adopting two cats, siblings are recommended.

SOCIAL CONTACT

(OWNER SCHEDULED DAILY QUALITY TIME)

- Appropriate petting - cats particularly like being petted along the whiskers, behind the ears and under the chin
- Training
- Brushing
- Playtime - toys, games (for example, hide and seek)

Appropriate play with toys are

- objects that move
- complex in texture
- prey-like
- possibly containing catnip
- rotated daily so your cat doesn't get bored

Feeding enrichment ideas

- Food puzzles
- Play "Go Find"
- Treasure hunts

Consider your cat's environment

- Olfactory (scents)
- Visual (outdoor view to activities including bird feeding - YouTube search for additional ideas).
- Auditory stimulation (classical music or *Through A Cat's Ear*).
- Touch
- Obstacle course (agility for cats)
- Taste (appropriate grass and herb garden)
- Vertical space (high cat ladders)
- Window hammock
- Cubby houses
- An enclosure
- Cat proofing the back yard.