PDF on Bridging

Bridging - a sound or signal that communicates to the animal that particular behavior is what is earning the positive reinforcer that is about to be delivered, also known as a marker. It is called a ‘bridge’ because it bridges the time between when the animal gives the desired behavior and when the reinforcer is actually delivered.

There is a webinar included with your Level I & II Membership on bridging examples of bridging

- a click from the clicker - very popular in dog training
- a whistle - popular in marine mammal training
- a verbal bridge - such as “Good”, “Nice” and “Yes”
- a thumbs up - popular in training deaf animals
- the flash of a light - used with fish

A bridge is an important factor in training, especially when training a new behavior. Timing is crucial in teaching an animal a new behavior. Seconds can pass before delivering a positive reinforcer for a desired behavior. Those two seconds can be very important because by the time you deliver the positive reinforcer, the animal can be doing something completely different. If your animal is doing something different and you deliver the reinforcer without the understanding of the bridge, you may be reinforcing another behavior.

The bridge should be delivered at the exact time the behavior was given by the animal. Example, training a dog to sit. If your bridge is the word “Good”, the word “Good” should be delivered at the exact time the dog’s behind touches the floor. If your dog goes into the down position before the word “Good” is delivered, the opportunity for you to bridge the desired behavior was missed. In this example you would ask your dog to give another behavior so you could request the ‘sit’ behavior again.

A bridge should be a sound or signal that you use at no other time or a word that you use very infrequently. Examples of these types of verbal bridges are the words ‘Nice’ and ‘Yes’. The word ‘Good’, which is what I use, has to be used with care. I have to be careful to use this word at not other time, other than training. If I use the bridge and don’t deliver the positive reinforcer, it will cause my bridge to have less, if any value during training. See Primary & Secondary Reinforcers below.

Shaping a bridge

To teach your animal the bridge, stand in front of your animal and in close proximity. Decide what sound or signal is going to be your bridge then deliver the bridge followed
immediately by the positive reinforcer. In dog training, this is called ‘charging the clicker’, assuming the clicker is the bridge.

For example, if you are teaching your parrot a bridge for the first time, stand in front of him/her. I will use the example of the word “Good” as the bridge and pine nuts as the bird’s positive reinforcer. Stand in front of him and say “Good”, then immediately deliver the pine nut. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Keep your training sessions short but frequent. Make a few training exercises out of this.

**Bridging Exercises**

- when reinforcing with treats, take the hand that delivers the treats and put it into a fist. Then place that fist in the small of your back. Do not move that hand until the bridge is delivered.

- take an object, any object that an animal is likely to look and deliver the bridge when the animal looks at it. This is a fun and effective exercise that will train your animal to look at something. This exercise requires exact timing.

**Improper Bridging**

examples of improper bridging

- delivering the bridge at the same time as delivering the reinforcer (there are very few exceptions to where this would be effective)

- putting your hand in the treat pouch in anticipation of delivering a food reinforcer

**Primary & Secondary Reinforcers**

**Primary Reinforcer**

any reinforcer that loses its effectiveness *only temporarily* though satiation; meaning animal can get full on the reinforcer but once worn off, the reinforcer will become of value again. These are not always food. These are things that your animal is willing to work for.

**Secondary Reinforcer**

a reinforcer that loses its effectiveness permanently through *unpaired* presentations - example is the bridge

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