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INTRODUCTION TO CLICKER TRAINING

What is clicker training?
Clicker training is a type of marker training, where the trainer uses the click sound to mark the desired behavior as it’s happening and to indicate a reward is coming. Marker training is a fun, positive and humane method of training that’s been used since the 1950s with marine mammals and other working animals. Whether using a clicker, a whistle or some other signal, this training method is often used with zoo animals to teach them to willingly participate in husbandry behaviors and medical procedures. And since the 1990s, the use of clicker training has become increasingly popular with companion animals—especially dogs, but also cats, horses, birds, etc. A version of clicker training called TAGTeach is even used with humans.

So, if all these different species of animals have been successfully trained for decades with this method, surely you can clicker train your own beloved cat, right?

How do you use the clicker?
Clicker training involves the use of a specific sound provided IMMEDIATELY as the animal performs a desired behavior. We call this an event marker. The “click” sound can come from a clicker sold in pet stores specifically for this purpose, from the sound of a push pen, or simply from a click of your tongue.

The idea behind clicker training is that the click serves as a bridge between the desired behavior and the animal’s reward (after clicking, you'll give the cat a food treat or some other highly motivating reward). So it looks like this: (1) The desired behavior occurs, (2) you click as it’s occurring, and (3) within 1-2 seconds, you give the animal a reward. Another way to think of it is as a camera: The click is similar to your taking a snapshot of the correct behavior right as it’s being performed.

The reason for using an event marker is so that we can communicate precisely with the animal. To make it easy for them to learn, we must let them know right away when they do a good thing. Say the cat sits. In the seconds it takes you to fumble around for a treat to reward her for the sit, your cat may have turned her head to look out the window. For all she knows, turning her head is what got her the reward, not sitting. But you can eliminate that confusion by clicking the moment her butt hits the floor. Timing is very important in clicker training.

Of course, clicking in itself is not a particularly motivating reward for the animal. So first you must link the click with the treat. We call this charging (or loading or priming) the clicker, and we'll explain how to do that elsewhere in this manual.

Teaching a new behavior
Clicker training is used most for teaching new behaviors. Once your cat is performing a behavior well when asked, you don’t have to keep using the clicker. You should, however, continue to reward them
for a behavior well done, even if it’s only with praise or petting (assuming either of those is rewarding for your cat).

A variety of methods can be used to teach new behaviors.

**SHAPING** involves clicking and rewarding small steps (or what trainers like to call “successive approximations”) toward a final behavior. Once the animal seems to understand the first small step, then hold out for the next step before clicking and treating (C/T). For instance, shaping a “spin” (where the cat turns in a circle) may involve a C/T when the cat first turns her head in the right direction, then later a C/T when she bends her body that direction, then a C/T when she moves her inside foot one step that direction, etc., until she can turn the whole way around with only one C/T at the end. Depending on the cat and the goal behavior, this may take several sessions. When starting a new session, reward a step or two earlier than where the cat was last successful. For instance, if the goal is to go in the carrier and the last session ended when he put all four feet in the carrier, start the next session by C/T’ing a few times for having just one or two feet in the carrier.

In this manual, we’ve come up with shaping plans for some of the behaviors, but it’s important to realize that you may have to break the behavior down into even smaller steps for some cats, or you can skip steps for other cats. Watch the cat’s body language closely to determine what’s needed to keep him motivated and avoid frustration.

**LURING** involves the use of a reward, usually a food treat, to entice the animal into a certain position. For instance, holding a treat directly in front of a cat’s nose and then raising it slightly above her head and toward her back will generally make the cat sit, as she naturally follows the movement of the treat (nose goes up, butt goes down). Only use the lure (the treat) 2-3 times, then use only an empty hand, which becomes your hand signal for the behavior. For instance, raising your hand above your cat’s head will become the signal for “sit.” The danger of luring with food is that the food becomes part of the cue, and then the cat won’t perform the behavior without the food lure. So it’s important to quickly fade out the use of food lures. During this whole routine, you should click when the cat’s rear end hits the floor (for “sit”). And then reward after the click.

**PROMPTING** is similar, but instead of using a primary reinforcer such as food, you are using another behavior the cat already knows to lead them into the new behavior. An example would be holding a target stick (which the cat has already learned to follow) by your leg as you walk, thus getting the cat to “heel” beside you.

Another method is **CAPTURING** a behavior. Perhaps you’d like to teach your cat to bow. He naturally does a “bow” when he stretches after a nap, so you can begin by simply catching him in the act—just as he stretches, click and treat. Add a cue word just as he starts stretching/bowing, and eventually he will associate the cue with the bow.
Adding a Verbal Cue
A verbal cue is only added once we can reliably predict that the behavior will occur. Either the cat is performing the behavior correctly with a hand signal or some other non-verbal cue (e.g., the presence of the target stick) 8 out of 10 times, or you can easily tell when she is about to perform the behavior. Only then do we add a cue word, and we do so a split second before the behavior starts. Another option is to say the cue word as the behavior is occurring, and then “back it up” until you are saying it right before the behavior occurs. And a third option is to say the cue right before presenting the hand signal that you know the cat will respond to, and then gradually fade out the hand signal.

Adding the verbal cue in this way prevents it from becoming meaningless to the cat. If we start adding the cue too soon, the cat won’t relate it to the behavior we want.

There is also nothing wrong with just using a body language cue, like a hand signal.

Additional Learning Methods
Multiple learning styles often occur at the same time when an animal is learning a new behavior or association. Others mentioned in the exercises in this manual are habituation and desensitization/counterconditioning (DS/CC).

HABITUATION occurs when an animal stops responding to a particular stimulus with repeated exposure to that stimulus. An example is when a cat gets used to the feeling of wearing a harness.

DESENSITIZATION refers to exposing the animal to a scary stimulus gradually in ways that do not cause him to display negative behaviors (such as fearful or aggressive behaviors). COUNTERCONDITIONING means providing something (e.g., treats) to help the animal associate the scary stimulus with a positive experience, and/or asking for an alternative behavior (sit, target, etc.) that is incompatible with the undesired behavior (such as hissing or running away). These two methods are often used together. For more information on DS/CC, see the handout at the end of this manual.

NOTE: There are always multiple ways to train a particular behavior. The instructions in this manual are suggestions only, but they are methods the author has used successfully with many cats.
**RULES OF TRAINING**

1. Training should be fun for you and the cat!
2. Be prepared with all the materials you need, such as treats, a treat bag, a clicker and props, before you get started.
3. Training should usually not last for more than a few minutes at a time. When first starting, it might be only 30 seconds or so! Often once a cat gets the hang of clicker training, they will remain engaged for longer periods of time. But typically 5 minutes is a good training session length.
4. Watch the cat closely for signs that she’s getting tired of training. Signs may include being easily distracted, not taking treats, or not performing behaviors that you believe the cat already knows. If you see any of these signs, take a break.
5. Better yet, stop training sessions while the cat is still interested. Leave her wanting more!
6. Set the cat up for success (make it as easy as possible for her to do the correct behavior).
7. Think about what you want the cat to do and train that, instead of trying to teach the cat not to do something.
8. The first two behaviors we suggest teaching (“target” and “go to mat”) involve removable props. This is because cats, when in doubt about learning a new behavior, tend to default to the first one or two behaviors they learn. But they can’t do this if the prop (target stick or mat) isn’t there. Teaching in this order helps set them up for success by encouraging them to try new things. On the other hand, if “sit” is the first behavior taught, the cat will often sit when you’re trying to train another behavior and she doesn’t understand what you want. Not the end of the world, but it can slow the training process.
9. A verbal cue is not added until either (1) the cat is performing the behavior reliably 8 out of 10 times or (2) you can reliably predict the moment he is about to perform the behavior.
10. Patience, consistency and a sense of humor are key to a fun training session.
11. Anger and frustration have absolutely no place in training. If you feel yourself becoming upset, take a break!
**Clicker Mechanics: Tips for the Trainer**

**What is this exercise?**
Clicker mechanics refers to the trainer’s skills when clicker training. These exercises will help you develop the skills to become a better trainer.

**Why is this important?**
Clicker skills are very important to practice and master so that the signals we are giving the cat are as clear as possible, enabling the cat to better learn what we’re trying to teach him.

**How do I learn this?**
Practice, practice, practice! If you have a friend to practice with, even better.

**Exercise 1: Home Base**
*This involves keeping your treat hand still and in one place until after you click. This is important because we don’t want the cat to become focused on your treat hand or interpret your treat hand movement as part of the cue. Practice in another room or face away from the cats so they don’t think you’re clicking them.*

1. Decide which will be your treat hand and which will be your clicker hand. (You can always change this at any time.)
2. Gather together some treats—either in your hand, in a treat bag around your waist, or on a plate or shelf, etc.
3. Determine where you’d like to keep your treat hand. Some ideas are behind your back, at your bellybutton, or by your side. This is “home base.”
4. Sit on the floor and, without a cat, practice clicking the clicker and bringing your treat hand in front of you to give a treat to an imaginary cat.
5. Repeat several times.
6. Is your hand staying in place until after you click? (It might help to practice with a friend watching you or in front of a mirror.)
7. Practice this with both soft and hard treats, as well as with a spoon (as if you are using canned food).

**Exercise 2: Manipulating Treats in Your Hand**
*Although you may often use a treat bag to hold treats, sometimes it’s helpful to have several in your hand so you can deliver them in rapid succession instead of having to reach for them. It can be tricky, though, to deliver only one treat when you are holding multiple treats in your hand!*

1. Count out 10 hard treats or kibble and hold them in your hand.
2. Stand in front of a cup, plate or shelf, etc.
3. Click your clicker (or have a friend do so) and immediately deliver ONE treat to the cup. (Don’t forget “home base” too!)
4. In between clicks, move the treats around in your hand so that only one is ready to go next.
5. Repeat until the treats are gone.
6. Repeat again with 10 soft treats.

**Exercise 3: Timing**

*Timing the click to coincide with the exact behavior you want to reinforce is critical. If our timing is off, we can inadvertently teach the cat a different behavior. (If this happens, we just back up a couple steps in our training process, but it’s ideal to prevent it from happening.)*

1. **If you have a friend to practice with,** have the friend toss a tennis ball to the ground. Click the moment the ball hits the floor.
2. **Now the friend should throw the ball up in the air.** Click when the ball reaches the highest point.
3. **Have your friend vary the height the ball is thrown and also try to fake you out by acting like he’s going to throw it but not throwing it.**
4. **If you are practicing by yourself,** sit in front of the TV and decide on a behavior on TV to click. Maybe it’s every time someone smiles, or every time a certain word is said, or every time the camera angle changes. Pick one thing to click for several minutes, take a break, and then pick something else.
TREAT PREFERENCE TEST

What is this exercise?
This test will help us determine what food rewards are most motivating for the individual cat.

Why is this important?
Every cat is different in its taste preferences and level of motivation. For training to be most successful, we need to find what motivates the cat. It’s helpful to know what treats are considered high-value and which ones are of lower value, but still motivating. We can potentially use a variety of treats depending on the difficulty of what we’re working on (i.e., high-value treats for new behaviors or when there are a lot of distractions, low-value treats for well-known behaviors or low-distraction environments).

How do I implement this?
1. Gather samples of the following types of food: canned cat food, meat baby food, canned tuna, crunchy treats, soft treats, kibble (or other things you think your cat likes).
2. Present one treat at a time to the cat and note: (1) whether he eats it all and (2) how quickly and enthusiastically he eats it.
3. Make a somewhat subjective interpretation of the value of each treat.
4. List your cat’s most favorite to least favorite treats. If he doesn’t eat a particular treat at all, make a note of that too.

Alternative test:
1. Place small amounts (2-3 treats or a small spoonful of moist food) of each treat on its own paper plate or similar item. Place them all in a row a few inches apart. Position the cat about 3 feet in front of the samples and record which one the cat eats first, second and so forth.
MARKER PREFERENCE TEST

What is this exercise?
This test will help us determine what sound works best as a marker signal (e.g., clicker) for the individual cat.

Why is this important?
Cats can respond differently to various noises, with some not seeming to notice certain sounds and others even showing fear of a particular sound. It’s important to use a marker that the cat notices but is not scared of. Although it’s preferable to use a unique and distinct sound (like the click), if the cat is very fearful, we can use a word if needed.

How do I implement this?
1. Gather the following noise makers: a box clicker, a button clicker and a push-pen. Also try a tongue click (if you’re able to make that sound).
2. Note the cat’s reactions to each sound. If at any time the cat appears to be fearful of the noise, do not repeat the sound.
3. With the cat nearby, start with the softest sound, probably a push-pen. Hold the pen a few feet away from the cat. Click the pen and note the cat’s reaction. If not showing signs of fear, repeat this 3 times.
4. Next, use a tongue click. Note the reaction and repeat 3 times.
5. Continue with a button clicker and then with a box clicker.
6. Which sound did the cat orient toward or take notice of the most, without showing signs of fear? This will be the marker we use for training, at least at first. You might be able to switch them up as is practical for you and the cat one he’s used to the concept of clicker training.
7. If the cat appears to be fearful of even the soft sounds, try using a word, but make it short and obvious, like “yes!” or “good!”

Note: We will use the terms “click,” “clicker,” and “click/treat (C/T)” throughout this manual to refer to whatever marker you end up using.
CHARGING THE CLICKER

What is this exercise?
Charging the clicker is a procedure for teaching the cat to associate the sound of the clicker with a reward (usually food). It is an example of classical conditioning—think Pavlov’s dogs who involuntarily salivated at the sound of a bell that predicted food was coming—and results in the clicker becoming a secondary reinforcer (the reward is the primary reinforcer.)

Why is this important?
It is the foundation of clicker training. If the cat does not make the association of the click sound with a reward (food), then the clicker is meaningless. (It is true, however, that many cats will learn this association at the same time they learn their first trained behavior, even without charging first.)

How do I teach it?
1. With treats in your hand, sit near the cat.
2. Click and immediately give her a treat. (This is a great time to practice your “home base” too!)
3. Repeat several times—click/treat, click/treat, click/treat.
4. The cat does not have to be performing any special behavior at this time; she’s just figuring out that the click is a good thing because it means a reward will follow.
5. Once you see the cat turning her head toward you as she hears the click, she’s probably got the idea. This may take a few minutes or several sessions over a period of hours or days.
TARGET

What is this exercise?
The cat touches her nose to a target. (Try something stick-like—such as a pencil, pen or your finger—at first. Later targets could be a sticky note, coffee can lid, or something else, but linear targets may be easier to use to teach other behaviors down the road).

Why is this important?
This behavior is a fun and easy way for the cat to learn the game of clicker training and is often the first behavior taught. Targeting can then be used to prompt the cat into performing other behaviors (such as “go to mat” or “sit pretty”). And, as a bonus, it can make the cat better tolerate—and even look forward to—people reaching toward her.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“Touch” or “Target”

What are the primary training methods used?
Capturing, shaping

How do I teach it?
1. With the cat nearby, present the target about an inch or two away from her nose (be sure not to scare her).
2. Many cats are curious and will reach forward to sniff the target. Click/treat (C/T) when her nose touches the target. Repeat several times.
3. Gradually work up to placing the target farther away so the cat has to stretch her neck to touch it. Then move the target to one side or the other, and above and below the cat’s head. C/T each time she touches it.
4. Present the target several inches away so the cat now has to take a step toward it to touch it; C/T when she does.
5. When she is touching the stick with her nose 8 out of 10 times, or when it’s easy for you to reliably predict when she is about to touch it, say “touch” right before she does the behavior. Continue to immediately C/T the nose touch.
6. When the cat is reliably performing this behavior on cue, try it in a different room or with some minor distractions (e.g., another person in the room). Note: With increasing distractions, you may have to go back to presenting the target closer to her nose a few times.
7. Shape the behavior so that only touching the END of the target stick (if using a pencil, for instance) is rewarded.
8. Work up to having her follow the target a foot or more in distance. C/T when you stop moving and she touches it.
Troubleshooting

1. If the cat doesn’t touch the target, then C/T any interaction with it (looking at it, sniffing but not touching it, reaching toward it). Gradually work up to C/T’ing only when she actually touches it.

2. If the cat starts by pawing at it, C/T once or twice, then wait for a nose touch. If needed, reposition the target to help her succeed.

3. To make the target more enticing (if necessary), smear some canned food on the end of it, dunk it in tuna juice, or spray catnip on it.

4. If the cat tries to lick or bite it, C/T this 2-3 times, then only C/T closed-mouth touches. (If food was smeared on it, either let the cat lick it all off or wipe it to help deter further licks/bites.)
**GO TO MAT**

**What is this exercise?**
The cat sits with all four feet on a mat.

**Why is this important?**
This behavior has many practical uses and benefits:

- The mat becomes a rewarding place to be and is portable. As such, it can be taken to unfamiliar places like the veterinary clinic or be placed in the carrier to help create a positive association with a potentially scary new environment.
- It can be used to keep the cat off counters or from running out an open door.
- It can be transferred to a stool or other “place” as needed.
- It can be used to prevent altercations with other pets.

**What is the suggested verbal cue?**
“Mat” or “Place” or “Go to bed”

**What are the primary training methods used?**
Shaping, prompting

**How do I teach it?**
1. Lay the mat on the floor; be ready to start training as soon as you do.
2. C/T any interaction the cat has with the mat. Once the cat is actually touching the mat, toss the treat away from the mat to reset him.
3. C/T each of the following steps 2-4 times before holding out for the next step. *Note: Cats may progress more quickly or slowly than the recommended steps, so it’s okay to improvise as needed.*
   a. Look toward the mat
   b. Move toward the mat
   c. Sniff the mat
   d. Place one foot on the mat
   e. Place two feet on the mat
   f. Place all four feet on the mat
   g. Sit on the mat
4. Add the verbal cue once you’re sure he’ll do the complete behavior.

*Alternative method: Prompting*
1. If the cat is having a hard time and won’t interact with the mat, or it’s taking a long time to progress through the steps, use a target stick to prompt him toward or onto the mat.
2. Click when he touches the mat but *before* he touches the target (and remove the target out of his reach before he touches it). We are using the target as a prompt, but the behavior we are rewarding is touching the mat.

3. Only use the target a few times before trying again to shape the behavior without the target.

Notes:

1. The cat may throw some unclickable behaviors in there, too (such as meowing or pawing at you). Just ignore them.

2. When starting a new session, reward a step or two earlier than where the cat was last successful. (For instance, if the last session ended when he put all four feet on the mat, start this session by C/T’ing a few times for one or two feet on the mat again.)
**SPIN**

What is this exercise?
The cat spins in a circle either to the left or right to the point where he is facing the same direction at the end as when he started.

Why is this important?
This is simply a fun and easy trick to try.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“Spin” or “Twirl” (Use a different cue for each direction of spin.)

What are the primary training methods used?
Prompting or luring, shaping

How do I teach it?
1. Start with the cat standing and the target stick in your hand.
2. Place the target stick right in front of the cat’s nose and slowly move it to lead him into a circle. When the circle is completed, remove the target stick right away (before he has a chance to touch it; we are rewarding the turning behavior, not the nose touch) and C/T.
3. If the cat doesn’t follow the target all the way around, break the circle down into small pieces and shape a 360° turn. Use the target stick to C/T the following example steps (repeat each step 2-3 times and then wait for additional behavior to C/T):
   a. A head turn
   b. Leaning in the direction of the turn
   c. A paw movement
   d. A ¼-turn
   e. A ½-turn
   f. A full circle
4. Once he’s done a complete circle a few times by following the target, start fading it out. Make the stick shorter by placing your hand closer to the tip.
5. Continuing fading out the target stick until you can just use your finger.
6. Once the cat is following your finger at nose height, gradually move your finger higher until you don’t have to bend down at all to use the finger cue to indicate “spin.”
7. When the cat reliably understands the finger cue (complies 8 times out of 10), add the verbal cue, “spin,” right before presenting the hand signal. After several times doing this, you should be able to fade out the hand signal (though you don’t have to).
**Sit**

**What is this exercise?**
The cat sits with his butt on the floor.

**Why is this important?**
“Sit” is an easy behavior for a cat to learn. It can be a polite attention-seeking behavior as well as a foundation behavior from which other behaviors are taught (high-five, etc.). “Sit” can also be used to some extent to prevent unwanted behaviors; i.e., if the cat is sitting, he can’t be running out the door or jumping on the kitchen table.

**What is the suggested verbal cue?**
“Sit”

**What are the primary training methods used?**
Prompting or luring

**How do I teach it?**
1. Stand or kneel in front of the cat.
2. Move the target stick slowly up and back between his ears. Keep the target close to his nose as you do this.
3. As he follows the target stick with his eyes and nose, the rest of his body will automatically end up in the sit position. C/T just as his butt hits the floor.
4. When he’s doing this reliably, switch to using just your finger as the target. (You could also start by using just your finger if he already knows to follow it.)
5. Once he knows to sit by just your finger rising over his head, add the cue word, "sit," immediately before he starts to sit.
6. At this point you can toss the treat off to the side to reset him so you can practice again.

**Alternative method: Luring**
1. Place a treat in your hand and let the cat sniff it.
2. Stand or kneel in front of the cat.
3. Move your hand slowly up and back between his ears. Keep your hand close to his nose as you do this.
4. As he follows your hand with his eyes and nose, the rest of his body will automatically end up in the sit position. C/T just as his butt hits the floor.
5. Repeat this with a treat in your hand no more than 3 times.
6. Then use the same hand motion but with no treat in that hand. Click when his butt hits the floor and offer the treat from your other hand.
7. Once he knows to sit by just your hand rising over his head, add the cue word, "sit," immediately before he starts to sit.
Troubleshooting

- If the cat rises up on his hind legs, your hand is probably too far away. Bring your hand closer to his nose.
- If he tends to step backward, train in front of a wall or other solid object.
- If he’s not sitting completely, use *shaping* to C/T small parts of the behavior, such as the head tilting back, a crouch of the hind legs, etc.
**High-Five**

What is this exercise?
The cat is sitting and lifts her paw so that it touches your hand, which is offered to her with palm facing her vertically at the level of her head.

Why is this important?
This is a fun trick that provides a positive interaction between the cat and a person.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“High-five”

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping, prompting or luring

How do I teach it?
1. Have the cat sit in front of you, initially where the two of you are at about eye level (either you’re sitting on the floor or the cat is on a table).
2. To shape the behavior, C/T the following (remember, every cat is different; you may be able to skip some steps or you may have to think of how to break them into even smaller steps):
   a. A shift of weight to one side
   b. A slight paw movement
   c. The paw actually leaves the floor
   d. Gradually higher paw lifts
   e. Paw touches your hand, which is offered palm facing the cat at the level of the cat’s head (or lower, if needed)
   f. Gradually harder paw touches, so the cat is eventually “slapping” your hand
3. Note: For shaping, it’s best to offer your hand during the later stages. However, if needed to elicit a paw lift, you can offer it in the early steps. If the cat ignores your hand, though, stop offering it (your hand should become part of the cue and we don’t want the cat to learn to ignore it).
4. Add the verbal cue, “high-five,” once she is reliably offering the behavior. Say the word before offering your hand.

*Alternative method: Prompting or Luring*
4. Have the cat sit in front of you.
5. Method A:
   a. Use a target stick (e.g., pencil) with only about half of it showing from your hand; offer it a few inches above the cat’s head. C/T if the cat paws at it. (Ignore any attempt at nose touches.)
b. Gradually decrease the length of the target stick that’s visible, until you can get rid of it all together and the cat is simply touching your finger or hand with her paw.
c. Gradually adjust how you offer your hand, so that your palm is facing her and she is “slapping” your hand.

6. Method B:
   a. Hold a treat in your hand and place it above the cat’s head, almost as if you are asking for a sit, but higher. Ignore any nose sniffs. C/T any paw raises. (Deliver a treat from your other hand.)
   b. If the cat raises both front feet, C/T 2-3 times, then wait her out until only one paw is raised. You might also try offering the target or your hand off to one side just a little.
   c. Shape the behavior until she is slapping your flat palm with one paw.
SHAKE HANDS

What is this exercise?
The cat is sitting and lifts her paw so that it touches your hand, which is offered to her palm up at about the level of her elbow or lower.

Why is this important?
This is a fun trick that provides a positive interaction between the cat and a person. It can also be used (with additional training) for trimming nails.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“Shake”

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping, prompting

How do I teach it?
1. Have the cat sit in front of you, initially where the two of you are at about eye level (either you’re sitting on the floor or the cat is on a table).
2. To shape the behavior, C/T the following (remember, every cat is different; you may be able to skip some steps or you may have to think of how to break them into even smaller steps):
   a. A shift of weight to one side
   b. A slight paw movement
   c. The paw actually leaves the floor
   d. Gradually higher paw lifts
   e. Paw touches your hand, which is offered palm up about level with the cat’s elbow.
3. Note: For shaping, it’s best to offer your hand during the later stages. However, if needed to elicit a paw lift, you can offer it in the early steps. If the cat ignores your hand, though, stop offering it (your hand should become part of the cue and we don’t want the cat to learn to ignore it).
4. Add the verbal cue, “shake,” once she is reliably offering the behavior. Say the word before offering your hand.

Alternative method: Prompting
1. Have the cat sit in front of you.
2. Method A:
   a. Use a target stick with only about half of it showing from your hand; offer it at elbow height. C/T if the cat paws at it. (Ignore any nose touches.)
   b. Gradually decrease the length of the target stick that’s visible until you can get rid of it all together, and the cat is simply touching your hand with her paw.
3. **Method B:**
   
a. Have a treat in your closed fist and place it in front of the cat at about elbow height. At first, the cat might sniff it or use his mouth to try to get the treat; ignore this. The cat will likely then paw your fist. Click and treat from your other hand.

b. You can sometimes entice a weight shift or paw lift by holding a treat in your hand and moving it slowly in front of the cat until it’s just off to one side. C/T any movement of the paw.

c. Remember to fade away the treat in the hand after 2-3 tries, and then just use an empty hand.
SIT ON A STOOL

What is this exercise?
The cat sits with all four feet on a small step stool.

Why is this important?
This behavior has many practical uses and benefits similar to the “go to mat” behavior:
- The stool becomes a rewarding place to be. Sitting on a higher stool is a great alternative to getting on the kitchen counters or table.
- It can be used to keep the cat from running out an open door.
- It can be used to prevent altercations with other pets.
- It can be used as a “training podium” in multi-pet households, where each pet is rewarded for staying on its stool until it’s her turn to train.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“Stool”

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping, prompting

How do I teach it?
1. Place the stool on the floor nearby. Be ready to start training as soon as you do so.
2. C/T any interaction the cat has with the stool. Once the cat is actually stepping on the stool, toss the treat away from the stool to reset her.
3. C/T each of the following steps 2-3 times before holding out for the next step. Note: Cats may progress more quickly or slowly than the recommended steps, so it’s okay to improvise as needed.
   a. Look toward the stool
   b. Move toward the stool
   c. Sniff the stool
   d. Place one foot on the stool
   e. Place two feet on the stool
   f. Place all four feet on the stool
   g. Sit on the stool
4. Add the verbal cue once you’re sure she’ll do the complete behavior.
5. Once on the stool, you may add the cue, “sit,” if the cat already knows it, and if she doesn’t automatically sit when on the stool. Eventually you should be able to fade the cue for sit and have the automatic sit included in the final behavior with only the “stool” cue.
Alternative method: Prompting

1. If the cat is having a hard time and won’t interact with the stool, or it’s taking a long time to progress through the steps, use a target stick to prompt her toward or onto the stool.
2. Click when she touches the stool but before she touches the target (and remove the target out of her reach before she touches it).
3. We are using the target as a prompt, but the behavior we are rewarding is touching the stool. Try using the target only a few times before trying again to shape the behavior without the target. Or you could switch to pointing or another hand signal, which can become a cue also.
**JUMP THROUGH A HOOP**

**What is this exercise?**
The cat jumps (not just steps) through a hoop. (Note: If the cat is elderly or has any physical problems that make jumping contraindicated, only ask the cat to step through the hoop and don’t hold it very high off the ground.)

**Why is this important?**
This is simply a fun and easy trick. It can eventually be used to cue jumps over other objects, or as one element in an agility course. It can also be good exercise for healthy cats.

**What is the suggested verbal cue?**
“Jump” or “Through”

**What are the primary training methods used?**
Shaping, prompting

**How do I teach it?**
1. Hold the hoop upright in front of the cat with the bottom touching the floor.
2. Shape any interaction with the hoop (C/T each behavior 2-3 times before holding out for the next step):
   a. Look toward the hoop
   b. Move toward the hoop
   c. Sniff the hoop
   d. Paw the hoop
   e. Place head through the hoop
   f. Place one foot through the hoop
   g. Place two feet through the hoop
   h. Walk through the hoop
3. Next, raise the height of the hoop by small increments—small enough that ideally you don’t have to backtrack to earlier steps in the process (i.e., the cat should still be walking through the hoop with all four feet).
4. Eventually get to a height where the cat must actually jump—not just step—through the hoop. Click at the high point of the cat’s jump.
5. Add the verbal cue, “jump,” when the cat is reliably jumping through the hoop.
6. If the cat is young and healthy, you can gradually raise the height of the hoop so the jumping effort is greater (but be reasonable!).

**Alternative method: Prompting**

1. If the cat won’t interact with the hoop or is taking a long time to progress through the steps, use a target stick to prompt him toward or through the hoop.
2. Click when he nears or goes through the hoop, but *before* he touches the target (and remove the target out of his reach before he touches it). We are using the target as a prompt, but the behavior we are rewarding is moving closer to or through the hoop.

3. Only use the target a few times before trying again to shape the behavior without the target. You can also try transitioning to a finger, and then pointing may become a cue.
CARRIER TRAINING

What is this exercise?
The cat willingly enters the carrier on cue and is comfortable staying in it with the door closed for 5 minutes.

Why is this important?
Having a cat that is comfortable in the carrier allows for much easier and less stressful transport to the veterinarian or on family outings. Having him enter the carrier on cue can also help ensure his safety in an emergency situation.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“Kennel”

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping, prompting or luring

How do I teach it?
Note: To successfully achieve all of these steps may take several days or weeks, depending on how wary your cat is of the carrier.

Part 1: Getting the cat into the carrier
1. Place the carrier on the floor with the door propped open (to make sure it doesn’t accidentally shut or hit the cat on his way in or out).
2. C/T each of the following steps 2-4 times before holding out for the next step. Note: Cats may progress more quickly or slowly than the recommended steps, so it’s okay to improvise as needed.
   a. Look toward the carrier
   b. Move toward the carrier
   c. Sniff the carrier
   d. Place head inside the carrier
   e. Place one foot in the carrier
   f. Place two feet in the carrier
   g. Place all four feet in the carrier
3. Add the verbal cue once you’re sure he’ll do the complete behavior.
4. Once the cat is happily placing his whole body in the carrier, keep him in there for several seconds by continually giving him treats. Throw the last treat outside of the carrier to reset him. Repeat this process several times.
**Alternative method: Prompting**

1. Use the target stick to encourage the cat to move closer to the carrier.
2. You can still break up the behavior as suggested above for shaping by C/T’ing small movements toward the target and carrier, and by letting him move away from the carrier (and reset) to get the treat. For instance, use the target to get him right up to the opening of the carrier, click and then toss the treat away from the carrier.
3. Repeat each step a few times before encouraging further movement toward or inside the carrier. You can stick the target into the side holes of the carrier and then into the back holes as the cat progresses (or from above if there are holes on top).

**Alternative method: Luring**

1. If the cat is having a hard time and won’t interact with the carrier, or if it’s taking a long time to progress through the steps, toss treats near the carrier and then inside it. Click as he moves toward or inside the carrier. Proceed slowly if he is wary, so he remains successful.
2. Once you’ve gotten him inside the carrier 2-3 times, go back to shaping, so that you are C/T’ing after he does the behavior.

**Note:** If your cat is afraid of the carrier, try removing the top of the carrier if possible and do all the same steps this way, before repeating the process later with the top on the carrier.

**Part 2: Closing the door**

1. To get him used to having a closed door, with the cat inside the carrier C/T each of the following steps 2-3 times before holding out for the next step. **Note:** Cats may progress more quickly or slowly than the recommended steps, so it’s okay to improvise as needed. **If you notice signs of stress (not taking treats, vocalizing, pawing at the door), go back a step or two in the process and repeat until the cat is comfortable.**
   a. You reach out and touch the door
   b. Move the door a couple inches toward the closed position
   c. Close the door halfway
   d. Close the door completely, but don’t latch it
   e. Close and latch the door, feed a treat through it, and immediately open it again
   f. Close and latch the door, continually feed treats through the door, and gradually build up the duration until the cat remains comfortable in the carrier for 5 minutes.
   g. As the duration extends past one minute, just feed every 15-30 seconds or so.

**Part 3: Moving the cat in the carrier**

1. Once the cat is comfortable remaining in the carrier for 5 minutes, throw in a few treats and while he’s eating, lift the carrier off the floor for a few seconds and then place it down gently. (If the cat is comfortable, he should continue eating. If not, you might have to start with simply putting upward pressure on the carrier [pull up on the handle but don’t lift the carrier] while he eats, and progress in smaller steps from there.)
2. Progress to walking around the room and/or outside with the cat eating treats in the carrier.
3. You don’t have to click while doing these exercises.

Part 4: Car travel

*Note: Use high-value treats for these steps.*

1. If the cat is comfortable being carried around in the carrier inside and outside, place him in your car and feed him lots of high-value treats. Repeat over a few days.
2. Next, while the cat is eating, turn on the engine but don’t move the car. Repeat over a few days.
3. Then, just drive down the street while the cat is eating.
4. As long as the cat is doing well, continue increasing the distance you drive. Even if he’s not eating while you drive, he should appear relaxed and comfortable.
TAKE “MEDICATION” THROUGH A SYRINGE

What is this exercise?
The cat is sitting and willingly eats a treat from a syringe while you are holding her head and opening her mouth as if you were giving real medication.

Why is this important?
At some point in a cat’s life, he will likely need to be medicated. Having a cat that easily accepts medications can make this procedure much less stressful for both the owner and the cat, and will help you provide effective medical care for your cat when needed. This behavior can truly be a lifesaver!

What is the suggested verbal cue?
None needed or “open wide”

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping

How do I teach it?
1. Load a 1ml or 3ml syringe (ask your vet for a couple) with the cat’s favorite moist treat (watered down if needed so that it can be dispensed easily from the syringe). Until the cat is happily anticipating the syringe near her mouth, smear some of the treat on the outside of the syringe, too. Suggested treats: meat baby food, the water from a can of tuna, canned food, Inaba treats.
2. Ask the cat to sit, click and offer her the syringe so she can lick the outside. (About 2 licks=1 treat). Repeat 2-3 times.
3. Next, when C/T’ing the sit, offer the syringe and squeeze a little out of it so she has to lick the tip.
4. Slowly work toward placing the tip of the syringe on and then into the corner of her mouth. When it touches her mouth, click and squirt a small amount on her lips or into her mouth. Repeat several times. (It might be easier to use a tongue click or verbal marker like “yes” here.)
5. When she is happily accepting this, reach toward her face with your empty hand as you also offer her the syringe with your other hand. Be very aware of her body language and proceed with small enough hand movements so that you don’t elicit avoidance behavior from her. This may be the longest portion of the shaping process for this behavior; break the reaching-toward-her behavior down into tiny steps if needed. Click when your empty hand reaches out and treat with the syringe. You might practice this behavior without the cat several times first, because your hands may not be reaching the same distance at the same time and this might take some getting used to.
6. Once the cat is comfortable with your empty hand reaching toward her, gently touch the top of her head as she is eating the treat.
7. Very gradually, work toward a more forceful touching of the head while she eating the treat.
8. Very gradually, work toward gently opening her mouth while you insert the syringe, again being sure to avoid eliciting avoidance behavior from the cat.

9. The goal is that the cat loves to have her head and mouth manipulated because it means she will get a yummy treat.
TAKE “MEDICATION” WITH A PILL GUN

What is this exercise?
The cat is sitting and willingly eats a treat from a pill gun that you offer her. (See video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spjJNcycRMQ courtesy of Dr. Colleen Koch, DVM, KPA-CTP.)

Why is this important?
At some point in a cat’s life, she will likely need to be medicated. Having a cat that easily accepts medications can make this procedure much less stressful for both the owner and the cat, and will help you provide effective medical care for the cat when needed. This behavior can truly be a lifesaver!

What is the suggested verbal cue?
None needed

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping

How do I teach it?
1. You do not need to use the clicker for most of this exercise.
2. Have canned food or baby food available (based on the cat’s preference) along with a pill gun.
3. Smear the moist food all over the tip of the pill gun.
4. Ask the cat to sit, click and offer her the pill gun so she can lick the outside. (About 2 licks=1 treat). Repeat several times.
5. When offering the pill gun, let the cat reach toward it a little, rather than shoving it toward it her mouth. Our goal is to have the cat grab for the pill gun and take it into her mouth.
6. Now place a hard or semi-moist treat in the pill gun (as if it were a real pill). Continue dipping the outside of the gun in canned food.
7. As the cat is licking the canned food, watch for the moment she takes the pill gun into her mouth; at this moment, “inject” the hard treat into her mouth.
8. Follow up with more canned food.

Troubleshooting
1. If the cat is avoiding the pill gun, simply place it nearby her while she’s eating high-value treats and walk away. Present the pill gun at the same time you present the treats. Make sure it’s far enough away initially so that she is comfortable eating.
2. Move the pill gun closer and closer to the treats she’s eating (over several sessions if needed). Present the pill gun at the same time or slightly before you present the treats.
3. You can also try teaching her to target the pill gun to develop a positive association with it.
4. To get the cat to grab for the pill gun, try placing a hard treat on top of it (set into the canned food that’s smeared on it.)
NAIL TRIMS

What is this exercise?
The cat learns to tolerate nail trims well.

Why is this important?
Trimming nails is often a stressful event for both cats and owners, but it doesn’t have to be. If we can help cats better tolerate this procedure, this will further develop the human-animal bond and potentially decrease destruction of owner belongings and injury to people and other pets. A cat who tolerates nail trims may have a lower risk of getting declawed or relinquished.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
See below; different cues for different parts of this behavior

What are the primary training methods used?
Shaping, desensitization/counterconditioning

How do I teach it?
These exercises will likely need to be done over many sessions, as you’ll want to stop before the cat becomes fidgety.

If the cat already knows how to shake hands:
1. Start each session by having the cat target the nail clippers for a C/T a few times.
2. Cue “shake” and C/T a few times. Do this with both front paws. (If the cat typically only uses one paw, you may need to shape him to shake hands with the other paw.)
3. Next, follow these shaping steps, realizing you may need to add more or skip steps based on the cat’s behavior:
   a. Hold the paw for gradually longer periods of time before C/T (up to about 3 seconds should suffice).
   b. Say “toe” and then press one toe gently for a split second. C/T and repeat (asking for a new “shake” each time) for all toes on one paw, then the other.
   c. Say “toe” and press the toe so that the claw is extended. C/T and repeat as in (b).
   d. Repeat (c) but also bring the nail clippers near the toe and C/T.
   e. Repeat (c) and touch the nail clippers to the toenail. C/T
   f. Repeat (c) and clip one nail. C/T (If successful, consider ending the session for now and give several treats in a row.)
   g. Continue this way until you can clip all the nails of one toe, then the other.

If the cat does not know how to shake hands, and for the back feet:
1. Start each session by placing the nail clippers nearby where the cat can see them. To keep the cat relaxed don’t click at this time, but you can give her a treat.
2. For the steps below, just work with the paws that are visible if the cat is lying down.
3. While the cat is in your lap or relaxed on a bed, shape the following steps, with a C/T each time:
   a. Reach toward one paw. (Depending on the cat, you may have to start with reaching for/touching the shoulder, for example, and moving down the leg from there step by step.)
   b. Gently touch one paw for a split second.
   c. Gradually increase the time you touch the paw.
   d. Lift the paw slightly for a split second.
   e. Gradually increase the time you can lift each paw, holding it gently.
   f. Lift the paw and press on one toe.
   g. Gradually increase the pressure on the toe until you can extend the claw.
   h. With the claw extended, reach toward the toe with the nail clippers but don’t touch it.
   i. Touch the extended claw with the clippers.
   h. Clip one nail. (If successful, consider ending the session for now with a jackpot of treats.)
   i. Continue this way until you can clip all the nails of the exposed feet.

Alternative method: Classical counterconditioning
   1. You can do all the same steps above without using the clicker but still using food.
   2. The key is to present the food when you’re doing the behavior (e.g., actually touching the paw) and take away the food when you’re not touching the paw. So touch=food; no touch=no food.
   3. Timing of the food is very important. Be careful not to present the food first before the touch; this could result in the cat not wanting to eat because the food predicts the “scary” touch. It will be helpful to have a second person to provide and take away the food, but communication between the two of you will be key.

Note: You may never be able to trim all nails in one session, and that’s okay! You might make a routine of trimming one nail every day or two consistently so that all nails are trimmed every 10-20 days.
PETTING/BRUSHING/HANDLING

What is this exercise?
The cat learns to enjoy—or at least, willingly tolerate—human touch, grooming and being picked up.

Why is this important?
Acceptance of touch and handling will allow the cat to receive affection and husbandry care from its owners, as well as veterinary care. This will deepen the human-animal bond and permit good care.

What is the suggested verbal cue?
“Ready?” or none

What are the primary training methods used?
Desensitization/counterconditioning

How do I teach it?
Part 1: Observation
1. Observe the cat’s body language when you interact with her. Does she seem aggressive, fearful, stressed, ambivalent, or happy when you:
   a. Reach toward her
   b. Pet her around the ears/under the chin
   c. Gently stroke her along the back
   d. Pick her up
   e. Brush her
   f. Touch her feet

Part 2: Desensitization/Counterconditioning (DS/CC)
1. Read the handout on DS/CC
2. Determine whether any of the behaviors in Part 1 elicit a negative reaction from the cat and choose one behavior at a time to work on. We’ll use picking up the cat as an example here.
3. Remember, every cat is different and you might be able to progress faster, or you might have to add in even more steps. Assessing the cat’s reaction at every step and adjusting your behavior as needed is critical. Repeat each step about 5 times.
4. Assuming the cat tolerates touch and petting well, but just doesn’t like being picked up, start by simply stroking her along the back and sides. C/T.
5. Next, lightly place your hands on her as if you were about to pick her up. C/T.
6. Apply pressure as if you were about to pick her up, but don’t lift her. C/T.
7. Pick her up about 1 inch off the ground for 1 second. C/T. (It’s important to make the cat feel secure so she’s less likely to struggle; this is why we’re not including several steps between #7 and #8, because we don’t want her just hanging in the air!)
9. Gradually extend the time that you’re holding the cat, and C/T just before you put her back on the ground.
10. Then start walking around with her while holding her and C/T just before you put her back on the ground.

*Alternative method: Classical counterconditioning*

1. You can do all the same steps above without using the clicker but still using food.
2. The key is to present the food when you’re doing the behavior (e.g., lifting her for 1 second) and take away the food when you’re not (she’s back on the floor). So behavior=food; no behavior=no food.
3. Timing of the food is very important. Be careful not to present the food first before the touch; this could result in the cat not wanting to eat because the food predicts the “scary” touch. Having a second person to provide and take away the food will be helpful, but communication between the two of you will be key.
**Harness Training**

**What is this exercise?**
The cat learns to enjoy wearing a harness and leash and having the harness put on.

**Why is this important?**
If a cat can happily wear a harness and leash, it opens the door (literally and figuratively!) to a whole new world of enrichment—the great outdoors—in a safe manner, providing a fun activity that the cat and owner can share.

**What is the suggested verbal cue?**
None needed

**What are the primary training methods used?**
Desensitization/counterconditioning, luring

**How do I teach it?**
1. Present the harness and have the cat target it for a C/T. Repeat several times.
2. No clicker is needed for the rest of these exercises.
3. Drape the harness (unattached) over the cat while he’s eating some yummy treats. Remove the harness at the same time he’s done eating. Repeat several times.
4. If possible, you can also drape the harness over him while he’s eating his regular meals; remove it when done eating.
5. Once he is tolerating the harness well in this manner, attach it while he continues to eat. Let him keep eating with the harness on and/or ask for some easy behaviors and C/T those. Then remove the harness.
6. Try to make size adjustments to the harness while it’s not on the cat. It doesn’t have to fit perfectly at first but it’s important that the cat cannot slip out of it.
7. Gradually leave the harness on for longer periods of time (but always supervised).
8. When he’s comfortable wearing the harness, attach the leash and let him drag it around. Make sure it doesn’t become caught on anything. If having it drag bothers him, hold the leash and follow him around, occasionally asking for behaviors and C/T.
9. If he is really bothered by the leash, whether it’s dragging or you’re holding it, try attaching a short string or shoelace instead. Gradually lengthen the string and when he’s comfortable with that, go back to the leash.

**Alternative method: Luring**
1. If you have a harness that you must place over the cat’s head, teach him instead to put his head through the harness.
2. Start by having him target the harness and C/T to build a positive association.
3. Then hold open the harness in front of the cat, place your other hand slightly through the opening of the harness with fingers outstretched and holding a treat. Let your cat take the treat. Repeat a few times.

4. Now hold the treat just inside the harness opening so the cat’s nose is barely inside the loop to get the treat. Repeat a few times.

5. Now hold the treat on your side of the harness so the cat’s nose (not whole head) must reach through the harness to get the treat.

6. Gradually hold the treat farther toward you so the cat has to eventually place his whole head through the harness opening to get the treat.

7. When he’s comfortably doing this, lay the rest of the harness on his neck/shoulders.

8. Try to remove the harness just before he’s done eating so he doesn’t have the opportunity to back out of it.

9. When he’s comfortable with this, provide him with several treats or a small bowl of food for putting his head through the harness, and while he’s eating, attach the harness behind his front legs. Take it off before he’s done eating.

10. Work up to keeping the harness on for longer periods of time, while keeping him eating or playing so he barely notices he’s wearing it.

11. Continue with the other steps as described above for attaching the leash.
DESENSITIZATION/COUNTERCONDITIONING (DS/CC)

These guidelines can be used to work on anything an animal is reactive to. Desensitization refers to exposing the animal to the scary stimulus gradually in ways that do not cause her to display the unwanted behavior. Counterconditioning means providing something (e.g., treats) to help the animal associate the scary stimulus with a positive experience, and/or asking for an alternative behavior (sit, target, etc.) that is incompatible with the undesired behavior (such as hissing or running away). Combining both techniques can speed up the process. Still, DS/CC can take weeks or months to get the desired effect, depending on the situation. But it can be very effective.

Key points:
1. Training sessions should be relatively short, about 2-5 minutes, if even that. The length will depend on the cat’s reaction. Try to train 1-2 times per day, at least 3 times a week.
2. Remember, we want to set the cat up for success; the goal is to have the cat calm and taking treats willingly with no fearful or reactive behavior.
3. Use small, high-value treats. Consider small pieces of tuna, cheese, or meat baby food (one lick=one treat), for instance.
4. Watch for signs of stress, which may include ears back, crouching, dilated pupils, trying to run away, tail twitching and not taking treats. If this happens, go back a step in the process to where the cat was calm, and end on a good note.
5. Before starting a DS/CC session, do a minute or so of fun exercises where the cat is rewarded with treats. This will get her started in a good frame of mind, and reinforce her focus on you.
6. It is very tempting to move along in this process too fast; better to go to slowly than to cause a reaction from the cat and have to back up in the process.
7. Try to end each session on a good note; it's easy to want to keep going when things are going so well, but if they’re going that well then it's probably a good time to stop and come back later for another session.
8. Start each session a few steps behind where you left off the last time, so you're warming up with steps you've already been successful with.
9. These techniques use classical conditioning—think Pavlov and his dogs that salivated at the sound of a bell that predicted food was coming; initially the bell meant nothing to them, then it resulted in the salivating, which was a reflex that the dog couldn’t control and indicated anticipation of a food reward. Similarly, we want your pet to “reflexively” associate the initially scary stimulus with anticipation of something good happening.

Example DS/CC session (for a cat afraid of the vacuum cleaner):
1. The following steps will likely take place over several weeks, depending on the level of fear your cat has toward the vacuum cleaner.
2. Start in a quiet environment, with the vacuum cleaner unplugged and stationary at a distance far enough away so that the cat sees it but doesn’t react to it.
3. If your cat knows any tricks, ask her to do one and reward her immediately. If not, simply give her a food treat. Give her a few treats in a row, one at a time, at that distance.
4. Move 6-12 inches closer to the vacuum cleaner and repeat giving the treats.
5. Very gradually move closer to the vacuum cleaner and give treats as long as the cat is staying calm and focused.
6. End on a good note, and pick it up again the next day from a step or two farther away than where you left off.
7. Repeat simply giving treats near the stationary, quiet vacuum cleaner over several days, until she is able to eat treats off the vacuum cleaner itself.
8. Then, start again at a far distance but this time have a helper very slowly move the vacuum cleaner as if vacuuming (or possibly just move it a couple inches, depending on your cat’s reaction; remember we’re trying to avoid any fearful reactions.)
9. Repeat steps 2-5, moving slowly closer to the vacuum. However, the closer you get, the less the vacuum should be moved initially. So at each step closer, minimize the movement of the vacuum cleaner and then build it up again at that distance before moving closer.
10. Remember, always gauge your cat’s reaction— with some kitties you can move through these steps much more quickly; with others you may have to move much more slowly.
11. Work up to having your cat eating treats tossed all around the moving (but quiet) vacuum cleaner.
12. Next, work on the noise of the vacuum cleaner, which can be the scariest part for most cats. Start at a very far distance with extra-special treats. You may even need to have the vacuum on but out of sight at first. During this time, the vacuum cleaner should not be moving.
13. Very gradually, following similar steps above, work up to where your cat can eat treats near the noisy vacuum cleaner (but possibly not quite as close as before).
14. Another option if the noise really freaks out your kitty, is to have her in a whole different area of the house with the door closed, and have a helper turn on and off the vacuum cleaner, a few seconds at a time. With you sitting by your cat, every time the vacuum cleaner turns on, feed treats. The moment it turns off, take the treats away. So noise=treats; no noise=no treats. Over several days, move your cat closer to the room where the vacuum cleaner is.
15. Once your cat is comfortable with this, then start again at a far distance, have the vacuum cleaner on AND have someone moving it (only slightly at first).
16. Work your way back up—VERY gradually—to where your cat can eat treats near (but not super close to) the moving, noisy vacuum cleaner.
17. Pat yourself on the back—you’ve made a very scary monster into a fun treat dispenser for your kitty!