

# SHAPING

Worksheet for practical lessons with František Šusta; [www.trainingisdialogue.com](http://www.trainingisdialogue.com)



**WARNING, THIS SHEET SERVES FOR STRUCTURED LESSONS WITH A TRAINER, not as instructions for use**

**Definition:** Shaping is acquisition of required behaviour through gradually increasing demands.



Hey, do you know for sure that your instructions for jumping through the ring of fire don't have some pages missing?

F.Šusta

THERE IS NO UNIVERSAL PLAN OF SHAPING. DOZENS OF PATHS LEAD TO THE SAME GOAL, AND EACH MUST BE TAILORED TO THE NEEDS OF THE SPECIFIC ANIMAL!

Question No. 1: DEFINE exactly (measurably) the behaviour you want to achieve in your dog.

*Example of good definition: I want that my sitting dog, on the command PAW, raises the front paw to horizontal position, within two seconds from the command, and holds it up for three seconds at the minimum.*

*Bad definition: It should wave its paw when I say PAW.*

Why do we define it in such details? Because we must know exactly in advance what we want. A lot of us tend to "start somehow" and "complete it somehow". But such procedure confuses the animal, and it gets frustrated also by the times when we are "floundering around". When we get the goal exactly at the beginning, we won't waste time during training and the dog won't lose its nerves about us.

Today's goal:.....

Question No. 2: - Shall we choose SHAPING or CAPTURING? (advantages and disadvantages)

Shaping (gradually increasing demands) suits for actions the animal has not managed so far, or for actions that it usually has in its common behaviour repertory, but they are not convenient for the animal to offer them spontaneously (e.g. baring its teeth).

Capturing means supporting some action the animal usually does, increasing its frequency and then reinforcing it only after command, so that it starts doing it only on command. It suits for natural actions, if it does not matter that the animal will increasingly offer them spontaneously.

If we have chosen shaping, then let's answer Question No. 3: What CRITERIA shall we follow?

*Example - the paw waving on command, described above, has the following criteria: 1) position of front extremity during the exercise, 2) position of the remaining body, 3) speed of performance, 4) duration, 5) command, 6) environment in which the exercise is performed, or possibly people to whose command the dog responds..., and we could certainly find other criteria too.*

The criteria of today's exercise are.....

Look at the shaping rules by Karen Pryor (page 2). Rules 2 and 3 concern criteria and are breached the most often. Let's beware of it today!

Question No. 4 - What means for explanation do we have?

The whole dialogue with the animal goes as follows: Cue - behaviour - bridge - reinforcer. This dialogue is built "from behind" - i.e. if we don't have good reinforcer, there is no point in teaching bridge, if there is no bridge, we won't create behaviour, etc. So, before starting creating the behaviour, we must have good reinforcer and bridge. Do we have them?

*In the case with the paw waving, they are the following: Cue (PAW) - behaviour (the dog raises its right front paw to horizontal position) - bridge (clicker sound) - reinforcer (snack).*

Bridge is .....

Today's reinforcer is .....

Shaping plan:

The first step - we must start with something the animal manages without problems, something that resembles most the required behaviour. A frequent mistake consists in starting by a first step the animal cannot do.

*Example of well chosen first step for paw waving - touching the paw with the target.*

*Badly chosen first step - raising of paw.*

Today's first step will be.....

The whole procedure

Take a separate piece of paper and try to arrange your shaping plan for your specific exercise. Keep in mind that, in practice, you will change and modify it to adapt it to the animal's demands; therefore allow for space for changes in your plan. Additionally to individual steps, try to write down also the stages achieved in individual training lessons.

*Simplified example: Goal - The sitting dog, on the command PAW, raises the front paw to horizontal position, within two seconds from the command, and holds it up for three seconds at the minimum. Bridge = clicker, reinforcers - snacks.*

Plan	reality	notes
1 - the dog is sitting, touching its front paw with target	At the beginning, mere approaching of target must be clicked and reinforced, as the dog was afraid of touch.	10 repetitions
2 - the dog follows the target with its paw at 1 cm		4 repetitions
3 - when the target is raised, the sitting dog raises its paw	The dog started jumping up; we had to go a step back and reinforcer mere sitting too. Then we followed through.	15 repetitions, end of lesson
4 - I say the cue PAW first, the target gets eliminated	The command had to be said several times after waving, together with the clicker, so that the dog noticed it. Then the command was said first.	10 repetitions
5 - criterion of hold - we increase hold to 3 seconds	The criteria had to be "loosened"; we first increase hold when showing the target and after the command; then the target was eliminated again.	8 repetitions end of lesson
6 - criterion of speed of response under two seconds	The criteria had to be loosened; first, there was fast response with short hold; later the hold was good again.	9 repetitions
7 - learning finished, the behaviour meets the goal exactly		5 repetitions, jackpot, end

**SHAPING PRINCIPLES BY KAREN PRYOR:**

1. Small steps - the animal must have chance of success.
2. Always train ONLY ONE NEW CRITERION, never two at the same time.
3. When introducing a new criterion into training, ease off the old criterion for a short time (the animal will soon remember it).
4. Always be a step ahead of the animal - have a good plan, don't stop.
5. Don't change the "trainer" in the middle of learning.
6. When one method does not work, try another one.
7. Don't interrupt the lesson groundlessly - the animal could understand it as punishment.
8. If the behaviour gets worse, review the previous shaping process - that's why you should make records.
9. Finish while there is success - see principle of greater effort in animal than in human.

And several principles by experienced trainers:

Don't waste too much time in the same step, but go on as soon as the animal manages it WITHOUT HESITATION.

But at the same time, don't continue if its response is hesitating.

Don't give the stimulus before the animal has asked for it. In such case, the animal is not prepared.

IF YOU DON'T ENJOY IT, DON'T DO IT! In such case, the animal won't enjoy it either.

I WISH MUCH FUN ☺