

Reinforcement and punishment: how they affect behavior

Reinforcement means anything that will tend to **increase** behavior.

Punishment means anything that will tend to **decrease** behavior or avoid it altogether.

Positive means anything that is **added**.

Negative means anything that is **subtracted** or taken away.

- Positive does not mean “good” in this case; it means added as in a “plus sign.”
- Negative does not mean “bad.” it means taken away or subtracted as in a “minus sign.”

Below we have a chart showing the four categories that affect behavior and examples of each:

	REINFORCEMENT (tends to increase behavior)	PUNISHMENT (tends to decrease behavior)
POSITIVE (+) (something is added)	<p>POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT <i>Dog sits and gets a cookie for doing so.</i></p> <p>Giving a cookie when the dog sits will tend to get him to sit more often. This is positive reinforcement, positive because a cookie is added and reinforcement because it tends to increase the likelihood of the dog sitting again.</p> <p>You add something the dog wants.</p>	<p>POSITIVE PUNISHMENT <i>Dog forges and gets a jerk on the leash for doing so.</i></p> <p>A jerk on the leash will make the dog think twice about forging. This is positive punishment, positive because the leash jerk is added and punishment because it tends to decrease the likelihood of the dog forging again.</p> <p>You add something the dog doesn't want.</p>
NEGATIVE (-) (something is subtracted or taken away)	<p>NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT <i>The dog's ear is pinched until he picks up the dumbbell.</i></p> <p>Pinching the dog's ear is negative reinforcement, negative because you stop pinching the ear the instant the dog takes the dumbbell and reinforcement because it tends to increase the likelihood of the dog taking the dumbbell again.</p> <p>You take away something the dog doesn't want.</p>	<p>NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT <i>Dog jumps on you for attention and you turn your back on him.</i></p> <p>When you turn your back on the dog, this is negative punishment, negative because you take away your attention from him and punishment because it tends to decrease the likelihood of the dog jumping on you again.</p> <p>You take away something the dog wants.</p>

Reinforcement training is better than **punishment training** because:

- **Reinforcement** occurs **during** the moment the behavior occurs, and allows for quick learning (to do the behavior).
- **Punishment** occurs **after** the behavior occurs when the subject is unable to change the behavior that has already occurred; little or no learning takes place (or the learning takes a lot longer).

“Learning to alter behavior in the future in order to avoid consequences in the future is more than most animals can understand.”

— Karen Pryor (p113, *Don't Shoot the Dog!*)

NOTE: The dog decides what is reinforcing or punishing to him, not the trainer.