

Four Quadrants of Operant Conditioning



To be put simply, operant conditioning is the way in which all beings learn through consequences of actions. Operant conditioning is a natural way that all of us, ourselves and our dogs, learn. There are four quadrants, as explained below.

It's important to note that these are scientific terms, and "positive" does not mean good and "negative" does not mean bad. Positive simply means to add, and negative means to take away. Likewise, reinforcement does not mean good, and punishment does not mean bad. Reinforcement is anything that results in a behavior being more likely to happen, whereas punishment results in a behavior being less likely to happen.

Below I've made a chart explaining what the four quadrants are, and examples of how you may see them used.

<p><u>Positive Reinforcement</u></p> <p><i>Adding something to make a behavior more likely</i></p> <p>Giving your dog a treat when they do something you like is an example of positive reinforcement. However, in addition to food, we may use toys or affection as well.</p> <p>Positive reinforcement can be done by the environment as well, and may not always be your best friend. For example, let's say your dog jumps on your guests and your guests respond by touching your dog while you try to get your dog to get down. Your dog may prefer your guests' attention over your treats, in which case being touched is a form of positive reinforcement that makes jumping a stronger habit.</p>	<p><u>Positive Punishment</u></p> <p><i>Adding something to make a behavior less likely</i></p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Your dog jumps on the counter to steal the food you left out, and you spray them with a water bottle. If the dog finds this aversive, you've added an audible consequence that most dogs will try to avoid in the future, decreasing the likelihood of this behavior happening again.</p> <p><i>It's important to note that in my training programs we do not do anything that causes fear or pain to our dogs. Doing so will result in immediate removal from our programs. Done correctly, punishments can be applied that are effective at extinguishing behaviors but do not harm our dogs in any way. Punishment is not, nor should it ever be, painful or traumatizing.</i></p>
<p><u>Negative Reinforcement</u></p> <p><i>Taking something away to make a behavior more likely</i></p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Let's say your dog is pulling towards a tree they want to sniff. As they pull, the leash is taught and tense (which is uncomfortable for your dog) but they continue to pull until they reach the tree. When they reach the tree, the leash goes slack because you caught up. The removal of leash tension just so happens to reward the dog for pulling. Most dogs learn "oh! To make the annoying sensation go away I must pull to get where we're going!".</p> <p>When we can identify this, we can stop the practice of it and add positive reinforcement to teach dogs what we do want them to do.</p>	<p><u>Negative Punishment</u></p> <p><i>Taking away something to make a behavior less likely</i></p> <p>Example:</p> <p>If a dog wants my attention and jumps on me, and as a result I walk away and ignore them. The jumping results in the consequence of me walking away (removing attention), which makes the jumping less likely to happen again.</p>

