



NATURAL
Animal
CENTRE

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What is Positive Reinforcement?



Positive Reinforcement by definition:

In its scientific definition, positive reinforcement (R+) refers to 'the addition of an appetitive stimulus in order to increase the likelihood of a behaviour recurring'.

Appetitive means something that the learner naturally enjoys, which we would refer to as a 'primary reinforcer'.

The key thing here is 'naturally enjoy', which means verbal praise is not a primary reinforcer - as we have to teach our learner to understand it - but grass, hay, treats, hard feed, social contact amongst others all are.

What is positive reinforcement and where does it come from?

Positive reinforcement is just one quadrant of an operant learning model which refers to the way learners receive, process and retain information. This type of learning is called “operant conditioning” (instrumental learning) and works on the learner building behaviour- consequence relationships/ associations.

Operant conditioning is normally attributed to B.F. Skinner, who based his work on Thorndikes Law of Effect (1898) and thought it best to understand behaviour

by looking at the causes and the consequences. The principle is that behaviours followed by pleasant consequences are likely to be repeated and behaviours followed by an unpleasant consequence are less likely to be repeated. Similarly, he found that behaviours that were followed by a positive outcome became strengthened and behaviours that were ignored faded.

Positive reinforcement is now utilised in all realms of animal training, from training tigers to consent and co-operate with blood draws to teaching horses how to do half-pass or stand for the farrier.



Caption

Okay, that's great! How do I get started?

When we first learn about how effective R+ training can be with our horses, it can be so tempting to grab a clicker, some carrots and jump right in and I totally encourage you to try! But first there are some points to consider:

- A) getting the right food for your horses
- B) teaching your horse to remain calm around food
- C) finding your smooth treat delivery
- D) spending time reading up and watching videos will give you a head start when it

comes to taking your new skills to the barn!

E) and lastly, just like when starting out on any new skill it's advisable to find an experienced professional to help you stay on the right track!

The new upcoming NAC courses take a deep dive into the science behind R+, how to start training with it and

achieve the best success rates as well as dispelling some common myths that surround it, and take you deep into the foundations and advanced nuances of R+.

So keep your eyes on your inboxes!



Just before you go!

Here's a quick run down of the learning theory quadrants:

Reinforcement works by **encouraging** behaviours to happen again.

Punishment works by **discouraging** behaviours from happening again.

Positive refers to **adding a stimulus** (be it reinforcer or punisher) before or after a behaviour is exhibited.

Negative refers to **removing a stimulus** (be it reinforcer or punisher) before or after a behaviour is exhibited.



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Quadrants of Operant Conditioning

Positive Reinforcement R+

An appetitive stimulus is added as a consequence of a desired behaviour to increase the likelihood of the behaviour repeating

Negative Reinforcement R-

An aversive stimulus is removed as a consequence of a desired behaviour to increase the likelihood of the behaviour repeating

Negative Punishment P-

An appetitive stimulus is removed as a consequence of an undesired behaviour to decrease the likelihood of the behaviour repeating

Positive Punishment P+

An aversive stimulus is added as a consequence of an undesired behaviour to decreased the likelihood of the behaviour repeating