

# The Four Categories of Operant Conditioning

## How to Classify Techniques in a Methodical Manner

**+**  
**Reinforcement**

Anything that increases the likelihood a behavior will occur again.

**Positive Reinforcement:**  
Adding something the animal wants in order to increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur again.



By giving the dog a treat when he sits, you increase the likelihood that he will sit next time.

**-**

**Negative Reinforcement:**  
Removing something aversive in order to increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur again.



By removing the aversive noise as soon as the dog is silent, you increase the likelihood that he will be silent again. Note that if the aversive is too high the dog may not perceive the exact instant when it is removed. As a result it may be difficult for him to understand what the desired behavior is\*.

**+**  
**Punishment**

Anything that decreases the likelihood a behavior will occur again.

**Positive Punishment:**  
Adding something aversive in order to decrease the likelihood that the behavior will occur again.



By adding a loud, aversive noise when the dog barks, you decrease the likelihood that he will bark again\*.

**-**

**Negative Punishment:**  
Removing something the dog wants in order to decrease the likelihood that the behavior will occur again.



By removing your attention when the dog jumps, you decrease the likelihood that he will jump again.

**Step 1:**  
Define the behavior.

**Step 2:**  
Decide whether you want to increase or decrease the behavior.

**Step 3:**  
Decide whether you are adding or subtracting something.

\*Note that Dr. Yin is not advocating aversive techniques. Rather, she is providing examples of the various categories of operant conditioning.

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**Dr. Sophia Yin, DVM, MS**  
*The Art and Science of Animal Behavior*

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