

Look at That (LAT)

Why this is useful for your dog to know

Some dogs show signs of fear, or go ballistic (barking, lunging and generally freaking out) when they see something exciting or scary. Although a lot of dogs display reactive behavior, it can be embarrassing at best and dangerous at worst. Implementing this “look at that” training plan will help dogs stay calm and safe in these situations.

Goal behavior

The dog will look at the trigger (whatever she is reactive toward) and then look back at the handler.

Before you start (documents available in Training Library):

- Read **Clicker/Marker Word** – get up-and-running with your marker
- Read **Thresholds** – become familiar with the variables that contribute to Thresholds
- **U-Turn (Let’s Go)** – practice with your dog

Foundation

Step 1: Decide on a sound (click), word (“Good” or “Yes”) or visual marker (thumbs up – useful for deaf dogs) that you’ll use to indicate to your dog that she’s doing something great and a treat will follow. *Note: You can start out teaching this with a clicker and verbal marker simultaneously, then fade the clicker. Read Clicker/Marker Word in training library.*

Step 2: To teach your dog that the marker always means a treat is coming, click the clicker or say the word and then give her a treat immediately. You can also toss the treat and click/mark just before she eats it. Do this repeatedly, until she looks expectantly at you whenever you use the marker. *Note: while you’re creating the association between the click and the treat, your dog **doesn’t** have to be doing anything specific, such as sitting.*

Practice

Step 3: Hold a familiar object, like a toy (not a toy he gets too excited about) or a random object, such as a shoe. Wiggle or move the object so your dog looks at it. Mark + treat. Practice this with 10-15 treats at a time, in 2-3 sessions. Do whatever you need to do with the object so your dog looks at it: change the position of your hand that holds the object, move it, squeak it (if it’s a squeaky toy), etc. You are trying to get your dog to look – even just glance – at the object so you can mark + treat. This step allows *you* to practice your timing and get your dog hooked on the game.

Insert Verbal Cue “Look at That” or “Check it Out”

In *SOME* cases, you might want to teach your dog a verbal cue to prompt him to check out something in his environment. This allows you to be proactive rather than have your dog be surprised (e.g. if your guest gets up to use the restroom and is returning).

1. Once your dog is good at Step 3, start saying “Check it Out” as you present the toy/object. Practice this with 10-15 treats at a time, in 2-3 sessions.
2. Switch toys/objects a few times so you can use the verbal cue in conjunction with a new item.
3. Practice this with 10-15 treats at a time, in 2-3 sessions.

Real Triggers

Step 4: Next, with the dog on leash, stand or sit at a distance from the trigger. You could be outside of a dog park (if your dog reacts to other dogs) or sitting in your living room (if your dog reacts to visitors). *You should be far enough away that your dog sees her trigger but isn't reacting. If you are using a verbal cue (“Check it Out”), use it now. As soon as she looks at the trigger, mark. She should turn toward you in anticipation of the treat.* When she does, give her the treat. Repeat 10-15 times.

If she does not turn toward you, either go back to Step 2 OR increase the distance between her and the trigger. *Note: This might be a good time to review Thresholds document.*

Up the Ante

Step 5: When she consistently looks at her trigger without reacting, test to see if she'll look back at you in anticipation of the marker and the treat after she looks at the trigger. Do this by withholding the click/marker for just a second longer than you normally would. This usually prompts a dog to look at you as if to say “Hellooo...I looked at the thing, where's my marker/treat?” If, after you withhold the marker and she looks at you, mark and then **give her 5 treats, one at a time, counting out loud as you give them to her**, e.g. “one, two, three...”. This is to create an obvious distinction between the reward associated with the trigger (Step 4) and the reward associated with looking at you.

Strengthening Threshold

Step 6: Gradually, one foot at time, decrease the distance between your dog and the trigger. Or, if you're working with people indoors, increase the Intensity of the trigger, e.g. person stands up, walks around, leaves room and re-enters, etc. *Note: as the intensity of the trigger increases, you will need to increase your rate of reinforcement, i.e. mark/treat more often.*

Continue using your marker and treats if she doesn't react. You may have to shift between Steps 4 and 5 as the distance decreases. If you see your dog starting to get concerned (body language), increase the distance between her and the trigger until she's no longer upset, and continue training. OR, if the trigger is becoming too intense, toss a few treats on the ground, say “Let's Go” and end the session.

Note: Review Thresholds in Training Library. Take into account Intensity and Duration in addition to Distance.

Tips

- Keep these training sessions short (7-10 minutes) and end the session on a good note (toss a few treats on the ground, congratulate your dog in a happy voice, etc.)
- If your dog goes over threshold and erupts, calmly say “Let’s Go” and move away until your dog can give you a simple behavior (hand target, sit) that you can mark/treat.

Proofing

Proofing means teaching the dog to generalize the behavior in different contexts.

It’s important to practice LAT often with your dog. When you first start, you will want to practice in the same environment, someplace that is low stress for your dog. If your dog is reactive toward other dogs, make sure that you are practicing with a calm non-reactive dog as the trigger.

Once your dog is consistently doing LAT successfully with the other dog, practice with dogs who are progressively more reactive (or in more intense environments, like outside a dog park where dogs are playing). Keep in mind you will need to adjust distance if the triggers are more intense. *See Thresholds document.*

Here’s the continuum of behavior of a dog from non-reactive to reactive:

- Calm, ignoring a dog (or other trigger)
- Calm, occasionally looking at a dog
- Calm, looking at a dog
- Calm, staring at a dog
- Pulling toward a dog
- Barking at a dog
- Lunging at a dog

You’ll also want to proof the behavior:

- With different people handling the dog
- With different levels of distraction
- In different places
- With different triggers (e.g. skateboards, trucks, kids, etc.)

Troubleshooting

As mentioned above, when you start training LAT, you’ll want to position your dog far enough away from the trigger so that she sees the trigger but doesn’t react to it. This is called being under threshold and it may take a little experimenting to find that place. So, start farther away than you think necessary and gradually move closer to the trigger.

If your dog is extremely reactive and you can’t find a distance from which she won’t react, ask your trainer about teaching the cue “Look” or “Watch Me” indoors first.



If a trigger comes upon you unexpectedly while you're training, and your dog starts to bark or lunge, say "Let's go" and do a U-Turn, moving away from the trigger until she's no longer upset. Once she's at a distance where she's not reacting, start doing LAT again or ask for behavior she already knows until you have regained her attention.

If you get stuck on any step, stop and take a break. When you try again, go back to the previous step in the plan. If necessary, create intermediate steps with intensity and duration that your dog is comfortable with. Don't rush: take it at the dog's speed. Keep in mind that it can take a long time to change deep-seated fears, so be patient.