

## Koehler Method

*"Reliability off lead should always be the most significant criterion when evaluating and comparing training methods."* - William Koehler

In 1910, years before Skinner's published work on operant conditioning, German dog trainer Colonel Conrad Most wrote *Training Dogs*, a manual that showed an understanding of operant conditioning. Most began training police dogs and eventually trained guide dogs for blind owners. William Koehler, the dog trainer who is most denigrated by the proponents of operant conditioning, began training military dogs, then shifted into training performance dogs in Hollywood and popularising dog training for the general public after World War II. Although Koehler introduced many training principles that are in use today in modified form, his harsh methods for resolving behaviour problems overshadow his positive contributions in the minds of many trainers.

Some trainers who followed Koehler adapted his negative-reinforcement methods to their own style; over the years negative reinforcement evolved into emphasis on positive reinforcement, and more gentle training methods emerged through the work of Clarence Pfaffenberger, William Campbell, Ian Dunbar, and Karen Pryor (for example, clicker training).

**Koehler believed that a dog's learned behaviour is an act of choice based on his own learning experience. When those choices are influenced by the expectation of reward, the behaviour will most likely be repeated. And, when those choices are influenced by the anticipation of punishment, they will most likely cease.**

In summary, training goes through the following process:

**Shaping:** Mechanical Placing → Desired behaviour → Praise

**Training:** Mechanical Placing + Command → Desired behaviour → Praise

**Training/Proofing:**

Desired behaviour → Praise  
Command → or  
Undesired behaviour → Correction → Desired behaviour →  
Praise

Credit for portions of this document to Tan Teck Woon of A Good Dog Training School – Affiliate member of AAPDT. Parts of this document have been excerpted from his essay Training Methods & Maxims as part of his Dog Training Instructor Course with Dog Obedience Guidance Systems of Australia (DOGS).

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