

## DEMONSTRATION of operant conditioning:



1. You will need: some willing chickens, two distinctly coloured cups (for example red and blue; black and white), and a tasty treat.

(Remember earlier I said that learning is affected by motivational state – well, if you offer a food item that isn't very exciting, you aren't going to motivate your chicken to perform, so use something they love! Also, don't try to teach them this when their mind is elsewhere – so don't take a broody hen off the nest for this, her mind is on incubating, not eating. Also, don't test a bird that has just eaten a big meal – her motivation for food treats will be very low!)

2. I am offering the treat under one cup, and either nothing, or stones, or plain chicken food under the other. I need to help my chicken discover what each cup is associated with, so I am going to put a treat near one of my cups.



3. Once she starts to notice that the treats are being put out, you'll see she quickly approaches the appropriate cup.

4. Now I'm going to hide the treat under the cup, if she doesn't try to knock it over, I might need to let her have a peek that the treat is under the cup, by propping the cup up with a stick or a stone.
5. Now I can put down both cups, and let's see if she can distinguish which cup to go to.
6. How about if I swap the position of the cups, has she learnt that it is the colour of the cup and not the position of the cup? It might take her a while to understand this, so I might need to swap the position of the cups until she understands the colour is the cue, not the location

So hopefully you can see that the hen has learnt that by performing a task (knocking over a cup) results in a reward (a tasty treat!) Think of some other things that you can teach chickens – generally they should incorporate natural behaviours (such as pecking, or scratching, or vocalising) to make your life easier. Post your ideas on the discussion forum!

