

## CATNIP: Positive Reinforcement

Teachers, in the hopes of building rapport, often use compliments or “positive reinforcement”. This approach frequently backfires with cats. This is due to three reasons. 1) The cat, on some level, knows that when a compliment is given that it is polite to return it. This is the exact kind of pressure a cat hates. The cat resents the entanglement that accompanies a compliment. 2) If a cat feels that a praise is undeserved, one actually LOSES credibility. 3) Finally, if the relationship isn’t high enough, the positive reinforcement won’t mean anything to a cat. With cats we must *earn* the right to give a compliment. Remember: the way to form a relationship with a cat is *indirectly*. Cats DO love feedback about themselves, but we have to be indirect when giving it. Give positive reinforcement to the cat indirectly by speaking about and gesturing to the cat while looking at the class, or by sandwiching inside dialogue between you and the cat.

Choose a dog student in your classroom. List a compliment you would like to give this student:

**Recommended:** (we avoid least recommended for dogs, because remember, teasing a dog produces a mean dog)

Give the compliment directly to the dog student, with full eye contact and approachable body language and voice pattern. Describe the reaction:

Choose a cat student in your classroom. List a compliment you would like to give a “cat” student:

***Least Recommended:***

Try giving the compliment directly to the cat student, with full eye contact and approachable body language and voice pattern. Describe the reaction:

***Recommended:***

Try sandwiching the compliment inside dialogue or giving positive reinforcement to the cat without eye contact while speaking to the group. Describe the reaction: