



THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR SCENT WORK

Choose the right scent for you and your dog. Just like people dogs have aversions to some scents. Notice your dog's reaction to each scent. Remember their noses are stronger than ours and they only need a minute amount of scent for a second or two to get the "scent". If they pull away don't bring them back, they've probably "got it". If you and your dog complete all the scent discrimination badges your dog will have learned to find a minimum of four scents plus your own.

Is the dog interested in scent work? Test your dog's interest in scent work by hiding his favorite toy, treat or family member. Initially hide it while he's watching where he can see it, then while he's watching where he can't see it, then once he understands the "game", hide it in places his nose will find it. If you do not see interest at first DO NOT give up. With the right incentive and motivation most dogs will come to love some form of scent work.

Components of training for scent work

There are three different components to this training:

- 1) The dog has to learn what scent you want him to find. (Imprinting Odor)
- 2) The dog has to find the scent (Find or Search - Scent Cone - Alert)
- 3) The dog has to learn some way to let you know the scent has been found by an alert followed by an indication to the odor. (Indication)

IMPRINTING ODOR: There are many ways to imprint odor. It is often beneficial to imprint in a shotgun approach...using multiple methods creates built in generalization. Generalization makes the imprinted odor, and even behaviors for that matter, stronger. Imprinting odor is traditionally done by pairing odor with food or a toy.

Wooden Spoon Method: We can get quicker success by using a scented wooden spoon. Place one (& only one!) drop of clove oil (or scent of your choice) on the convex side of a wooden spoon. Allow to dry overnight. Only allow your dog to touch the side WITHOUT the oil, so the dog does not saturate their nose with target odor. That's a quick way to poison this behavior. Teach targeting by holding the spoon parallel to the ground at nose level to your dog. Your dog will naturally want to explore the spoon by sniffing it. As your dog targets the spoon on the concave side, click and treat. Again, do NOT let your dog touch the side with the oil on it! Repeat. Most clicker savvy dogs will pick it up very quickly. If you present it and the dog does not move toward it, put the spoon behind your back, re-present, and slowly move back from you dog, drawing it in. Reinforce the touch with a click and treat. You can even reset, tossing the cookie away, so the dog repeats the behavior with increased drive. You are looking for this increased driving to the source. It will help you in the long run and it's fun for the dog. There is no need to put this behavior on cue. Some use Scent, Find Scent. You can certainly add a sit or down, after the nose touch, and before the click/treat, but it is not necessary. You can extend the length of time for the touch or require multiple nose touches before marking the behavior. Once the dog is offering the trained behavior, you can add a "Show Me" cue, to get your dog to re-engage or pinpoint source.

Wooden Spoon Method (Part 2): Here's another exercise to develop your dog's ability to search. Place the handle of the spoon in the ground, and have your dog indicate the scent at its source, gradually



varying the distance from the point you release. Then ask the dog to search. Increase the difficulty of the exercise by placing multiple unscented dummy sticks and ask the dog to discriminate which stick is hot. Once you achieve success with this exercise, remove the hot stick from the field and place a random scented object out so the dog relates to the significance of the odor, not just a scented stick. Remember, progression should not be made as a staircase, but on a variable schedule. Continuing to require the dog to do something harder with each repetition will push the dog to failure.

Tube Method: Reward your dog for showing interest in the tube. If they are not comfortable with the tube or show no interest take it away and bring it back. Once comfortable with the tube add the scent to the tube. As your dog puts their nose near the bottom of the tube send the treat from the top down the tube. Each time the dog's nose goes near the tube they get rewarded with the click and treat down the tube. As you play this game the dog will tend to keep their nose in the hole to get more treats. Increase duration and distance. This is a good way to get your "alert behavior", like a down. The longer you play the game they get tired and lay down, jackpot & put it away till next time.

It's your choice game: Offer a scent odor contained in a scent container in one hand while you hold a treat in the other. Dog only gets the treat if he chooses to nose/bite at the scented item – progress to open treat hand for dogs that already know Susan Garrett's self control game (hand with treats closes if dog chooses treats of scent odor). To reward dog, move treat hand over the scent odor hand. So dog learns to stay at the scent odor and wait for the reward to be delivered. Treat hand returns to original position if dog leaves the scent odor hand to try to get the reward early. End the session when all treats have been delivered. Play this game a couple of times over 5 days, use can use a different scent odor for each session. Periodically give your dog a jackpot for a correct response and do less repetitions in that session.

The Squeeze game: Attach a scent to the back of a target plate. Place the target plate on the floor at the end of a hallway. Start off close to the plate and step back further each time. Release your dog to go to the target plate, follow in and reward once your dog reaches the plate – feed treats on the plate. How far away can you start from the plate and successfully send your dog to the target? Don't lead your dog to the plate (so don't increase distance too soon) – the goal is to encourage and allow your dog to move ahead of you and to build confidence in moving into narrower spaces, followed by being rewarded at the source of odor.

The Big Squeeze game: Add a couple of pieces of furniture or large objects to block the direct path, your dog must now climb over or go around or between them to reach the plate. Be sure to include 2 objects that narrow the path to the target plate. Play this game a couple of times re-configuring the furniture / objects each time, but leaving the plate in its original location.

Whichever method you use Look for some indication that your dog is starting to pair the smell of the scent odor with treats, so they are more inclined to pause at the source of that odor to see if treats are forthcoming. Working on building a history of reinforcement, if you jump into searches before teaching your dog what they are searching for, you're setting yourself up for failure.

TIP: Never pull your dog away from scent. If he continues to go back to it, he is getting that the scent has value, reward big time with a jackpot. Ultimately you want your dog to stay on odor no matter what you do. To get them away either have a helper take the scent away or lure them away with a reward.



BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN THE ENVIRONMENT: Not all dogs respond to environmental obstacles with the same level of confidence. We can build confidence by using training puzzles. Puzzles are usually done indoors where the leash can be removed, and the dog can move unencumbered. A puzzle is an obstacle or series of obstacles that require the dog to climb, over, go around, run through, crawl under, and/or knock down, to get to food, first, and then (as the dog becomes more comfortable) target odor. Puzzles should be simple enough for success and easy to change if you need to alter difficulty in the middle of the exercise. At the same time, they must be hard enough to create “good” stress (see Glossary of Terms). Items used for creating puzzles could be small cones that the dog must knock over to get to source, stackable platforms that the dog has to climb on, or that can have a foldable tabletop (legs retracted) set across so a dog has to crawl under to get to source. How about piles of newspaper that are spread out over scent source or food, so a dog must dig through them? When your dog is working puzzles to source, require an indication as your behavior to reinforce. Sitting or even focusing on source can be a challenge on a wobbly surface, when the source is out of reach, etc.

INDICATION BEHAVIORS: The behavior you have your dog do to indicate the target has been found is up to you. There are several behaviors to choose from. Some are known as “passive” alerts in which the dog gets still and doesn’t risk harm to the target or its surroundings. This includes sit, down, focused staring or sustained nose targeting (putting nose on the target area and keeping the nose there until released). Others are known as “Active” or “aggressive” alerts and involve the dog engaging in some sort of action such as digging or barking at the hiding place. These “active” indications may not work if you are planning on doing competitive scentwork or if searching for bombs 😊 .

You may pick your dog’s favorite of the above possibilities or just pick one at random or based on the scent you are using and train that. If your dog rarely barks, you may not want to try to teach a bark alert. If your dog doesn’t usually use his paws, then a scratch alert might not be the right choice. But you want to know which you plan to use when you start this training.

Teaching the indication then find – Steve White, a police K-9 trainer that uses operant conditioning, teaches the passive alert behavior of sit right from the start. The way he does this is to use the target scent as a cue for the indication behavior. The dog knows it has to sit to get the click and it learns that it has to first target the scent before it can sit. So this method teaches the dog both the indication behavior as well as the desire to search.

You can see a video of this on his website here: <http://i2ik9.com/video.htm>
It’s the one titled “Search, Locate, Report”.

Get the behavior – You start by cuing the sit for a few repetitions. Then you have the dog touch the scent article and cue the sit. You’ll click the sit and reward. Repeat multiple times.

When the dog gets in the habit of touching the offered item and then sitting, drop the verbal cues and repeat several times.

Scent wheel – Then he introduces a “scent wheel” which allows quick repetition while still moving the scent to a “new location”. This can be made with clean cans with lids, pill bottles, film canisters or any



other container you can close and attach to a wheel. You could also just toss several identical containers on the ground, with only one that contains the target scent. At first, the target scent paper or cloth bag or whatever holds the scent will be visible so the dog can “cheat” a bit to find it (don’t reward a retrieve though!) When the dog sniffs the target scent container, cue the sit. Repeat till the dog no longer needs you to verbally cue the sit, then repeat several more times!

Out of sight – Next add the cover (with a hole) on the target scent container so it is identical to all the others. Now the dog HAS to use his nose to locate the right container. Be sure the container has some sort of mark so YOU know which is correct! Click/reward when the dog locates the correct scent and offers the indication behavior. Repeat several times. When you know the dog will correctly do this chain of behaviors, you can add the “go search” cue of your choice as you send the dog to find the scent.

After several repetitions, add YOUR find into the chain before you reward. When the dog does the indication, you get the target out of the container and get really excited- “What did you find?! Oh LOOK! How cool! Good dog!” Because when neither of you knows where the target is you’ll need to verify the find before you reward the dog. And the dog will be more likely to try to help YOU find the item if he knows that’s what it takes for you to reward him. :-) You can even ask the dog for another nose bump at this stage to help mark the item location and keep the dog’s focus on the item till it’s in your hand.

Add Distractions – Once your dog is successfully finding and indicating the scent, add a distraction one at a time (toy, food, a room you recently cooked in, gradually add whatever it is your dog really wants).

On the road – When the dog is successful and quick with that, you can start hiding the scent (visible to the dog) in locations around the environment. At first, the dog will see where you hide it and be able to see the item in its “hiding” spot. The dog should go to the item, touch it with his nose and offer the indication behavior. If this doesn’t happen in that order, go back and repeat previous steps. You can still get excited over the find and ask for a re-touch.

The next step is to hide it from view when the dog can’t see you. At the end of Steve’s video, you’ll see him doing some directed searching of a vehicle. Steve knows where the item is, but the dog doesn’t. Even though Steve moves away from the vehicle, the dog does the indication behavior.

True search – The last step is to have someone else hide the item so neither you or the dog knows where it is.

Trouble shooting – If your dog has trouble with this, verify that there is not some weird air current happening by trying a new location. Be sure you are using directed searching so you don’t miss a spot. If the dog still doesn’t indicate or offers random indications, you’ll need to go back and work on previous steps. Also be sure that when you know where the item is that you aren’t doing anything that might cue the dog to the location. Let the dog find it while you stay still and quiet to be sure the dog isn’t just cuing off you. Then practice with you doing directed searching with your focus on continuing to direct the search even after the dog finds the target. Having the dog choose the indication behavior when you are telling the dog to keep searching is a form of “intelligent disobedience”. This can be hard for some



dogs to do, so be sure to practice it when you know where the item is and heavily reward when the dog disregards your “look here” signal and offers the indication behavior instead.

Focus on target – It may help your dog stay focused on the target scent after the find if the reward is delivered at or on the scent location. You can also withhold the click until the dog is offering the indication behavior AND looking at the target. And adding in your find of the item will help too. It will help you locate the target object (when you don’t know where it is) if the dog maintains eye contact with it’s location until released. If you miss a quick bump and the dog sits back from the hiding place and looks at you, where do you look for the item? If instead the dog is boring a hole in the location with his eyes, it helps narrow your search :-). Check out this video for an example of intense “focus” (because the reward happens AT the target scent): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfYaoWfV7HI> (Part 1 of this video shows the use of a training aid that is remote controlled and pops the reward up for the dog. But the same focus can be achieved if that’s what you reward from early on.)

Scratching – You get what you reward, so if you don’t want the dog to scratch the hiding place, simply don’t reward any scratching or move the dog away from the hiding spot and then let him approach again or hold the dog just out of reach of any “scratchable” surface. Depending on the target item, scratching/digging may injure or frighten a live target, cause crime scene damage, structure collapse or could cause an explosive to detonate. Drug dogs are the ones most often taught an active alert.