

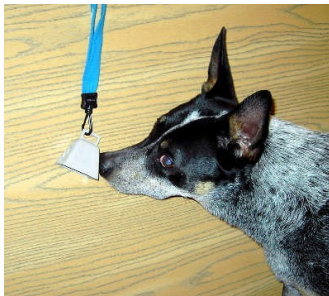
Targeting

Beyond basic “Touch”:

Teaching your dog to make contact with something using a designated body part or signal is not hard to do, but sometimes offers more of a challenge. Targeting has many uses, both fun and functional. Many of the targeting exercises are below. Special thanks to Virginia Broitman who, at the Clicker Expo in Ohio, introduced me to the many ways various types of targeting can be used.

NOSE TOUCH

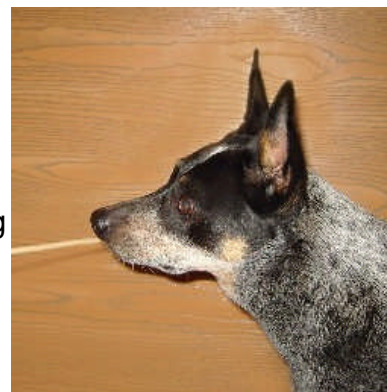
This is the easiest to get and has many uses. Some of these include touch lights, moving the dog, getting his/her attention, over coming fear, hitting agility contact zones and just for fun.



To start, offer the palm of your hand to the dog, be ready to click because odds are he will investigate it. As soon as he touches it (or sniffs at it for more timid dogs) click and follow it immediately with a reward. Repeat this again several times. If the dog does not move to your hand when it's offered, take your hand up, wait a few seconds and try again. If the dog just simply is not interested, try putting a treat between your fingers or dabbing some peanut butter on your palm. Still click for nose touches, not mugging your hand for the food. Most dogs catch onto this game quickly. Don't forget to do this with your other hand as well.

Once the dog is reliably offering the touch to your hand, say the cue before you start to offer your hand. Don't cue and offer at the same time, the dog will only pay attention to the hand movement and not what you are saying. By saying the cue before you move, the dog will start to anticipate that the hand is about to be offered when he hears the cue. Thus he will learn what desired behavior the cue predicts and will bring him a reward.

Once the dog is touching your hands on cue, switch to another object. Start the same way you did with your hand – offer, touch/sniff, click, reward. Don't use the touch cue till the dog is reliably offering the behavior with this item. Once you go through these steps with a few different items or surfaces, your dog will have a better understanding of the fact that



“touch” means to bump his nose on the indicated object.

HOLD YOUR NOSE

If you want to get a “sticky touch” – in other words, the dog puts his nose on the target and leaves it there, you have a few options for teaching this. I recommend you go through the steps above first, with a few different objects so the dog understands the foundation behavior. To teach the dog to keep his nose on target you have three options:

1. Instead of a single bump, wait for two bumps before you click/reward. Then, once the dog is giving 2 bumps, wait for three. Once the dog is consistently giving three bumps, try to get the dog to do the bumps faster by clicking/rewarding him for faster bumps and only offering verbal praise for the slower ones. You may have to take this in REALLY small steps to increase the speed. The idea is that once the dog understands that the bumps should be fast, he may “merge” the bumps together, resulting in a longer nose to target behavior that you can then click/reward.
2. “Shape” the nose touching behavior into a stronger and stronger touch. Do this by clicking the touches that are a bit stronger/harder than previous touches. The idea is that the dog will keep his nose on target a few fractions of a second longer when doing a harder bump and you can then click and shape that into a longer hold. You can “model” what you want by holding your hand on the dog’s nose for a split second longer when he does the touch.
3. My favorite way is to use a combined cue. Give the touch cue and then a stay or wait cue. This should work well for dog that has learned both cues reliably. The idea is that they will understand you want them to touch and then “stay” during the touch.

The “sticky touch” can be helpful when you are using “modifier cues” like “move right” or “move down” to direct the dog where you want them to be. They could target onto a rug on the floor and stick their nose there, then you say “move right” and they move their nose to the right and stay there. By doing this, you could move them over to a specific target you want them to bring, like a specific toy or even the phone. It can also be used to move the dog- he sticks his nose to your hand and wherever your hand goes, the dog goes.

It has been shown that using a targeting behavior to get the dog to move can help get them to go where they are too nervous to go otherwise. It also helps horses that are fearful of going into a trailer if they are thinking about the targeting instead of the dark horse eating monster they are walking into. The dog can target to your hand during agility for turns or direction or to a target placed at the base of a contact zone. With repetition, the dog will learn to look for the target to hit in the contact and won’t jump over the zone, even after the target is removed. You can fade the size of the target till it becomes the end of the contact that you want to be targeted. Great for keeping the dog’s head down over the A frame too.

Nose bumps can turn on/off a touch light and when combined with a “paws up” can be used on light switches as well. You can use the hand touch to focus or calm the dog. You may even be able to use the touch cue in place of a recall for a dog that gets loose and runs (when they stop and look at you), but don’t rely on this too often. Getting the dog to attempt a high target can teach the dog a nice “jump” for dancing/freestyle routines. You can use target to teach lots of other behaviors like “spin,” “heel,” “up,” “off,” etc. and it can give a reactive dog an alternative behavior to acting like a maniac when he sees another dog.

FRONT PAW TOUCHES

These are taught in a very similar way to the nose touches, except that the dog is using his paw instead of his nose. The use of the paw can be used for activating handicapped door openers, wiping the dog’s front feet (teach a paw “swipe” on a towel on the floor or wall.) Teaching “paws up” to get the dog to deliver items to you without you needing to bend over (like a dropped leash or pen) or to place objects on raised surfaces, or even getting the dog to trim his own nails using paw swipes on a board with sand paper attached!



REAR PAW TOUCHES

These are a bit more challenging to teach because most dogs don’t even know they HAVE back feet! They don’t consciously think about what their back feet are doing until you teach them how.



You can start this in a location where the footing surface changes (solid surface to carpet, or place a mat on the floor that is different than the floor surface (hard plastic on carpet or carpet on a solid surface.)

With the dog facing you, move toward the dog so he backs up. Click when the dog’s back feet are on the new surface. After several repetitions, try to reduce your movement till you are able to stand still and have the dog offer the behavior of back up to the other

surface. Now move a bit farther away from the other surface. At first, the dog is probably going to back up only the number of steps he first did. The dog thinks the behavior is back up x number of steps. He hasn’t realized that the surface is different yet. By gradually increasing the distance by one more step, he will learn that the click happens when he reaches the other surface, regardless of how many steps it takes. Once that light bulb goes on, you can switch up the

surfaces and then make the target area a bit smaller. You could get the behavior on a throw rug, then a placemat. If the dog offers a paw swipe/kick you can use that as a paw cleaning behavior, or name it "Toro" and use it as a cute trick like Virginia did in the example video :-). You can also use this "kick" behavior on the sandpaper board to file the dog's back nails.

You can also teach the dog a handstand with his back feet on the wall by gradually increasing the height of the target surface. Start with a block of wood, then go to 2 blocks, then a step/stair, then a board angled on the wall (make sure it's secure), then use just the wall. Not sure if this would be a useful behavior, but it's awfully cute! It could be used as a behavior in the game C.A.T. where one team offers a behavior and the other team has to copy it. If they can't copy, they get a letter. Game ends when the word CAT is spelled :-).

Depending on your dog's actions while he is targeting or learning to target, you may get other interesting behaviors you can put on cue, like the dog hiking his back leg while searching for the raised target :-).

SIDESTEPS

Teaching your dog to touch a target with its side can lead to several interesting possibilities- teaching heel by targeting to your leg, having a dog fearful of being touched or picked up willingly allowing it, cool freestyle dance moves, finite maneuverability of your dog (even at a distance) and more!

Start by desensitizing your dog to having your hand next to his side. Most dogs, when you try to hold your hand next to them, will turn to check it with their nose or will move away from it. So your first clickable criterion is the dog standing still while your hand is next to the dog. If at any time the dog bumps into your hand with his side, even if by accident, click/reward the contact! If the dog is not touching you, you can try touching the dog's side and clicking for a few repetitions. It's possible the dog will then try to touch your hand to get you to click. You can also get the dog to target something placed near his head on the side opposite your hand. By turning the head to the right for example, the dog's body curves out to the left (and into your hand.) You could also enlist the help of another person who will move toward the dog causing the dog to step away from them and into your hand. Mix up the ways you are getting the dog to make contact and the dog should start to get the idea that it's the contact with the hand that is the "constant" factor in the click. Once that happens, the "light bulb" will go on in the dog's head and he will actively move into your hand to get the click. When that is happening reliably each time you offer your hand, you can name it by saying the cue just before you move your hand to the dog's side. I suggest you name this one thing and the other hand/side something different. That way, you can use the cues to position your dog to either the left or right later, even if your hand is not present.

TAIL TARGETING

Having the dog learn to target with his tail can be useful for desensitizing that to touch, getting the dog to back up (even in a circle when the target is moved away in an arc as the dog is trying to touch it,) cool freestyle moves, other tail movements (“happy,” “sad,” etc.) once the dog realizes it HAS a tail :-)

The training steps for this weren’t explained during the expo, so what follows is from my head :-) I would start with a target that is long and at the dog’s tail height. Some dog’s can use a coffee table; others may need to have a target constructed out of PVC or something. If you go through some desensitizing steps (so the dog accepts the target being held behind him) you could hold a target behind the dog (or have a helper hold it.)

For dogs with a long tail, you may be able to start by having the dog wag his tail into an object or surface. This may be a less threatening way to start for shy dogs or dog’s sensitive about their tail. If they are hesitant to touch something like a nearby wall with their tail, you may need to “think outside the box” and set them up to succeed by creating a “chute” (walls on each side close enough that contact is inevitable) or if the dog likes agility, have the dog about to exit the tunnel, block that exit and click for tail wagging (created by happy talk) inside the tunnel. Gradually allow more and more of the dog out of the tunnel (into a chute?) until just the tail is inside and touching the sides.

Once the dog is comfortable with this, move to the steps below:

For all dogs, but especially dog’s with stub tails, you’ll need a target directly behind the dog, so you will likely need some desensitizing to that first. Once you have the dog accepting of a target behind him, move toward the dog to get him to lean or step back and touch the target. You may need to move the target into contact with his tail a few times first (& click that) to teach the dog that touching the target won’t end their life :-) Gradually lessen the movement you need to make until the dog is backing into the target as soon as it’s presented. When you reach that point, you can add the cue right before you move the target into place. Now change to a different target to help the dog generalize to any target placed behind him and to the cue that means “touch it with your tail.”

LOOK AT THAT!

Teaching a dog to target something with his eyes is not hard. Why would you want to? Well, think of the photography possibilities! You can get the shot of the dog’s profile, or have the dog sitting one direction and his eyes looking in another direction (appearing to be looking at anything you desire) when in reality he is looking at the target object. These are things found on the “pho-dog-raphy” badge requirements. Note: You’re



dog will need to know how to 'stay' with distractions before you start this.

To teach the "look", starting with the dog's favorite thing is easiest. This usually means food or a favorite toy. Click the dog for following the object with his eyes without moving his body. Then set the object near by, but out of reach and click the dog for looking at it. Gradually require more of a head turn while the dog maintains his body position.

It helps if the dog's reward IS the object he desires. You want to build the amount of time the dog looks at the favorite object (so later you have time to set up the rest of the photo shot.) Once you have a nice long "look" behavior, you can add the cue just before you place the object. Be sure you are varying the placement of the object to get the dog to look in different directions with more and less head turn. You can even place the dog up on a surface like a bed or chair or agility table and place the object below the dog so he has to look down. Great for editing in other items below the dog in the photo :-)

Once you have the duration, which you have built up gradually (or get automatically if it's a Golden retriever LOL) then you're ready to transfer the behavior to another object (required for the badge.) Start by putting the other object beside the first target object and do a few repetitions.

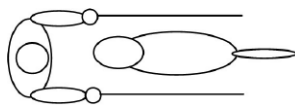
Then hide the first object behind or inside the new object (as much as possible.) Since the dog will still be getting the desired object, he shouldn't lose the behavior at this step. The next step is to only place the new object (you can fake placing the first object if it's small.) This time, the desired object will come from you, not the target location. Be careful that after a few repetitions of this, the dog isn't looking at you because you have the reward. If you work through these steps gradually so the dog understands the behavior, this shouldn't be a problem. You can go through these steps with various objects so the dog understands the "look" means stare at what I place till I tell you to stop.

FIND MY EYES

This was a cool exercise we were able to practice in the learning lab at the Clicker Expo. The dog was taught to move in relation to where the handler was looking. So the dog would be maintaining eye contact with the handler, but would move from side to side (or even in a full circle) based on where the person's eyes were. The dog moved to maintain eye contact with the person. This would be great for anyone teaching their dog freestyle dancing. I'm going to expand on what I learned at the Expo and explain how I would teach it. Your dog will need to have a solid "watch me" behavior on cue that means give me eye contact till told to do something else. If you go to the "[Scout Class](#)" page of the troop website, the training steps for basic eye contact are one of the first things explained on that page at this website: www.DogScoutTroop107.com

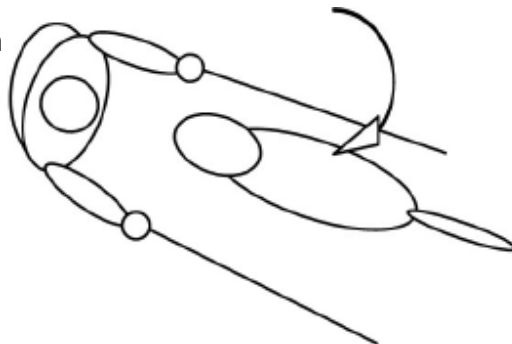
Start with a piece of wooden dowel (available at most hardware or craft stores), you could actually use any lightweight object about 2 or 3' long. You'll eventually need two of them (one for each hand.)

Start with one dowel, hold it out at arm's length in front of you and teach the dog to step away from it when it's placed beside him. Start with just one step away from it and gradually increase the expected number of steps the dog takes to the side while maintaining eye contact with you. Note: If you have already taught the dog to target with his side, you can have the dog move into the poles instead of away from them.

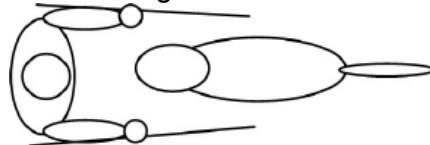


Once the dog is moving away from the dowel moved toward his side, move it to his other side and work on the dog moving the other direction. Once the dog is moving away from the dowel when it's on his left or right side, you can introduce the 2nd dowel. You will have a dowel in each hand now, one on either side of the dog. Obviously you'll either need a mouth generated click or an assistant.

Now you should be able to get the dog to move to his right or left by moving the dowel closer to one side to elicit movement from the dog. Throughout each of these steps, till the end, your shoulders, upper body and head needs to be moving as a single unit by turning from your waist to move the dowels, not just moving your arms. If your arms are off to your right, then your shoulders, eye contact and face should also be to the right. Click for sideways movement from the dog that is paired with eye contact.



Now shorten the dowels or hold them closer to the middle (with the ends sticking out behind you) in an effort to "fade" their use. Repeat the practice of moving the dog to the left and right while clicking for combined movement and eye contact.



Next, use just your extended arms to get the dog to move while maintaining eye contact. Be sure your shoulders are moving your arms, which should be stiff, not flowing. Then bend your elbows and use these "shorter arms."

Next, try moving just your shoulders, head and eye contact with your arms at your sides. Gradually fade the movement of your shoulders while continuing to use your eye contact/head turn to move the dog. You can add in distance by

using a barrier such as a fence or combine a “back up” cue with the shift of eye contact or see if tossing the reward away from you will get the dog to work at a greater distance (since that’s where the reward is anyway.)

WHAT’S THAT SMELL?

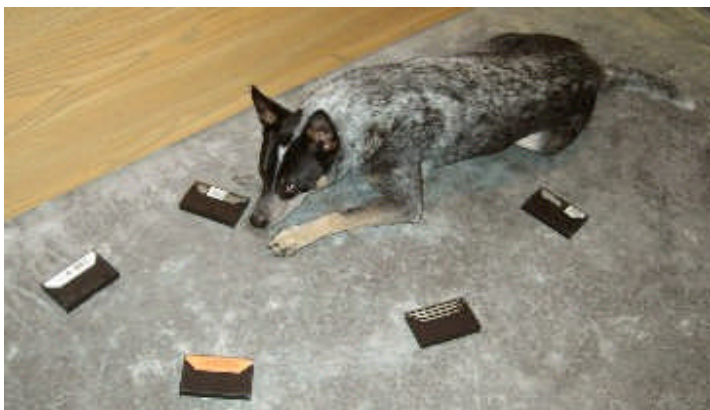
Getting your dog to target to a specific scent is not a hard thing to do. Drug, bomb and contraband dogs do this all the time. This is often used for animal actors that have to “find their mark” (place to stand/ sit/ whatever) because the scent doesn’t show up on the film. You can use it to teach your dog to find a specifically scented object. You could teach your dog to find things like termites, gun powder (to simulate certain explosives,) gas leaks (using the scratch n’ sniff cards provided by the gas company) or even just a certain spice or fragrance just for fun.

For dangerous items (and things you don’t want to escape, like termites) you can put the item in a cloth bag and place that inside a piece of PVC pipe that has holes in it and caps on both ends. This allows the scent to get out, but the dog can’t ingest it. If your dog likes to tug, you can add a strap through a hole drilled in one of the end caps that you then glue onto the tube. Wrap the tube in a wash cloth and tie it on with twine. The tube then becomes a tug toy the dog gets for finding it! Instead of the strap, you can make the toy/tube long enough for you to hold on either side of the dog’s mouth. If you are using a harmless scent like a spice or the gas smell (yes that scent is harmless but the gas it’s used to scent is not) you can rub it onto a store bought cloth tug toy and use that as the article to be found.

First you need to decide what behavior you want from the dog when he finds the source of the scent. Drug dogs often scratch and bark at the hiding spot, bomb dogs for obvious reasons are more sedate and often sit or lie down, you could teach the dog a “sticky target” described above or some other fun behavior like spin. This will be called the “alert behavior.”

Start with a few repetitions of the desired “alert” behavior in different locations around the room.

Next, combine the alert behavior with the target article. Offer the scented article, cue a “touch”, the dog sniffs, cue the alert behavior, click/reward. Do this until the dog no longer needs the touch or alert behavior to be cued. The scented article presentation becomes the cue for touch and then the alert behavior.



Coyote indicates the correct scented cassette tape container by laying down and putting his nose near it.

Now you can “hide” the article in plain sight. Let the dog see you place the article in different locations (on the floor, on a raised surface, under something (but still visible.) Walk the dog to the target location; cue the touch and then the alert behavior. Repeat till these don’t need to be cued and you can be farther from the target object when you send the dog to do these behaviors.

Now the dog is ready to start using his nose. The object shouldn’t be visible when it’s hidden now. The first few times, you can let the dog see you hide it, but progress quickly to having the object hidden without the dog looking. Starting with previously used hiding spots can help the dog succeed. Progress gradually to more difficult placements.

Steve White has an excellent video of this process on his website:

<http://www.i2ik9.com/video.htm>

It’s titled “Search, Locate, Report.”

WHAT’S THAT NOISE?

Dogs trained for hearing impaired people target to sounds all the time. If you use an alarm to wake up, odds are your dog has learned that alarm means their potty break and breakfast are not far off :-). They may even jump on you to “remind” you the alarm went off! Sound targeting is simply pairing a targeting behavior with a specific sound. For hearing impaired people, this is used for the telephone, doorbell, alarms, timers, someone calling the person’s name, sirens, etc. You may need these alerts from your dog, or you may just want to teach this for fun.

Start with the dog near the object generating the sound, if you can have it in your hand so you can “present it” for the target behavior that’s good. If not, teach the dog to target other objects first, then transfer the behavior to the stationary object using the touch cue. You can’t exactly “present” the oven when the cooking timer goes off! :-). Once the dog is targeting the object, cause it to create the sound and ask the dog to touch. Only reward the touches that happen during the sound (or immediately afterward for short duration sounds.)

Once the dog understands that it’s the sound that is the touch cue, you can work on distance. Start a step or two away from the object and gradually build the distance the dog has to travel to get to the item, then get back to you for the reward. It’s important for hearing dog work that the dog comes to the person to let them know there’s a sound that needs their attention. An alert behavior would be taught first and trained into these steps in a similar manner as the scent

targeting. Training chain would be “sound-go to target-go to handler- alert behavior- handler rewards the dog and takes dog in training back to the sound for another reward” As the dog becomes more proficient, some of those steps disappear until it becomes: “sound- dog goes to handler- alert behavior- runs to sound- handler follows and gives reward.” For most sounds, it wouldn’t hurt if the dog kept the initial target to the object in the chain. For sounds like a fire alarm, that step needs to be eliminated to get the info to the person as soon as possible. These sounds often get a different alert behavior to signal that it’s a danger signal and the dog then targets to a door.

So that’s targeting behavior. What can you do with it and where can you and your dog go with the training?

VIDEOS:

The following videos are (c) 2007 Madison Moore All rights reserved

"I don't know if you are familiar with the breed, but Italian greyhounds are not known for their working/obedience intelligence. I have many of them in my south Florida classes and can attest to this assessment. Jack has been clicker-trained his entire life so he is an unusual representative of his breed. If you would like to refer any of your scout troop members to any of the videos, you may. Just credit Jack's website where you will find these and over twenty others."

Cheers,

Madison Moore and Jack --

a clicker-trained

toy-breed mobility

service dog.

See Jack at work:

www.jumpinjackomo.com

[Go stand in the corner: \("sticky" targeting\)](#)

This was filmed on only our third repetition of putting all the parts together for this trick. You can see Jack think it over a bit before he heads off to the corner. He pauses to consider what I've asked for again when he gets there. Eventually, the nose just goes and sticks.

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/standincorner.wmv>

[Bang!](#)

This started out as shoulder-targeting and as I worked on developing it without any real idea of where it would go, I eventually got a robust flop to the floor and this idea began to form in my head. (You can see that Jack enjoys acting.)

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/bang.wmv>

[Go hide in the box:](#)

Because targeting has been so happily reinforced, Jack just gave me this nose-touch to the corner of the box while playing "101 things to do with a card board box" one day. It was so hysterical that I decided to give it a cue phrase.

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/hideinbox.wmv>

[Are you sad?](#)

Nose targeting.

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/areyousad.wmv>

[Who's the Alpha dog?](#)

In this video, Jack is attempting to touch the top of his head to the floor. This one was filmed on the second session of developing all the parts of the trick. (You can see that I was still providing a signal prompt.)

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/alphadog2.wmv>

[Say your prayers](#)

Paws and nose targeting, filmed in the very early stages.

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/prayers1.wmv>

[Jack's Best Pitbull Impersonation](#)

This started out as nose-targeting to a small plush ball. After a few repetitions, I held the ball at his mouth until Jack got the idea that perhaps I wanted him to take it. I captured the mouth opening at the presentation of the ball

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/betterpitbull.wmv>

[Pitbull the early stages](#)

(this is the first film I made of the behavior). I faded the ball and kept working until I caught a little of the front teeth, some body movement and some mouth sounds. Jack usually does not show his teeth so this always makes me laugh out loud.

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/pitbull2.wmv>

[Where's Jack?](#)

Paw targeting.

<http://www.jumpinjackomo.com:80/video/wheresjack.wmv>

More videos can be found at: <http://www.jumpinjackomo.com>

Thank you to Madison and Jack for sharing their videos!