



Teaching Target

If I could teach only one behavior, it would be targeting.

Targeting is any behavior in which you ask your dog to touch or align a body part to some object or other discernible mark.

Is your dog offering eye contact? That's a form of targeting, as your dog is aligning her eyes with your own. Will she lie down on her mat, on cue? This is another form of targeting, as she's placing her body in a specific location, or on a specific object, her mat.

One of the most common forms of targeting is the nose-to-hand target. Your dog touches her nose to your hand, and the moment you feel the nose on your hand you mark this behavior with either a clicker or a verbal marker.

You can introduce targeting in this way:

1. Choose a hand position that you want to mean "target" to your dog, being careful that it doesn't look like other hand signals you might use in training. Some possibilities are:
 - A flat hand held with your palm forward so that your dog can easily touch your palm
 - A hand with two fingers extended together for easy touching
 - A closed hand
2. Hold your hand a few inches away from your dog's nose, and a little to the side or below so that you're not pressing your hand into her space.
3. Wait for your dog to notice and touch your hand with her nose.
4. Mark with a clicker or word the moment you feel your dog's nose on your hand.
5. Give your dog a treat.

Here are some next steps:

6. Add a Cue:

When your dog is reliably touching your hand with her nose, add the cue "Touch".

 - Say the word "Touch", as you present your hand.
 - When she touches your hand with her nose, Click (or use your verbal marker) and follow the click with a Treat.

- If she doesn't touch your hand with her nose, present your hand at a smaller distance without saying the cue, and when she is reliably touching again at the smaller distance, begin again to add the cue, "Touch".

7. Add Distance:

When she's happily touching your hand with her nose, on cue, begin to increase the distance at which you're asking her to touch, ever so gradually to keep her in the "Success Zone". Click/Treat!

8. Add Movement:

Ask her to follow your targeting hand by moving it very slowly as she moves to touch it, making sure that she ultimately gets to touch it. Click/Treat!

Troubleshooting:

1. Your dog isn't interested in your hand:

- Check your hand position.
 - Is it close enough to be of interest?
 - Is it too high or too low to be easy to touch?
- Try rubbing a smelly treat on your targeting hand, just to get things started. When your dog touches your hand with her nose to sniff, Click and Treat!

2. Your dog moves away from your hand:

- Check your hand position.
 - Is it so close that your dog is moving away from it?
- Check your hand movement.
 - Is your hand moving quickly toward your dog? Slow your speed.
 - Change the angle at which you bring your hand toward your dog until she is really comfortable with it.

Remember that training, while fun, also asks a lot from our dogs. Train in short 3-5 minute sessions throughout the day, rather than long sessions.