

# Targeting /Touch

The beginning of target training takes advantage of the dog's natural curiosity. Most dogs will sniff or even touch your palm if you hold it out to them - especially if you've just been handling food treats. Simply click and reward your dog for each touch. It helps if you hold it close to their nose, maybe just below their nose level. If you want to eventually transfer the nose-touch to some inanimate object - like a target stick, sticky note (such as a Post-It©©), or margarine lid, simply put some food smell on that, too, and hold it cupped in your hand when you start.

To train the paw touch, move your hand around in short, jerky movements low to the ground near the dog's paws, or hold a treat under your hand. Most dogs will paw at this. Again, click and reward for each touch.

Repeat this a few times. See if your dog gets more confident in her touches. I've found that many dogs, even those with some experience with "making you click", act as if they don't believe that simply touching your hand will work. Make sure you reward this easy first step quite a few times before making it any harder.

Once you have the initial touching fairly confident, hold the target out a little bit further - a few inches away, or just enough for the dog to really stretch out her neck (or leg) to touch it. Click and reward those touches, repeating a few times.

Now start varying the position of the target relative to the dog, and relative to you, and you relative to the dog. Hold it out slightly to one side, then the other; hold it an inch or two above or below the original level. Hold the target out while you stand, sit, or kneel; while you face the dog or have the dog at your side. Make it clear that it's touching the target that is causing the click and reward, not any of the other factors your dog is seeing.

Are you willing to bet that your dog will touch the target at any one time? Then add a cue, like "Touch!", "Target!", or "Paw it!", or a hand signal like touching the target yourself with two fingers of the other hand. Add the cue just before you think the dog will do it, to form the association between the cue and the action.