



Teaching to Target (“Touch” Command)

Targeting is taught for various reasons. It can be used to teach assistance dogs to open doors, cupboards, etc. It can be used to move your dog from one place to another (great for resource guarders!!!), to help teach your dog to walk nicely, and to offer a positive distraction for your dog while out on a walk (for those serious squirrel hunters!). And aside from all of that, it’s just a fun exercise that you and everyone in the family can do with your dog to keep their mind working and helping bond with your pup.

You can use a clicker for this training however below are instructions for those not using a clicker.

Get a yummy treat in one hand. Take your other hand and place it close to your dogs nose, palm facing them, fingers pointing to either side of your dog (imagine a “stop!” hand signal but sideways) and say “touch” in a happy, calm voice. What you are looking for is your dogs nose to touch your hand. Tongues don’t count.

As soon as his nose touches, say “yes!” in a quick, happy voice and immediately reward with the treat. Do not say anything else like (good dog). “Yes” is the marker. It is the signal that he did the right thing. Repeat keeping your hand close. If your dog does not touch the hand when you give the command, simply pull your hand back and use a “no reward” marker like “wrong.” Then try again closer. It just means that either you’ve moved too far too fast or your dog is getting bored with the command. Once your dog can do this 5x in a row at a very close



distance, begin moving your hand just slightly further away including to the side. Continue practicing every day (short sessions – just 5 minutes several times a day). Eventually you will be able to ask your dog to “touch” from a distance and your dog will get up to come over and “touch.” It’s really fun and builds confidence in your dog! No matter what size, what age, dogs love this! You can incorporate a game of ball as the reward instead of a treat. Say “yes!” and start a game of ball. And this is a great exercise to teach the kids to do with the dog.