



HAND TARGETING

Hand targeting is when your dog touches your flat opened palm when given a cue/command such as “here” or “touch.” Hand targeting is one of the most valuable obedience/manners skills to teach any dog, regardless of size, breed/mix, or age

Benefits of Teaching Hand Targeting

- 🦷 Hand targeting is a foundation for a reliable recall. While you begin teaching this behavior with your hand just a few inches from your dog, with practice your dog will learn to enthusiastically run to you and target to your hand from greater distances. The precise target of your open palm gives your dog a specific spot to head to rather than potentially circling around you and playing a game of catch me if you can.
- 🦷 Hand targeting is useful to help your dog learn to interact politely and confidently with people (i.e. they present their hand and your dog touches it to say hello, as opposed to jumping up on them or shying away).
- 🦷 Hand targeting is a great way to help prevent and solve behavior problems since it allows you a calm, easy way to redirect your dog away from objects, other animals, people, etc.
- 🦷 Hand targeting can also be added to the list of behaviors your dog can use to ask nicely for things. For example, you can ask him or her to hand target before getting to play in the dog run, walk out the front door, or come up on the couch for a hug.

Why You Should Use a Marker

A marker (whether a short word like yes or good or a clicker) is a way of providing precise feedback to your dog about their behavior. Think of it like a camera that takes a sharp-focused, high quality picture. The marker tells your dog what they did at the exact moment they heard it is what earns them the reward. A marker is not the same as praising your dog with something like “you’re such a great pup!” Both are valuable, but for different purposes. Since the act of a dog touching their nose to your hand is an extremely brief behavior, we need a way to accurately tell your dog that what they did at that exact moment is what is earning the reward.

Verbal Marker or Clicker

Some trainers choose to use a verbal marker (like yes or good) and others use a device called a clicker. A clicker can be more consistent (compared to variations in the way you might say a verbal marker), and typically does not have any previous associations for a dog. One of the benefits of a verbal marker is that you always have your voice, whereas you may not have a clicker on hand.

Charging the Marker

You can 'charge' the marker by simply making the sound happen and immediately offering a tiny food reward. After 10-30 repetitions of this, most dogs start to make the connection that the sound means a reward will happen.

How to Teach Your Dog to Hand Target

1. Fill up your treat pouch with an assortment of tiny (no bigger than a pinky nail), very tasty/high value treats.
2. Present the palm of your hand no more than 6 inches away from your dog's nose. Your curious dog is likely to touch your palm. At the exact moment you feel his or her nose on your skin say your marker word (we generally suggest either "yes" or "good") and then offer one tiny treat.
3. Repeat so your dog gets lots of opportunities to build a strong learning muscle.
4. Gradually increase the distance you hold your flat open palm away from your dog so that he or she has to make more of an effort to touch your palm, hear the marker, and get a reward.
5. Be careful not to push your hand into your dog's face. The object of this exercise is to teach your dog to touch your hand on cue, not to teach your dog to tolerate you touching his or her nose.
6. Be careful not to hold the treats from your other hand too close to your dog's face. In the initial stages of teaching you want to make it as easy as possible for your dog to make the right choice. In the case the choice is touching their nose to your flat palm. As you and your dog progress, you can work on having your dog hand target away from a food treat in the other hand as well as from an endless list of other distractions.

Adding the Verbal Cue:

Now let's work on teaching your dog to touch your hand prompted by a verbal cue, not just when it is presented. When your dog is touching your palm reliably when the visual cue (your hand) is presented (reliably enough that you would be willing to bet \$100 the behavior will happen!), say the chosen word such as "touch" or "here" right before you present your open palm. This way you are connecting the word with an existing behavior so your dog can most easily make a connection between the two.

More Advanced Hand Targeting Games

1. Once your dog is touching your hand consistently and enthusiastically when it is presented no more than 6 inches away from his or her nose, you can start to:
2. Present your hand a bit farther away from your dog. Expect your dog to be less reliable in responding as you change the criteria of what you are asking (i.e. your hand is farther away, higher, lower, on a different side of his or her head, etc.). Just stick with each new way of presenting your hand until your dog touches it reliably and then try something slightly different.
3. Toss a treat a distance away from you, or place it on the ground and move away once your dog starts eating it. This way you are getting some space between you and your dog and giving them an opportunity to practice this skill in a manner that replicates a real life recall.
4. Have your pup hand target back and forth between two or more people. Be sure that each person has treats/rewards of equal value and that when one person presents their hand for the dog to touch all the other people remain quiet and non-interactive with the dog so it is easier for them to make the right choice and go to the person presenting their palm.