



Nose Targeting

Nose targeting is the foundation for many other wonderful behaviors. You can teach most agility behaviors using nose targeting, you can greatly improve leash walking, you can teach a host of fun pet tricks, and you can even use it to build the confidence of a fearful dog. In our class, we'll be using nose targeting to teach our dogs to come when called.

Before you begin:

Choose your marker. This could be a clicker, a verbal marker like “yes!”, pen clicking, etc. Be consistent and don’t change your marker. For an overview of clicker training, check out our *Clicker Basics* handout, or our *Clicker Training 101* webinar!

Choose your reinforcer (reward). Make sure it’s appropriate for the environment! If you are in a low distraction environment, you can likely get away with low value treats, but if you are working in a higher distraction environment or more exciting time, you may need something higher value like hot dogs, cheese, etc. Cut up small of course!

Part 1: Steps to nose targeting

1. Get your dog’s attention. Be exciting, get silly!
2. Hold your clicker in your non-dominant hand, leaving your dominant hand free for targeting and treat delivery.
3. Place two fingers about an inch from your dog’s nose with your palm facing up.
4. The instant your dog touches your fingers with their nose, click!
5. Reach into your treat pouch, grab a single treat, and toss it just behind your dog so they can enjoy chasing after it. Repeat!
6. If your dog gets distracted or doesn’t make contact with your fingers after a couple seconds, remove your hand, and present it again. Try to use your body language/voice to keep your dog engaged, encourage them to “explore” your fingers. Don’t be afraid to get silly and weird!
7. When first starting out, ANY touch of the muzzle area to any part of your hand is acceptable—licking your fingers, targeting another part of your hand, etc. are all things you can click for until your dog is targeting more consistently.
8. Remember to place your fingers no more than an inch from your dog’s nose. We want this game to be super easy initially and to build up your dog’s confidence with this fun game.
9. Also remember not to “help” your dog by moving your fingers to touch the dog’s nose. The dog needs to touch your fingers with their nose. Dogs do not like having their noses booped!
10. Repeat 8 to 10 times, and then stop and play with your dog or shower them with some petting and affection if they enjoy it. You can practice another set after your break if you choose.

11. Once your dog is consistently targeting your fingers, try moving them a little further away so your dog has to move to touch the target. Many dogs really enjoy following the target to boop it, and you can then ask them to jump on and off of furniture, into cars, or any other creative additions you can think of!

12. **Helpful tip:** When you are first starting out, keep your sessions really short, 2-5min at first! You may be surprised at how much your dog has seemed to progress after a break. 😊

[Video example of getting started nose targeting](#)

Part 2: Attaching the Verbal Cue

It can help to have a verbal way of asking your dog to come perform the “touch” behavior. This is the basis for a great recall! When do we move to this step? *When you are 99% sure your dog is going to successfully touch the target when you present your fingers.* This might change depending on the environment! Start adding the cue wherever your dog is most comfortable. We want to go “back to kindergarten” when we are adding a new element!

1. Begin with a few rounds *without* the cue. Use this to build momentum, so your dog is “in the game.” Try to present your target hand in a similar place/orientation during this exercise, even if your dog has gotten used to moving to touch the target.
2. When your dog is obviously moving toward your fingers with intention, *as you present your two fingers*, say, “touch!” (or cue of your choice).
3. Repeat! Make sure you are saying your cue CLEARLY, and ONCE, right before you know your dog is about to perform the behavior.
4. If you say your cue/present your fingers and your dog does NOT touch them, *do not repeat* the cue. Take a moment, reset, call your dog over again, and give it another try. If your dog still doesn’t respond, they may need more practice to get consistent before adding the cue!
5. Once your dog is getting used to consistently touching after hearing the cue, if there is a time they hesitate, *give them about 5 sec with your hand still extended* before resetting. Sometimes they just need a little time to think!

Do not repeat the cue multiple times! Our goal is to create a consistent association with the word (your cue) and the action (the dog touching the target). Repeating the cue a bunch of times can muddy the water.

[Video example of attaching the verbal cue](#)