

## The Targeting Method

When you are teaching a cat to perform a behavior by presenting a specific object for the cat to touch a part of his body to, you are using the Targeting method. Often, the cat will use his nose or paw to touch an object you present in front of him. Any object can serve as “the target.” Commonly used objects are a target stick, straw, finger, hand, tongue depressor, or eraser on a pencil. Many behaviors can be taught using targeting such as high-five, jump through a hoop, sit pretty, and moving from point A to point B.

### TEACHING THE BEHAVIOR

#### STEP 1: Clicking for Interest in the Target/Touching the Target

To start teaching this behavior, hold the target object within a head-stretch or a turn for the cat (about one inch away). When you place something near a cat’s face he usually sniffs it. At that moment you click then reinforce. Repeat this until the cat is stretching to touch the target readily.

#### STEP 2: Taking a Step to Reach the Target

Once the cat is readily performing the targeting behavior from Step 1, then move the target object a bit further away so the cat will now have to take half of a step toward the target or stretch further to reach it. Remain on Step 2 until the cat is continuously performing the goal behavior.

#### STEP 3: Choosing the correct level of distance increase

Now that Step 2 is learned, move the target object even further away from the cat. If you move it too far too fast, the cat will let you know by not attempting to touch the target. He may appear to give up, when in fact, the cat doesn’t know what to do. If he isn’t responding, move the target back toward him until he is responding again. Then try increasing the distance by a smaller amount in your next attempt.

### TEACHING THE CUE

After the cat is performing the behavior consistently, start adding the cue. For the target behavior the presentation of the object will naturally be the visual cue; you can say the word “target” or “touch” for the verbal cue. If you are training a specific behavior like giving someone a high five, you can use a verbal cue specific to that behavior like, “High Five!”

#### STEP 1: Cue with target object

Present the target object in front of the cat. Immediately (1 second) before the cat touches the target object with his nose, give the verbal cue – a common verbal cue is the word “target.” After the cat has performed the targeting behavior, click then reinforce. Repeat for approximately 5-10 repetitions.

#### STEP 2: Cue then target object

Say the verbal cue and *then* present the target object. After the cat has performed the targeting behavior, click then treat.

**Once you have the behavior truly on cue, the behavior is considered “mastered.” You are then ready to start working on a new behavior utilizing the Targeting method.**

# Using the Targeting Method for Some Common Behaviors

## Nose Bump or Head Bump

“Nose (or Head) Bump” is a behavior that is defined by the cat using his nose or forehead to touch an object.

- Hold the target object so that the point you want the cat to touch is located on the object you want the cat to touch.
- When the cat touches the target with his nose or head, click then reinforce.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Touch.” A common visual cue for this behavior is pointing to the object you would like the cat to touch.

## High-Five, High-Ten/Give Me Ten, or Wave

“High-Five” is a behavior that is defined by the cat placing a paw against a human hand. “High-Ten” or “Give Me Ten” is a variation of this behavior that requires the cat to place both paws against human hands. “Wave” is yet another version where the cat does not make contact with their paw, but rather repeatedly “waves” their paw up and down.

- Hold the target so that the point you want the cat to touch is in front of your palm. Over several repetitions, slowly move the target until it is touching your palm.
  - *For Give Me Ten:* Use two separate targets (one for each paw) OR wait for your cat to use both paws to touch one target. This behavior will require the cat to balance on their back legs/hips.
  - *For Wave:* Hold the target just outside of your cat’s reach.
- When the cat touches the target, click then reinforce.
  - *For Give Me Ten:* Click then reinforce when your cat uses both paws to touch one (or two) targets.
  - *For Wave:* Click then reinforce when your cat attempts to touch the target just outside his reach.
- Common cues:
  - *For High-Five:* A common verbal cue for this behavior is “High-Five.” A common visual cue for this behavior is placing your open palm facing the cat (fingers pointing upward) at about the cat’s shoulder level.
  - *For Give Me Ten:* A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Give me ten.” A common visual cue is placing both hands, open palms facing the cat (fingers pointing upward) at about the cat’s shoulder level.
  - *For Wave:* A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Wave.” A common visual cue for this behavior is moving your hand up and down, palm facing down. Alternatively, you can repeatedly bend all fingers where your fingers join your hand.

## Jump Over an Object or Through a Hoop

“Jump” over an object or through a hoop is a behavior defined by the cat jumping from one side of an object (over or through) to the other side of the same object. Initially it may be easier to place the object directly on the floor, allowing the cat to walk over/through the object. As the cat gains confidence, you can begin slowly to move the object off of the floor requiring the cat to jump over/through the object.

- Hold the target so that the point you want the cat to touch is just over/through the object you would like them to jump. Over several repetitions, slowly move the target until it is on the other side of the object.
- After jumping over/through the object, when the cat touches the target, click then reinforce.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Jump.” A common visual cue for this behavior is moving your finger from the “start” to the “finish.”

## Roll Over

“Roll Over” is a behavior that can be defined in two ways. A partial roll over (180°) is defined by the cat moving from laying one side of his body to the opposite side by “rolling” on his back. The cat starting from a “down” position and rolling to the left or right, ending in the same position from which he started, defines a full roll over (360°).

- Hold the target so that the point you want the cat to touch is just above the cat.
  - Partial Roll Over: Move the target in the same motion as described above in luring.
  - Full Roll Over: Move the target in the same motion as described above in luring.
- After the cat completes the motion (partial or full), hold the target directly in front of the cat’s nose. When the cat touches the target, click then reinforce.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Roll Over.” A common visual cue for this behavior is using your pointer finger to make the “rainbow” motion from one side of the cat to the other.

## Fetch

“Fetch” is a behavior defined by the cat bringing an object to you and dropping it in front of you. It is usually easiest if you use softer objects that are easy for the cat to pick up with their mouth.

- After the cat has picked up the object, hold the target at your feet or wherever you want the cat to bring the object.
- After the cat brings the object to that location and touches the target, click, then reinforce. If the cat is not dropping the object before touching the target, you can choose to prevent the cat’s physical access to the target until he drops the object.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Fetch.” A common visual cue for this behavior is picking up and tossing the object.

## Sit

“Sit” is a behavior that is defined by the cat bending her back legs and resting her hips on the floor while her front legs remain extended.

- Hold the target so that the point you want the cat to touch is just above and slightly behind her head. Touching the target with her nose should put her in a “sit” position.
- As soon as your cat completes the “sit” position, click, then reinforce.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Sit.” A common visual cue for this behavior is moving your hand (palm open and facing upward) from about the cat’s chest level to above their head.

## Sit Pretty

“Sit Pretty” is a behavior that is defined by the cat raising her front feet off the ground while sitting. The cat will be in a completely vertical position when successfully completing this behavior.

- Hold the target so that the point you want the cat to touch is just above and behind the cat’s head. You may need to move the target initially to encourage the motion of sitting back into the cat’s back legs/hips.
- When the cat touches the target while sitting only on her back legs/hips, click, then reinforce.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “Sit Pretty.” A common visual cue for this behavior is moving your hand in a “J” motion in front of the cat.

## Coming When Called

“Coming When Called” (aka a “recall”) is a behavior that is defined by the cat orienting toward the human and approaching the human. Most commonly, this behavior is complete once the cat has come within inches of the human who is calling her. It could even end by the cat jumping into a waiting human lap for positive attention!

- Hold the target so that the point you want the cat to touch is within inches of you.
- When the cat touches the target she should be within inches of you. Click, then reinforce.
- A common verbal cue for this behavior is “come,” or saying the cat’s name and then “come” (such as, “Fluffy, come.”) A common visual cue for this behavior is moving your hand (palm open and facing toward you) by bending your elbow. Go from an outstretched, straight arm to 90° bend in your elbow. Additionally, you may also choose to use a different visual cue such as a “point” from your hand to a location near you.