



TARGET TRAINING

What is it?	Why do it?
Dog hits a small target with feet on command.	Needed for flygility. Useful for teaching tricks, and also can be used for contact training for agility.

NB: Each of the following steps may take several days or weeks. Do not progress through the steps until your dog is consistently performing the previous step with enthusiasm and speed.

Background: Shaping - what's it all about??

The form of learning used in this exercise is called 'shaping' and it can take some getting used to!

- The idea is that you don't give a command or many clues about what you want – you simply reward when the dog offers the behaviour you're after, even if they offer that behaviour accidentally.
- Your dog will initially be puzzled about what it is you want from them and what it is they are actually getting praised/rewarded for. They will eventually try to 'offer' various behaviours to get the reward. You need to be very patient.
- Some dogs will attempt other 'tricks' as they try to figure out what you want – they may try sitting, lying down, offering a paw etc. You need to give them time and opportunity to puzzle it out until they can realize that it's touching the target that gets the reward.
- The most common mistake people make is to lose patience too quickly. You need to bite your tongue and just wait til the dog offers the right behaviour – don't give up too soon!

Step 1: Introduction to Target Training

What you need:

- 🐾 A target. Your target should be a flat piece of light plastic about 10-15cm square (depends on size of dog). White or another light/bright colour is best. Lids off icecream or other containers are fine.
- 🐾 Lots of small (delicious) treats.
- 🐾 A hungry dog.

What you do:

- 🐾 Have your dog in a distraction-free setting.
- 🐾 Put the target flat on the ground near your feet. As soon as you put the target down hopefully your dog will show interest in it so be ready straight away.
- 🐾 Praise the dog for any interest or contact with the target and reward enthusiastically with voice and food for any touching the target with a foot (even if it's completely accidental).
- 🐾 If your dog isn't interested in the target, move it briefly with your foot to attract the dog's interest.
- 🐾 If your dog won't touch the target with a foot, reward any interest, eg sniffing, then gradually up the stakes so only a more purposeful movement is rewarded & eventually only a foot touch is rewarded.
- 🐾 Make sure you pick up the target as soon as you stop working with it, as if the dog offers the correct behaviour while you're not paying attention it can undo a lot of good work!



Step 2: Consolidation

Once the dog is reliably touching the target:

- 🐾 A command is introduced (eg 'hit it', 'touch' 'target' etc)
- 🐾 The distance can start to be gradually increased (but don't increase the distance too much - this is a separate exercise from the send away).
- 🐾 The size of the target is reduced gradually by cutting the plastic down in size.

We are hoping to have the dog respond to your command by going and touch a small target (5cm²) from a distance of 2 or 3 metres.

Putting it together

When you have completed some of the other modules you will be able to combine this exercise with a send-away and obstacles so that your dog hits a target at a distance from you.

You can also place the small target on objects so that you teach the dog to touch those objects with their paw on command:

- For flygility you will be putting the target on the pedal of a flyball box.
- You can also use the target on the contact areas of agility gear to teach the dog that they must put their paw on that part of the equipment before running on.
- The target can be positioned on doors or light switches to teach a dog to open a door with a paw or switch on a light on command.

Eventually your plastic target gets smaller and smaller and the command transfers to touching the object instead of the target. So, 'touch' starts to mean 'hit the pedal of the box', regardless of whether there is a plastic target anywhere, 'target' may mean run right to the bottom of the dog walk in an agility course and put a paw there, or 'hit it' might mean 'go to the nearest light switch and press it with your paw'.

You may eventually even take the command off entirely so that the dog knows that whenever there's a flyball box in front of them, they hit the pedal, or that they must always touch the bottom part of an agility ramp.