



## RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

# Target Training

### What is target training?

“Targeting” is a training concept which teaches an animal to touch a target (hand/spot/stick/light) with a part of their body - most often nose or paw. As many behaviours we teach our animals are quite complex, and are broken down into smaller steps, targeting makes it easier to communicate the next step to our dogs. It is important to remember that a target is not a lure.

Targeting is an excellent way to teach tricks, as well as “useful” behaviours. Want your dog to close a drawer? Ring a bell to go outside? Press the button at the pedestrian crossing? Roll a soccer ball along? Ride a skateboard? All these behaviours can be taught using targeting.



### How do I get started?

Initially, target training uses our animals’ natural curiosity. Most dogs will sniff or even touch a palm or fist presented to them. Simply click and reward your dog for each sniff or touch - ensuring that your rewards are not in the target hand, otherwise you are simply luring your dog! Timing of the clicker is very important for this exercise. Make sure your click happens just as your dog’s nose touches your hand. (If you are unfamiliar with clicker training, ask for our handout.)

It is important to develop duration on the hand target early in training. Once the dog starts to get the idea, vary the time they need to keep their nose on the target before you click and reward - increase incrementally.

Take care not to reinforce concurrent behaviour (two behaviours occurring at the same time) for example, mouthing and touching your hand.



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### Advantages of using a target

- Gives the animal a point of focus
- Reduces error in communication, by removing the 'guess work'
- Allows complex behaviours to be broken down and learnt in small steps
- Allows learning to be conducted in a consistent, positive manner
- Excellent for building confidence, especially with timid dogs

### Tips

Keep sessions short

Start with the target close to the dog

Target training is also a training concept used widely in zoos and aquariums with a large number of different species. It is very useful for animal husbandry procedures, minimising the need to physically manoeuvre the animals around.

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