

Teaching “Touch”

Teaching “Touch” can lead to several other behaviors that can be fun and beneficial, including discriminating between objects.

I use a target of some kind to start, some people use their palm. I don’t like using a body part in the beginning because some dogs like the positive reinforcement so much that every time they are near you, they may “touch”. Some of you may already have this type of behavior if you have taught your dog to “shake”. You can always use a body part later, once the behavior is learned.

I have used several things for targets: old CDs, mouse pads, coasters. Pick something small and easy to move. As your dog gets better and better with touch, you may want to be able to stick the target on something with a little height.

I teach “touch” having the dog use his nose, others teach using a paw, it’s your choice.

Hold the target in your hand if using the dog’s nose, put it on the ground if using a paw, tap and/or point at the target to get your dog’s attention to it and say “Touch!” Close approximations get rewarded. Remember the dog has no idea what you want yet. If he seems completely clueless, put a treat on the target (this will get his nose). Do about five repetitions and then stop. You can do five repetitions 10 times a day if you want but work under the dog’s boredom/frustration level (and your own).

As your dog gets better, treat for the good touches—longer or squarer to the target, whatever your goal is AND THEN move the target. Not too far at first: point to it and say “Touch”, let the dog return to you for a reward (this works as a good reset for the behavior). You can have someone hold the target across the room and send them to “touch”. Build the behavior and reward well. I will give you more ideas of places to use it for training in the next article.

