

Touch

Touch is teaching your puppy to touch your open hand with his nose. It is a fun and easy training project that not only can be expanded into teaching fun and impressive tricks, but can also prove to be useful in practical situations as well.

Touch builds confidence. It helps in greeting people properly, supports bite-inhibition, useful when working distractions, and is a prerequisite for some more complex cues. It is a necessary skill for teaching recall ("Come") and helps with reliability, so before you teach Come, you will teach Touch.

Stage 1 - Getting the Behavior (Fist Touch)

1. Have some soft, pea-sized treats in a pocket or treat pouch. Prepare your treats ahead of time so that when you are ready to train, you don't have your puppy seeing or hearing you getting treats.
2. Place a small treat in your palm and close your hand into a fist so no food is showing.
3. Present your fist a couple inches from your pup's nose.
4. When your pup touches your hand with his nose, say your RM and open your hand to deliver the treat.

This is just like what you do with Following a Lure, but you don't move your hand.

5. Practice by moving about to keep momentum going and getting your pup to touch your hand from both sides, either hand, while you stand, sit or move.
6. When your puppy is consistently touching your hand from various situations, you are ready to attach the cue.

Stage 2 - Adding Verbal Cue (Fist Touch)

1. Say your verbal cue, "Touch," first, then present your fist at nose level. Mark and reward the nose touch.

Stage 1 - Getting the Behavior (Open Hand)

1. Have some soft, pea-sized treats in a pocket or treat pouch. Prepare your treats ahead of time so that when you are ready to train, you don't have your puppy seeing or hearing you getting treats.
2. Hold your hand out, thumb and fingers together and parallel to the floor, about 2 inches away from your puppy's nose.
3. Most likely he will lean forward to sniff your hand. When you feel his nose touch your hand, say your RM and immediately praise and give your puppy a treat from your other hand. Be patient. Some puppies aren't sure what to do at first but get curious about why you are holding your hand out and will investigate.
4. Repeat the exercise a number of times.
5. When you see your puppy readily touching your hand with his nose 9 out of 10 times, you are ready to move on to stage 2.

🐾 The more precise you are with your reward marker (a specific word or click from a clicker), the quicker your puppy will catch on to the exercise.

🐾 If you have already trained your puppy to shake (please don't if you haven't) with a paw so he offers his paw all the time instead of his nose, change your hand positioning from a full palm to three fingers (holding your thumb and pinky finger together like when we show the number three,

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except hold it finger down), or offer the back of your hand, or put your hand into a fist to have your puppy touch his nose where your thumb and index finger curl together.

***Troubleshooting:** If your puppy doesn't touch your extended palm with his nose, rub some yummy smells on your hand to entice interest. You can wiggle your hand as well.

***Troubleshooting:** If your puppy paws at your hand or mouths your hand, remove your hand and place it behind your back for a second or two, and then present it again. Be patient and allow him to work out the puzzle. If your puppy is experimenting with behavior trying to figure out what you want, that is good. "Doing" is a good learning strategy. Only the acceptable behavior will be rewarded, so don't worry.

***Troubleshooting:** If all else fails, or if you have a puppy that is just standing there (possibly over-thinking it), hold a small treat against your palm with your thumb. You will need to fade out the treat in your palm and get touches without food present before moving to stage 2.

Stage 2 - Adding the Verbal Cue

Once your puppy is reliable touching your palm (or fingers) when you hold it out to him, you are ready to add the verbal cue. Choose any word that makes sense to you, "Touch" "Target" "Hand" etc.

1. Say your cue.
2. Then extend your palm toward your puppy and wait for him to touch it with his nose.
3. When he does, instantly say your RM and reward with praise and a treat from the other hand.
4. Repeat this exercise a number of times so your puppy learns the meaning of the verbal cue.

Trainer Tip:

When teaching and playing this game, move about the room, allowing your puppy to follow you. This encourages further engagement, builds momentum and helps break up the repetitiveness.

Stage 3 - Increasing Range and Changing Direction

Once your puppy is reliable touching your palm (or fingers) on cue, begin presenting your target hand further away and from different directions. Take this step slowly, increasing distance by only a few inches at first. Sometimes puppies will get confused if they have to take steps to get to your hand.

1. Toss a treat to get some distance from your puppy.
2. When your puppy turns back towards you, say your cue, "Touch," and then present your target hand. You can choose wither a fist or an open hand. Practice both.
3. Mark and Reward the touch with the nose. Then toss out another treat and repeat.
4. Other variations include - present your hand a little to the left or right so your puppy has to turn. Present your target low so your puppy has to bend down. Present your target higher so he has to reach up to touch it, keeping all four paws are on the floor. Make sure with this one to not let your puppy put his paws on you to reach your hand, so don't place your hand too high!

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Stage 4 - Generalization

After a week or two of hand targeting in quiet, calm places, start practicing in more distracting situations - so take it to a new room, and also take it outside. The key is to increase the level of distractions slowly and be sure your puppy is successful 90% of the time. Two mistakes in a row means the distraction is too much and you need to practice under easier circumstances for a little while longer.

1. Begin with practicing in other rooms of the house and with different people. Then, work with you being in different positions: sitting on the couch or in a chair, kneeling, sitting on the floor and standing up, facing your puppy, and turned away from your puppy, etc.
2. Once your puppy has mastered it inside, take it outside in the backyard or other familiar outside location.
3. Once mastered there, take it on the road and practice in different public places.
4. Once your puppy has had all his shots and can go for walks, practice touch while walking to help your puppy learn to walk nicely near you and to focus on you and not just the exciting world around him.
5. %. Play in the doorway, going outside and inside. You will want to use this cue for getting your puppy back inside after being out. Don't use 'come' for this, you will risk your pup blowing it off and ruining the cue.

Why teach Touch and when would I use it?

1. Stepping stone to help train and improve other cues - recall, loose leash walking, heeling.
2. Helps to teach puppy not to use teeth or mouth hand.
3. Useful to teach manners for greetings with people. Alternate way of greeting people for timid and shy dogs.
4. Builds confidence. It is especially helpful for shy and timid dogs - helps them to move forward.
5. Great to use for teaching tricks for adult dogs - closing doors, turning on lights, etc.
6. Great game for reactive dogs - if your dog barks or lunges at other dogs or people when you take leash walks, you can use hand targeting as a game to help him focus on you instead. If your dog backs away or cowers from people or other dogs, play the touch game to help him to keep moving to get past them.
7. Great to use if your dog does not heel well yet, targeting can help you get through a crowd of people.

Trainer Tips:

1. Whenever you practice, include all the cues that you have taught your puppy thus far, in a random order to keep your puppy engaged and thinking.
2. Move about the room to keep excitement and incorporate play into the training session. Cue and have your puppy work, then play as an additional reward. Then practice cues again, and then play... "Lather, Rinse, Repeat"
3. Stop while your puppy is still having fun to build the desire to keep learning and end every training session with fun playtime.