

TEACHING YOUR CAT TO “Target”

DEFINITION:

The cat touches its nose to an object

HOW TO TEACH:

Target:

Almost all cats will sniff an object placed near their face. Choose an object such as a target stick, spoon or dowel. Every time the cat touches the object with his nose, click and treat. Start by holding the object within an inch of his head. When the cat is moving his head around to touch the object, start moving it farther away from his head. Once the cat stretches his neck to touch the target, begin to hold it far enough away that he has to get up or move his entire body to touch the target. Continue to increase the distance between the target and the cat in small increments until you are several feet from the cat.

Adding the cue:

You are ready to add the cue when the cat consistently touches the target to his nose. Say “target” or “touch” as the cat’s nose touches the target. After one session, you can say your cue word before the cat performs the behavior. Remember that the cat should be performing the behavior consistently before you start using verbal cues.

USES:

This cue is very versatile.

-By using the cue “target” you can have your cat touch its nose to almost any object. So if you want to stop the cat from looking at something outside or something that would scare it, you could have it touch an object where it can’t see the outside.

-If you don’t want your cat to dart out the door, you could have your cat touch a color spot on the wall away from the door as you step out.

COMMENTS:

If the cat is too distracted, start working the cat in an area (e.g., bedroom) that the cat uses as a favorite hangout.

The behavior may happen very quickly, so make sure you are paying close attention to the cat’s actions.

Keep training sessions for cats to no more than two minutes or 10 treats. Take breaks -- grooming the cat or giving attention at appropriate times -- between each training session.