

Step-by-Step Button Target Training

Quick training terms

Target: The post-it note or button with a post-it note on top of it

Mark: A word like “yes” (or a click) that instantly and clearly tells a learner they’ve done the right thing. It’s a more precise way to teach behaviors because it’s immediate and signals to the learner that a reward is coming.

Jackpot: Giving greater amounts of a reward or a higher value reward in response to the learner’s awesome effort or performance

Cue: The word and/or motion you use to ask the learner for specific behavior.

Pro Tip: Reward “in position.” When delivering a treat for a target touch, always hold the treat reward on the target itself. This will connect the reward to the position you want and can lead to more committed and firm presses.

ALWAYS reward your learner no matter what part of their body they use to touch the target or press a button!

To prepare: Choose the concept that is most motivating to your learner and record your word for it on the target button.*

**We refer to the TREAT button as your learner’s target button in the following exercises. However, while target training, you can substitute their word for whatever your learner’s strongest motivator is. If that’s tug, record “play” or “tug” on your target training button and play for 10 seconds to reward instead of giving a treat.*

You will need:

- ☐ Your target button
- ☐ Many small treats
- ☐ Mini post-its*

**Blue or yellow post-it notes are ideal because learners can see these colors. If you have regular-sized post-its, you can always cut them to size. They should fit on the button without covering it entirely.*

Part 1: Start by teaching “target”

Pro Tip: Rub a yummy treat over the post-it note to make it more interesting. Switch to a fresh post-it once they’ve learned to touch it.

1. Place the post-it in the center of your hand.
2. Say “target.”
3. Extend your flat hand out, holding it a few inches in front of your learner’s nose.*

**Know your learner. If putting something close to their face causes them to move away, hold it farther away so they will investigate it on their own terms. Moving the target slightly away as they lean forward can get them to pursue the target more insistently.*

4. Encourage them to investigate the post-it. Try pointing or tapping with the other hand to draw their attention to it.
 - If they touch it on their own, mark it and reward with a jackpot!
 - If they sniff it, you can gently shift the post-it to make contact, then mark immediately upon contact (timing is important) and reward.
5. Repeat Steps 1-4 until they have learned that “target” means they should firmly touch the post-it.
6. When your learner is consistently targeting the post-it note in your hand (i.e., getting it right more than 80% of the time), stick the post-it on top of your TREAT button. Holding the button in your hand, repeat steps 2 and 3.

- **If they actually activate the button, mark, and reward enthusiastically with a jackpot.** Repeat at least 8-10 times before moving on to Part 2.
- **If your learner touches the post-it, but not hard enough to activate the button, ask them to **target** the button again.** This time, use your thumb to help them apply pressure when they touch to make sure the button activates. Once the button is activated, reward! With enough repetitions, they learn rewards only appear if the button is audibly activated.
- **If your learner seems confused, return to steps 1-4** for a few reps before placing the post-it note on the button. It's okay to go back!

Part 2: Teach them “target” means press the button

7. Hold the back of your hand flat on the ground with the post-it button in your palm face up and say “**target**.” Ideally, your learner will attempt to press the **target** button, even though your hand is on the ground. If they don't, lift your hand only as much as it takes to get them to press the button as they were before. As they catch on, gradually keep asking as you move the **target** lower and lower to the ground. Mark and reward **every time** your learner successfully activates the button.

8. Once your learner is reliably targeting the button in your hand on the ground (on cue), you can remove your hand, and ask them to **target** the button on the ground by itself. If they press the button when you say “**target**,” mark immediately, and reward with a jackpot. Repeat at least 8-10 times.

- Pause for a moment after these repeated repetitions of asking for **target**. See if they'll take the initiative to press the button on their own. Give them a full minute—check your phone or look around to feign distraction.
 - **If they do press it, mark and reward them with a jackpot!** This is an awesome way for them to learn they can press buttons on their own. Keep

going and reward them every time they press the button on their own without you saying anything for as long as you're both comfortable. Get at least 10 reps in if you can.

- **If they aren't ready to try pressing on their own without being asked, that's okay too!** Keep practicing it on cue! Button target training, even if it's always on cue, will help build positive associations with buttons. Frequent modeling and sufficiently interesting or motivating buttons choices should lead your learner to begin exploring the soundboard on their own eventually.

Button Target Training for Precision

Target Issue: Learner is struggling to control which button they're pressing or doesn't seem comfortable fully utilizing all the buttons on their soundboard.

Supporting Tips:

· Be sure you have optimized your learner's soundboard button layout so they can comfortably reach each button without activating unwanted buttons. See **Planning Your Soundboard** for details.

Where's Target? Game

You will need:

- ☐ Regular soundboard set-up
- ☐ Target button with a post-it note
- ☐ Many small treats

1. Put your post-it over the TREAT button again and practice “target” with your learner a few times as a warm-up to refresh their memory.
2. Place the target TREAT button with the post-it on top in different locations on your soundboard. Then, ask your learner to press the target button.
3. Vary how close the button with the post-it is to other buttons and change its location so they have to reach an area normally wouldn't.
4. Every time your learner successfully presses the button, mark and reward them.

Button Target Training for Technique

Target Issue: Learner claws, digs, bites, or otherwise tosses the button out of the HexTile.

You will need:

- ☐ A HexTile
- ☐ Target button with a post-it note
- ☐ Many small treats (opt for less exciting ones for this exercise)
- ☐ (Optional) a piece of rolled tape to secure the HexTile to the floor

1. Practice the classic button target training game.
2. Ask them to touch the target button.
3. If they claw or otherwise displace the button out of the HexTile, calmly say “oops” and replace the button without giving them a treat so they can try again.
4. Repeat asking them to touch the target button.
 - You may want to remind them by saying “easy,” “be nice,” “be gentle,” or any other word or phrase you use to ask your learner to interact carefully with something.
 - Keep your energy level as low as possible while still responding to them. Speak softly and soothingly, slowing your words and movements down to help bring their energy level down to a more manageable level.
 - For “heavy paw-ers,” you can ask them to press while lying down or slightly raise the HexTile off the ground to increase the difficulty and discourage exaggerated scooping motions with their paw.
5. When they interact with the button carefully (or at least less aggressively), mark and reward them while maintaining low energy if that’s what they need. Only reward your learner when the button remains in place in the HexTile

Pro Tip: If TREAT or PLAY are too exciting for your learner, choose a less exciting button to work on, like SCRITCHES or a WATER modeling mini-game. If they are really struggling, make sure they’ve gotten enough exercise to get excess energy out before trying again.