

Teaching Assessment Lessons

The lessons presented here reflect the skills and concepts that are included in the KPA beginner-class curriculum (which is provided to all Academy graduates). In the actual curriculum, skills build in a logical progression, one level at a time. Because the lessons in this document will be used to assess your ability to plan and execute a training session, they have been adapted to consist of several elements, with the progression toward the goal behavior taking place in one training session. This format is appropriate in this instance because your students and their dogs already have a great deal of clicker training experience. (In the instructions that follow, “student” refers to the dog handlers in your class. In this case, the students will be your fellow classmates and their dogs. “Teacher” refers to you, the instructor of the class.)

Each lesson presented here contains instructions for one possible way of teaching a skill. We provide an overview of the steps involved. As you develop your lesson plan, and again when actually teaching the lesson, we welcome and encourage you to make changes as you see fit to help your students succeed.

You will teach one of these lessons for your teaching assessment on the second day of your Unit 4 workshop. Lessons will be assigned by random drawing on the first day of the Unit 4 workshop. You will have until the next day to think about the lesson and create a teaching plan. In order to more precisely simulate a training class, students will swap dogs (i.e., the Academy students in your “class” will not be working with their own dogs). This will make the experienced peers you are teaching more closely resemble the beginner dog handlers you will encounter in a “real” class. The students in your “class” may also, at their discretion, offer some of the common behaviors sometimes displayed by novice dog owners. This will allow you an opportunity to help them improve.

Your lesson plan should follow this instructional format:

1. Explain the skill.
2. Explain why it is useful.
3. Demonstrate the skill (with your own dog or a student’s dog).
4. Circulate through the class, giving individual instruction and using positive reinforcement and tag points as appropriate.

In the lesson instructions that follow, we have listed some things to think about, possible scenarios really, that you may encounter within the lesson. Also, there are a few things you should keep in mind for *all* the lessons:

- Be conscious of and consider the emotional state of the dogs.
- Arrange the physical setup in the room to optimize success.
- Give individual goals to students so that those doing well can move on to a more challenging step, and those having trouble get appropriate assistance or some tips concerning what to work on at home.
- Use the TAGteach approach (ask for one thing, ask for what you want, define a point of success and start there, use the three-try rule, shelve off-point errors—see Lesson 20: TAGteach Part 2 for more information on TAGteach), even when you are not actually tagging. Use tag points appropriately.
- Divide your time fairly among students.
- Move along at a suitable pace to complete the lesson in the allotted time.
- Increase difficulty in manageable steps.
- Have a plan to encourage and motivate students whose dogs are not moving along at a good pace on the lesson.

Lesson 1: Follow a Target

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to touch a finger target with its nose, and then follow the finger target over, under, or around an obstacle, such as the owner's leg or an object in the classroom. The students should put the first behavior (touch a finger target) and the second behavior (follow the finger) on separate verbal cues. This is a wonderful foundation skill, which can be applied to teaching any number of new behaviors, such as follow a target into a crate during crate-training, or more advanced skills needed for agility or freestyle dance training.

LEARNING GOALS

This is a great lesson with which to begin demonstrating the power of targeting. Students will get to practice both the process of shaping their dog to touch a target and the process of adding cues. The dogs will learn to target and recognize cues for these behaviors. By adding the component of interaction with an obstacle, students will see how targeting helps their dog focus and take on challenging tasks.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience shaping, targeting, and cueing.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

Students will need to select an obstacle for the third part of this lesson. The obstacle can be the student's leg (e.g., dog follows finger target under or over leg), or an object in the classroom (e.g., dog follows finger target around a chair leg).

TRAINING PLAN

There are three parts to this behavior:

1. The dog learns to target its handler's finger, and handler adds a cue, such as "touch."
2. Dog follows the finger target, and handler adds a cue, such as "this way."
3. Dog follows the finger target over/under/around (choose any one) an obstacle.

ASSUMPTIONS

- The dog and handler have some experience with targeting.
- The dog and handler have some experience with shaping.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Some dog and handler teams may finish one part before other teams in the class. Will you allow them to move on? How will you know if they are ready?

POSSIBLE TAG POINTS

- After each click... the tag point is *toss the treat* (this is to reset the dog).
- While the dog is in motion... the tag point is *give "this way" cue*.

Lesson 2: Recall to Hand Target

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to approach and touch a hand target from a distance of approximately 6 feet, and then begin to introduce distractions in a controlled way. The recall is a vital skill for all dogs, and could in fact be a lifesaver someday. By practicing at a short distance and introducing distractions in a controlled situation, owners will have a solid foundation on which to build greater distance and distractions in the future.

LEARNING GOALS

This is a wonderful lesson in how targeting can be applied to teach new behavior, and how introducing distractions in a slow and controlled way sets up the dog for success. Students also develop an understanding of what is distracting to their dog. Additionally, students will experience the powerful role reinforcement plays in building and strengthening behavior in the face of distractions.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience targeting, shaping, cueing, and working toward fluency (distance and distraction).

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

- High-value reinforcement (food and/or toy)
- Distractions, such as other people and objects/toys
- Chair for trainer (optional)

TRAINING PLAN

There are five parts to this behavior:

1. Dog learns to touch a hand target with its nose and handler adds a cue.
2. Dog moves forward to touch the hand target (from gradually increasing distance).
3. Handler adds cue to recall, and dog waits for the cue to move forward and touch a hand target.
4. Handler introduces distractions in a slow and controlled way.
5. Dog learns to ignore distractions while moving forward to touch a hand target.

ASSUMPTIONS

- The dog and handler have some experience with targeting.

- The dog and handler have some experience with shaping.
- Dog grasps the concept of waiting for a cue.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some dogs may already be resistant to common distractions. How will you introduce greater distraction while still managing the environment for dogs that are not as resistant?
- If a dog is unable to respond to the recall cue at a distance of 6 feet with distractions, what will you recommend to the student?

POSSIBLE TAG POINT

Before giving the recall cue... the tag point is *say dog's name*.

Lesson 3: Rope Shaping

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to go into a circle made by a rope and settle there. The dog will remain settled while the handler moves a short distance away from the rope and alternately introduces a distraction. This skill is very useful in teaching a dog to settle in a new environment. Also, the rope is a great alternative to a mat because it is very portable.

LEARNING GOALS

This lesson enables students to practice shaping a simple skill. In addition, seeing how adding distance and introducing distractions affects their dog's behavior will help students understand the importance of working toward fluency in small steps, always setting up their dog for success.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience shaping and fluency (adding distance and introducing distractions).

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

- 8- to 10-foot section of rope (size depends on size of dog). The rope should be large enough for the dog to sit or lie down comfortably within the circled rope (a leash can be used to increase the size of the circle if needed).
- Distractions, such as other people and objects/toys. In some cases, body movements by the handler may be a good level of distraction.

TRAINING PLAN

There are three parts to this behavior:

1. Dog learns to go into the circle created by a rope on the floor.
2. Dog settles and remains within the rope circle (no "stay" cue is given) while handler moves around.
3. Dog settles and remains within the rope circle (no "stay" cue is given) while handler moves a short distance away.

ASSUMPTIONS

The dog and handler have some experience with shaping.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some dogs will automatically sit or lie down when entering the rope circle, especially if they have previously been taught to settle on a mat. If the dog does not settle on its own, what tips will you give to the student? Can the student give the dog the “sit” or “down” cue?
- Some students may move through the shaping within the rope quickly. How will you help them continue while other students are still in the early stages of the lesson?
- What if the dog leaves the rope circle? What will you recommend to the student?

POSSIBLE TAG POINTS

- After you toss the treat... the tag point is *start walking*.

Lesson 4: Name Game

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to give eye contact in response to its name. Then each student will begin to practice around low-level distractions, and cue the dog by saying his name. This cue is very useful for teaching a dog to be attentive to its handler, and it lays a foundation for keeping the dog focused around “real life” distractions.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will see how a high rate of reinforcement enables them to keep their dog’s attention, even in the presence of other dogs. Dogs learn that being attentive always pays! Students also learn that observing carefully (clicking the instant the dog makes contact with their eyes) and raising criteria slowly help to set up their dog to succeed.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience capturing, shaping, cueing, and raising criteria.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

None—trainer may sit or stand.

TRAINING PLAN

There are four parts to this behavior:

1. Handler captures the dog making eye contact and adds a cue, the dog’s name.
2. Dog gives handler eye contact on a verbal cue.
3. Handler practices in the presence of mild distractions.
4. Handler intersperses other activities so the dog does not maintain constant eye contact, but responds quickly to the cue.

ASSUMPTIONS

The dog and handler have some experience with capturing and shaping.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some dogs may be distracted and unable to focus on their handler. How can you manage the environment to set up both dog and owner for success?
- Some students may be tempted to add a cue too soon. At what point should you instruct your students to begin using the cue?

- If the dog does not make eye contact when the student gives the cue, what will you recommend to the student?
- If the students are losing the dog's attention due to a low rate of reinforcement, what will you recommend?
- If the dog gets the idea that he should sit and stare at his handler, what will you recommend to the student?

POSSIBLE TAG POINTS

Before clicking... the tag point is *treat hand touches home base*.

Lesson 5: Lie Down

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to touch a target with its nose, then follow a target into a “down” position. There are many possible ways to teach this, such as placing the target low so the dog must crouch to touch it, or using the target to guide a dog under a handler’s leg or under a chair or low table. When the dog is reliably lying down in response to the target, the handler will change from a target to a “thumbs up” hand signal for “down” (no verbal cue). Down is a very useful foundation for teaching the dog to settle, which can be used when visitors are over, while nails are clipped, etc. The uses are endless really!

LEARNING GOALS

Students will learn how valuable targeting is to teaching new behavior, and how to fade the target and replace it with a new cue.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience targeting, shaping, and cueing.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

- Target stick or other target
- Handler’s leg or a low table or chair, if needed, to shape the down

TRAINING PLAN

There are six parts to this behavior:

1. Dog touches a target with its nose.
2. Handler moves target to shape the dog to a “down” position.
3. Dog follows a target, resulting in a “down” position.
4. Handler captures the “down” movement with clicks/treats.
5. Handler fades out the prop (chair or table), if used.
6. Handler replaces the target with a new hand-signal cue (thumbs up) for down.

ASSUMPTIONS

Dog and handler have some experience with targeting.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- What instructions will you give to an owner whose dog is pawing or biting at the target?
- Some dogs may follow the target with their nose, but keep their rear end in the air. What suggestions will you make in this situation?

POSSIBLE TAG POINTS

- The tag point is *place target between paws*.

Lesson 6: “High Five”

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to touch a target placed on the floor with its paw. Then the student holds the target in his or her hand, slowly shaping the dog to touch the held target while the student raises it higher and higher in small increments. Then the student will switch the target to a hand target. This results in a “high five,” where the dog touches the student’s hand with its paw.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will learn to shape targeting with a paw, and see how to use targeting to shape new behavior. Additionally, students get experience with transferring a cue from a target to a hand signal. Dogs learn to generalize the skill of touching a paw to a target, regardless of where the target is placed.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience targeting, shaping, and cueing.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

Sticky note, margarine lid, or other target

TRAINING PLAN

There are four parts to this behavior:

1. Handler shapes the dog to touch a target on the floor with a paw.
2. Handler shapes the target touch toward a “high five” position by gradually raising the target in small increments.
3. Dog will touch the target with a paw when it is held in the handler’s hand.
4. When the dog is reliably touching the target held in the handler’s hand, the handler will fade the target and continue shaping the dog to touch a hand target for “high five.”

ASSUMPTIONS

- Dog and handler have some experience with shaping.
- Dog and handler have some experience with targeting.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some handlers may try to raise the target too high right away. How will you encourage them to raise criteria in small increments?
- If handlers are cuing the early stages of the paw touch, at what point should the cue be switched to the new cue?

POSSIBLE TAG POINTS

After the dog touches the target... the tag point is *target behind your back* (this is to reset for the next trial).

Lesson 7: Wait at a Boundary

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to wait at a boundary created by stretching a piece of rope out to form a visual line, then introduce the “wait” cue. When the dog is reliably responding, students can begin to teach the dog to generalize the skill by moving the rope to new locations in the room. This is an excellent foundation skill for teaching “wait,” which is a skill that pet owners will use in many instances in daily life, including teaching their dog to have good manners on stairs and with house and car doors.

LEARNING GOALS

In addition to practicing shaping, students can see how their timing and treat delivery can impact training sessions (by clicking and delivering a treat to their dog before the dog crosses the boundary). Dogs will learn a new concept and begin to generalize a skill which can later be transferred to new circumstances.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience shaping, capturing, and cueing.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

- Rope or broom handle to create a visual boundary
- Chairs or cones to create a simulated doorway (optional)

TRAINING PLAN

There are five parts to this behavior:

1. Handler shapes the dog to remain on one side of a boundary.
2. Dog will remain on one side of a boundary.
3. When the dog is reliably remaining on one side of the boundary, the handler can introduce a cue to tell the dog to cross over the boundary.
4. Handler moves the boundary to a different position/place in the room and continues to practice.
5. Dog generalizes the skill and learns to remain on one side of a boundary until hearing another cue.

ASSUMPTIONS

The dog and handler have some experience with shaping.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some dogs may not immediately grasp the concept of the rope as a “boundary.”
What tips will you give the students to help them teach their dog?
- Will you recommend any changes to the training environment?
- How will you set up the training area to ensure success?

POSSIBLE TAG POINTS

- After the click... the tag point is *toss in a different direction.*

Lesson 8: Shape a New Behavior

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will shape their dog to do something new with a plastic cup or other prop, and then add a cue. This type of creative shaping can lead to an “ah ha” moment for some students, when they realize how effective shaping is in teaching new behavior.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will learn how creative the process of shaping is, and how behaviors can be captured and shaped into virtually anything the dog is capable of doing.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience shaping and cueing.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

Large plastic cup or other prop that the dog is not familiar with and that will not easily roll away into another dog’s space.

TRAINING PLAN

There are four parts to this behavior:

1. Handler clicks and treats the dog for any interaction with the prop.
2. When the dog is actively interacting, the handler will select a behavior to begin to shape.
3. Handler will add a cue when the dog is reliably offering the new behavior.
4. Handler will continue to shape toward the goal behavior, while eliminating off-cue responses.

ASSUMPTIONS

Dog and handler understand the concept of shaping.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Handlers might be tempted to prompt or lure their dog toward a specific behavior. How will you focus them on shaping?
- Some dogs may become frustrated if the handler is using a low rate of reinforcement. What tips could you give handlers to continue to keep their dogs eager and involved?

POSSIBLE TAG POINT

While waiting for the dog to offer the next behavior... the tag point is *look at the cup*.

Lesson 9: Go Touch a Target

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog to move away from the handler to go to and touch a target with its nose or a paw. The distance between the handler and the target is gradually increased to 6 feet. This will be a useful foundation for teaching new distance behaviors in the future.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will learn how a targeting skill can be generalized to new circumstances, including teaching behaviors at a distance. Dogs will learn that they can be reinforced for behaviors even if they are at a distance from their handler.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience shaping, targeting, cueing, and building fluency (distance).

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

- Trainer sitting in a chair
- Traffic cone or other target

TRAINING PLAN

There are four parts to this behavior:

1. Handler sits beside dog and teaches the dog to touch a target with its nose, then adds a cue.
2. Handler moves chair a short distance from the target and shapes the dog to touch the target from a short distance.
3. When the dog is reliably responding to the cue, handler continues to move chair, gradually increasing distance from the target.
4. Dog will continue to move to the target, until it is at a distance of 6 feet from the handler.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Dog and handler understand the concept of shaping.
- Dog and handler understand the concept of targeting.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some dogs may focus on their handler instead of the target as the distance increases. What suggestions will you make?
- Some handlers may be tempted to increase distance too quickly. How will you instruct them to proceed in small increments?

POSSIBLE TAG POINT

After the click... the tag point is *toss past the target*.

Lesson 10: “Mine” and “Take It”

LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students will teach their dog cues for “mine” and “take it.” First, students will teach the dog to leave food alone in response to the “mine” cue. Then they will teach the dog to take the food when cued to “take it.” These cues are useful in many instances; dogs learn to not eat anything that falls on the floor—think about dropped medication or other potentially harmful items. The skill of leaving food also serves as a foundation for teaching a dog self-control in other situations.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will learn how to introduce cues and present them in a timely fashion. Students develop an understanding of how two opposite cues can be taught at the same time. The dog will learn that not all food is fair game, and that being attentive to its handler and responding to cues is very reinforcing.

KEY SKILLS/CONCEPTS COVERED

Students will experience shaping and cueing, and will practice clicker skills, especially observational skills.

PROPS/SETUP NEEDED

- Different types of food reinforcers (Handler should determine a variety of reinforcers of different values based on knowledge of his or her dog’s preferences.)
- Chair for handler (optional)

TRAINING PLAN

There are five parts to this behavior:

1. Handler offers food in his or her closed hand and clicks the instant the dog moves its nose away from the hand.
2. When the dog is moving its head away from food offered in the handler’s hand, the handler should add the “mine” cue.
3. Handler cues “take it” just as he or she offers the dog the food. This can be the food that was being held, or a different piece of food of a higher value.
4. Handler begins to slightly increase the difficulty by holding the food between the thumb and finger when cueing “mine.”

5. When the dog is responding to the “mine” cue, handler positions him or herself a few feet from the dog, gives the “mine” cue and slowly lowers the food to the ground.

ASSUMPTIONS

Dog and handler have some experience with shaping.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Handlers may be tempted to move too quickly through the steps; if the dog tries to grab the food have they moved too fast? How will you help the students succeed?
- The dog may not generalize this skill to other locations/positions. What will you recommend to students to help them begin to generalize the skill?

POSSIBLE TAG POINT

- When the dog moves its head or body away from the food... the tag point is *click head moving away*.