TEACHING A REAR FOOT TARGET

Materials: A plank of wood 1” thick x 12” wide x 3’ long is a good size placed in the grass (so there will be a textural difference as well as a height difference).

1. Stand with your dog facing you just like in the Backing Up exercise, but this time have the plank in the grass behind him about 16” away (with the long side closest to him). We want to make sure that even if he backs up crooked he will still step on the plank. Give your Backing Up cue, “Beep Beep Beep” and take a step toward him if needed. Be sure to watch very closely. As soon as he touches the plank with his back foot IN ANY WAY click and treat. Good Dog! Remember verbal praise amplifies the value of the food reward. Make sure he is still touching the plank when you deliver the treat into his mouth. That means you have to be FAST!

2. Call your dog toward you and try again. Give your cue. Watch closely ANY FOOT CONTACT earns a click and treat. Pretty quickly we want the dog to step onto the TOP surface of the plank before we click and treat.

3. Once your dog is consistently backing up and feeling for the plank with his back feet (you will know because it looks really funny) wait until both feet are on the plank before you click and treat.

4. When your dog is consistently backing up and touching the plank with both feet, it is time to turn the plank so he is aiming for the short end of the plank instead of the long end.

5. Now it is time to name the position and fade the backing up cue. “Target” is a good cue. After playing the game for a few repetitions, instead of using “Beep” say “Target”. He should know what to do and still back up into position. Click and treat.

The last phase is teaching your dog that this position is a control position like sit or down and that he is to hold the “Target” position until you give the release cue, “OK” or “Break” or whatever you would say to release from a sit or down.

6. Start by giving your “Target” cue and rewarding for correctly stepping both feet onto the plank. Make a big deal that he is a good dog. Feed lots of treats in target position. Stop feeding and then take a small step back away from your dog. If he follows you and steps off of the plank (since up until now that is what we have been doing), withhold the treat and give your “no reward marker” like “oops” or “uh-ho” and wait until he steps back onto the plank. When he does this, have another BIG party: generous praise and treats.

7. Take a small step back again; he should stay on the plank. If so, BIG BIG PARTY! Good Dog!! If not, just wait until he steps back onto the plank then party!

He should learn pretty quickly that it is in his best interest to stay put and get treats. Slowly add distance between you and your dog. Always GO BACK TO YOUR DOG to deliver the treat as we are trying to build value for staying ON the target. He gets no treats for coming off the plank.

Thanks to Anna Lee Sanders for writing this handout.