

How To Develop Paw Tricks

Getting Started – Heather Somers

So many different ways to teaching this and for most dogs it is probably one of the easiest to teach.

Modeling: As you pick up a paw, give the cue you want to use and treat.

Have a treat close to the dog's nose and using the treat as a magnet, turn his head so he's thrown slightly off balance and, when the paw opposite the head turn lifts ever so slightly, click and treat.

Capturing:

When pup is playing and pawing at a toy, click and treat, 'capturing' the behavior every time you see it. No cue given on this one until he's starting to lift a paw for you on his own . . . then add the cue.

As he's walking, click when you see the paw closest to you off the ground. This is true capturing and works really well if your timing is quick. No cue on this one either until the paw is being held up longer and you can see that the dog definitely knows what gets him the c/t.

Put a treat in your closed hand and wait until he gets frustrated enough to 'paw' your hand in an effort to get the treat. c/t.

If he rubs his eyes, c/t as the paw is coming up. I captured the eye rub that Harta did as a puppy when he came out of his bed (like rubbing the sleep from his eyes). The head bob that he did with it he kind of did himself and I captured that as well. Then we practiced our timing . . . he did it as I did it. Sometimes it was more successful than others – like most moves. It's awesome what behaviors come out of clicker training.

No matter how you get the paw up in the first place, it takes patience and persistence to get it properly on cue. Best to have a different cue for the right and left paw . . . and remember that his are different from yours if he's facing you, so don't get upset with him if he lifts what you think is the wrong 'paw' - he's probably right and doing exactly what you asked of him!

More Tips from Ray's Dressage Class

Whether you "model" the move or "capture" the move, there are many drills you can use to refine the skill and many variations of the move to which you and your dog can progress.

Progressions/Variations

- once you have the move, be sure to name it. If you plan to use "left" and "right," start right away using "left" for the dog's left paw and "right" for the dog's right paw since you will soon be beside your dog, not in front.
- **Sitting in Front:** Start in front of your sitting dog, giving a target (hand). Once the dog consistently puts the paw in your hand, lay your hand on your leg. Eventually remove the hand so that the leg is the target. That way, you won't always have to bend over.
- **Standing in Front:** Have the dog stand and repeat the hand and leg targeting while standing in front of the dog.
- **Sitting at Side:** Move to the side of the dog. Have the dog sit. Give a target – first the hand. Hold the hand high but not far in front if you want the dog to reach high. The goal is to have the dog place the paw in the hand, not just reach for it. Replace hand target with a cane or other prop useful in the routine. Eventually eliminate the target cue and use just a voice command.
- **Standing at Side:** Have dog stand. Cue "left" and have dog hold left paw up. You probably will have to hold your hand under the dog's paw to keep it up. Tap the pads if the dog wants to drop the paw. Start with short holds and gradually increase. Repeat several times. Repeat process with right paw. At first, keep the two separate. Eventually have dog do left-hold, right-hold. *Gradually* increase to 4, then 6, then 8 repetitions. Gradually move your hand away and stand upright.
- **Hopping:** Introduce left-hop (as a single command) and reward immediately. Introduce right-hop. For a repeated hop, or limp, keep reward or cue hand over the dog's shoulders. Eventually, remove the cue hand. For left-hop; right-hop: keep it slow, start with just two, gradually increasing.
- **Paw-work behind the handler:** Dogs like targets. Sit dog and stand in front of dog, facing away from dog. Extend your left leg toward dog and cue "left." Repeat several times. Do the same with the right. Do left, right, left, right. Ask the dog to stand and do the same move. Eventually start moving forward. Depending on the dog's size, dog may put paw on your foot, calf, or thigh.

Refining the moves

- vary training: sometimes work on long holds, sometimes work on immediate lifts. Reward accordingly.
- Be sure *you* control the move. Reward dog only when it has held the position as long as you want it to.
- Teach the move on both right and left heel position.
- Do a transition move into the paw work. Ie. spin or circle into paw-work move – depending on your routine.

Now, the only drawback to teaching paw tricks is that at home the dog will be "giving you the paw" when you're trying to watch your favorite TV show.

