

Train Your Friend With a Pen!

Activity Length

15 minutes

Supplies

- Something that clicks or makes a noise, like a pen
- Wooden spoon
- Small snacks for rewards (optional)

Procedure

1. Find a friend or family member who is willing to be trained. Get your spoon and pen ready.
2. Click the pen and give your friend a snack if using (or, if you aren't using treats, you can say "good" instead). Click the pen and give them a reward a few times until they learn that the clicking sounds means they'll get a reward.
3. Hold out the spoon. Remember, when training animals, keepers aren't able to speak to them so try not to say anything. If they move closer to the spoon, or even look at it, click the pen and reward them with a snack or say "good". This will get them interested in the spoon.
4. Eventually, stop clicking when they just look at the spoon. Now they have to touch it. Hold out the spoon and wait until they touch the spoon. When they do, click the pen and give them a reward.
5. Try moving the spoon around. If your friend follows the spoon and touches it, click the pen and reward them.

Congratulations, you just target trained your friend! This is often one of the first things keepers and aquarists teach an animal and is the basis for more complicated behaviors. See if you can use the target to train your friend to do other things, like spin in a circle, lay on the ground, or stand on top of something.

Science

Training can be a great way to help an animal exercise their brain. It also makes it easier for their caretakers to give them the proper care they deserve. At the Aquarium, many of the animals are target trained, including the sharks and stingrays! Their targets let them know where to swim to get their food during mealtimes.