



## Loni Loftus Behaviour

### Target training with your horse

#### What is target training?

Target training is essentially teaching your horse to target (touch) something with a part of her body. This might be touching a target stick with the nose, targeting a part of the body onto your hand or standing on a mat (there are hundreds of possible options).

Targeting can be extremely useful as it provides a focus and direction for your horse which is rewarded upon completion and can be used in a variety of ways to deal with behavioural or training problems or just to teach your horse new things.

#### How do I start?

Start with training your horse to touch a target with her muzzle. This is a natural behaviour for horses who explore their surroundings with their muzzles which are highly sensitive to touch.

#### What do I need?

Use a commercial target stick or a homemade one (ensuring it is smooth and safe for the horse to touch). A tennis ball on the end of a garden cane or a toilet float on the end of a telescopic selfie stick both work well. It needs to be a new item for your horse with a clear part for the horse to touch and should be robust and lightweight.

You'll need some tasty treats for your horse and somewhere easily accessible to keep them such as a bumbag or treat pouch.

#### What do I do now?

1. Start nose targeting by holding the target in front of your horse, they are inquisitive creatures and will likely reach forwards to investigate it. Mark (you can use a clicker for this or a tongue click or word such as Yes or Good) and reward (with a food treat) that effort even if they haven't touched it.
2. Your horse has been rewarded for investigating the target so it is likely they will try and repeat the action. This time wait for them to touch the target and then mark and reward.

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3. Repeat a few times making sure they are doing the action in a calm manner, if they are a bit overenthusiastic just wait a few seconds until they touch it gently and then mark and reward.
4. Make it very easy for your horse at first so they get it 'right' often and then you can reward them. Over time you can make it trickier by waiting for longer when they touch the target so that their muzzle is on the target for a few seconds before rewarding, also try holding the target in different positions for them to touch.
5. Once your horse can reliably touch the target when it is presented you need to start introducing your cue word. This is the word that you will use to ask your horse to touch the target in the future, 'touch' is a good word to use.
6. When your horse is touching the target with her muzzle say 'touch' then mark and reward as usual. Repeat a number of times so that your horse begins to pair the action of touching the target with the word 'touch'.
7. Now you can use the word to ask your horse to touch the target as you present it. This can be very useful as you progress as it can be used to ask your horse to target on to other items such as stationary targets and scary objects.
8. You can now continue to practice (and strengthen) your horses learning of this new skill and use it to help you in a variety of situations, some examples of which are given below:
  - a. Ask your horse to target onto the stick to help with loading or walking through narrow areas
  - b. Ask your horse to target onto a stationary target, such as the target stick placed in a road cone, to teach them to 'stay'.
  - c. Ask you horse to target to move his body position
  - d. Ask your horse to target to move forwards towards novel or spooky items
  - e. Use targetting to help with leading problems
  - f. Ask your horse to target to move backwards when you open the stable door.