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Your Smart Dog A Doorbell for Your Dog August 2009

Wouldn't it be nice if your dog could tell you when he wanted in or out? Some dogs have great signals: they bark, scratch at the door, or nudge your hand to get your attention. Others have much more subtle signals – signals we're likely to miss. It's only later, when you see the puddle at the door, that you realize the dog was asking to go out when he walked past the door.

Fortunately, teaching your dog how to give you a clear signal to go outside is relatively simple and ridiculously inexpensive. All you need is a bell and some way to hang the bell from the door. Or, if you'd rather go the designer route, purchase [Poochie Bells](#) – customized doggie doorbells from \$16.95 - \$29.95.

WHAT TO TEACH

Target

To get started, you'll need to teach your dog to touch his nose to your hand (called *targeting*). To do this, simply hold your flat, straight palm out directly in front of your dog's nose. Click and treat the instant his nose touches your hand. Repeat. If your dog doesn't touch your hand within three seconds, pull the hand away and wait a few seconds before you put your hand out again. Timing is important, too: click the instant the dog's nose touches your hand.

Name It

Once your dog is reliably touching your hand when you put it in front of your dog's face, you're ready to name the behavior. You can call it anything: touch, target, even Alabama – it doesn't really matter! Just pick one word and stick with it. **To name the behavior, say your word, then immediately present the target.** Continue to click and treat when the dog touches your hand, just as you did in the previous step. Now you've got a specific behavior with a specific name.

Transfer the Behavior

Now you can transfer the "touch" behavior to something other than your hand. Hang the bell on the door, being careful that the dog can't get his paw caught inadvertently. Put your flat hand directly behind the bell and ask your dog to touch your hand. Click and treat any

movement the dog makes toward your hand. Remove your hand from behind the bell after each trial.

Repeat the process, this time clicking only if the dog's nose touches the bell. The bell doesn't have to make any noise – yet – so long as the dog's nose is at least touching the bell. As the dog gets really good at this skill, you'll raise the criteria: now the dog has to touch the bell *and* the bell has to jingle before the dog earns the click and treat.

When you're ready to bet \$50 that the dog will ring the bell, you can then put a specific name on this bell-ringing behavior. I'd suggest you use a word like "outside," or something besides your touch cue. You'd do this the same way you taught your dog the word for "touch." Give the dog the new cue "outside," followed immediately by the old cue "touch," then click and treat as soon as the dog touches. It won't take long before your dog has learned that "outside" is the cue for ringing the bell.

USING THE BELL

When the dog knows the new cue, you can now put in into real-life use. Every time you take your dog outside for a restroom break, stand in front of the bell, give the cue "outside," and wait for him to ring the bell. The instant the bell rings, click and go outside with your dog. [You'll have the leash and collar on your dog before you give the cue "outside." Notice also, that we're getting rid of the treats here – the reward is opening the door and letting the dog go outside.]

Give your dog the cue "outside," every time you take him out for a bathroom break. Soon, the dog will begin to ring the bell on his own. The instant you hear the ringing of the bell, praise your dog, put the leash on as quickly as possible, and take your dog out for a quick bathroom break.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Initially, your dog may think the bell is the way to signal you that he wants to go out to play, run, or socialize. Ideally, the bell will be used only when the dog has to go to the bathroom. In the early stages of



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training, it's important to make it clear to the dog that those bell signals are only useful for quick, short trips outside. That no playing or recreation will occur during those quick bathroom walks. **In other words, when the dog rings the bell, praise and let your dog out immediately, but don't engage in play, or take him for a long walk.** Simply take him to the grass and stand still. If he's got to go, he'll go fairly quickly. Stand in one spot for about two or three minutes, then come back indoors with your dog. If he rings the bell again, simply repeat the process of going out to the bathroom area and standing still.



WHEN NOT TO USE THE BELLS

Don't ask your dog to ring the bell when you're taking your dog for a long walk or a fun walk. **The bells are for the sole purpose of letting you know when the dog needs a bathroom trip.** Only cue "outside," when you're taking the dog on a scheduled bathroom break.

OTHER USES FOR THE BELLS

Some dogs have great signals to let their owners know when they want out, but not when they want to come in. They scratch through screen doors, dig at the wooden door, and other destructive means. You can hang those bells on both the inside and the outside of the door – teach the dog to ring the bell *to come in* as well as to go out.

With a little patience and practice, you can teach your dog a very clear signal to let you know he's go to go to the bathroom. You can put an end to surprise puddles and piles, and to scratched or torn doors and screens with the simple addition of bells!

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