

How dogs communicate

Dogs constantly talk to us, and each other, with posture and movement and through sounds and scent – whether we notice it or not! To become a dog detective and understand how your dog thinks, first identify the clues from their postures and sounds, and discover the depth of their world of smell.

Communicating with posture

We dog body language geeks are always analyzing how a dog stands, what the tail is doing, how the eyes, ears, and mouth look, and lots more. Each part of the body is like a letter in the dog's body language; together, they form a posture, or "word", that's a snapshot of what the dog is saying in that moment. A fluid, moving sequence of postures gives us the dog's full "sentence". This book is full of postures that are analyzed to help you learn to read your dog – while the "Advanced dogwatching" features will help you to master more complex full sentences of behaviour. It's really important to start by simply observing parts of your dog's body, without trying to analyze them straight away. Each is one piece of the bigger story.

Body

Are the body and stance relaxed and loose, or is there muscle tension and stiffness? Is the dog's posture tall or

lowered? Is their weight placed forwards, backwards, or is it neutral? Bunched fur can also reveal physical and emotional tension. Try to avoid assumptions; for example, a dog that has rolled over could be either friendly or frightened.

Ears

Ear position can tell you which direction the dog is thinking about. Forward ears are alert to what's ahead; pulled-back ears may mean the dog wants to move backwards. If one ear is forward and one back, the dog is listening to two sources of sound and may be making a decision, while "aeroplane" ears going out to the side are a sign the dog is guarding their personal space or an item.

Face

Can you see the dog's facial muscles, and are they tense or relaxed? Is the brow held in a tension frown?

Eyes

Look at the eyes: are they "hard" and bulbous, or "soft" and almond shaped? Are they blinking or staring? Are the pupils dilated (big), or constricted (small)? Can you see the whites of the eyes? What are the eyes focussing on?

Mouth

Is the dog's mouth open and panting, or is it closed? How far out is the tongue and is it "spatulate" (wider at the bottom)? Can you see pronounced teeth? If the dog is showing you their

teeth by curling a lip or panting with lips pulled back, there's a reason – they are probably warning you to give them some space.

Tail

Wagging doesn't always mean happy. The tail has several functions for dogs, including communication; if it's tucked between the legs or the dog is sitting down, it can signal anxiety. Note the height, tension, and speed of the dog's tail, moment to moment.



See the whole dog

Whatever your dog's unique features, be sure to look at their body language as a whole – from nose to tail.

