

Canine Temperament Profile

The following series of simple tests will help to determine the temperament of a dog being considered for placement. These tests are especially suited for dogs selected from a shelter or other unknown background. The selection of a dog for a specific environment is very individualized. A dog suitable for one situation may not be the best choice for the residents and environment of a nursing home. One placement may require a passive dog to be placed with a resident of similar temperament. Another placement might require an assertive dog to help "bring out" a passive resident. Therefore, the test results can only be considered as "good" or "bad" after consideration of the overall picture of where the dog will be placed and what its role will be while interacting with residents.

For a more thorough evaluation, the tests could be repeated at least once, varying the site, time of day, tester, and stimuli. Earlier versions of the Canine and Feline Temperament Profiles were published in Bustad, L.K., *Animals, Aging and the Aged*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981.

Note: The response categories listed with the tests do not include every possible behavior that might occur. A helper experienced in canine behavior should assist in interpreting the responses. Tail and ear positions are not listed in the responses since they have many interpretations. For example, a wagging tail does not always indicate a friendly dog.

Test 1: Initial Observation

A room or fenced yard with minimal distractions is an appropriate testing area. The dog should not be familiar with the area, nor should anyone the dog knows be in the vicinity. Allow the dog to investigate the testing area for a few minutes without the tester present. The tester, previously unknown to the dog, should then enter the area, stand still at a discrete distance and observe the dog for approximately 15 seconds. Record below the very first responses.

Acceptable:

- Holds ground
- Approaches tester
- Hackles normal
- Flews (lips) normal
- Sniffs tester
- Retreats

Questionable:

- Crouches
- Hackles up
- Flews (lips) "puffing"
- Moves about stiff-legged
- Growls
- Barks
- Avoids eye contact
- Stares at tester
- Whines

Other observations:

- No response
- Is dog housebroken? (for indoor test site)

Test 2: Approaching the Dog

After initial, brief observations, approach the dog with hand extended at dog's nose level, palm and fingers pointed downward. Do not "rush" in, but do not approach dog in a cautious or apprehensive manner, either. Walk up to the dog in a normal stride until your hand is within 6 to 12 inches of the dog's nose. Say nothing, and wait for the dog to make the next move.

Acceptable:

- Extends head or steps forward to sniff hand
- Seeks attention by nudging or leaning into hand
- Acts playful by barks or actions
- Licks hand

Questionable:

- Turns head away or tries to ignore hand
- Pulls back or retreats
- Growls
- Raises hackles
- Barks (not to be confused with playful barking)
- Flews (lips) "puffing"
- Overly exuberant
- Bares teeth (don't confuse with grin)

Other observations:

- Stares at you
- No response

Test 3: Handling the Dog

If the dog has not been eliminated by Tests 1 and 2, attempt to pet the dog, starting with the top of the head. Use the same attitude described in Test 2. Then pet and brush the dog to determine its overall response and its response on especially sensitive areas, such as the ears and mouth.

Acceptable:

- Enjoys the attention
- Tries to make friends
- Becomes playful
- Enjoys brushing

Questionable:

- Pulls back or retreats
- Growls
- Flews (lips) "puffing"
- Raises hackles
- Quivers
- Barks
- Cowers
- Rolls over on back
- Submissively urinates
- Snaps, bites
- Overly exuberant (jumps up; not calm by end of test)
- Shows white of eye
- Overly sensitive to grooming of certain areas
- Aloof

Other observations:

- Meets tester, but with head lowered, averted eyes
- Attempts to lick tester's face

Test 4: Interacting With the Dog

If the dog has not been eliminated by Test 3, interact with the dog for a few minutes and record your observations. This interaction could include the following:

- See if dog will retrieve a ball (a good test of future trainability).
- Walk away briskly, sit on floor and call dog (a good test of social attraction).
- Get dog to lie down, then gently roll dog over and rub its belly. Will dog allow this subordinate position?
- Have assistant place a novel stimulus such as a large stuffed animal or mirror close behind the dog when dog is distracted. Encourage the dog to investigate. Does dog show self-confidence?
- Attempt to play tug-of-war with a rag. Does dog play this game aggressively?
- How does the dog react to sudden arm movement?

Test 5: Sound Sensitivity

While casually interacting with the dog, have an assistant make a very loud noise without warning. For example, have the assistant hit a metal pan with a spoon.

Acceptable:

- Notices, but continues previous activity
- Notices and investigates
- Startles but recovers quickly

Questionable:

- Flees
- Cowers
- Freezes
- Trembles
- Urinates
- Moves as if to attack

Other observations:

Test 6: Pain response

While playing with the dog, briefly pinch the webbing between the toes until dog reacts, or pull a hair from the dog's side. Note response below. (This test may help you to predict the dog's reaction to sudden pain from an unexpected source, such as a wheelchair rolling over its tail.)

Acceptable:

- Tries to pull away, but shows forgiveness
- Yelps, but is not aggressive
- Trusts you and allows further petting

Questionable:

- Growls
 Snaps
 Acts fearful
 Acts distrustful

Other observations: _____

_____**Test 7: Reacting to Unexpected Events (choose version A or B to administer, not both)**

A. Have your assistant hide around a corner, out of sight, with a noisy utility or shopping cart. Walk with the dog toward the intersection, as the assistant rolls the cart as close as possible in front of the dog. Record the dog's reactions.

B. While the dog is playing with you and is distracted, have the assistant hide in a closet or behind a door. Lead the dog close to the hiding place and have the assistant suddenly jump out at the dog and open an umbrella. Record the dog's reactions.

Test 8: Manners

No attempt is made in this test to train the dog. The object is to determine if the dog is already mannerly enough for a 30-minute visit to the prospective facility. If you are not knowledgeable in dog training techniques, it may be helpful to have the assistance of a trainer for these exercises. The dog's response to these exercises will be an indication of his future trainability. The following are not the only methods of conducting these exercises; different dogs may require different techniques. For instance, a dog may not be familiar with the word "Heel," but might walk along nicely to "Let's go!" An experienced trainer should assist in the eventual training of the dog.

Equipment – The dog should have a properly fitting flat collar (i.e. not a slip collar or "choke chain") and should be on a lead, preferably one made of leather or cotton webbing. If a slip collar is used, do not leave it on an unattended dog.

The Sit-Stay – The dog is placed in a standing position at the left side of the handler, with the leash gathered in the right hand so that there is just a little slack. The dog is cued to sit, using the dog's name if known, e.g., "Rover, sit!" A hand signal may also be used. The dog should be praised for compliance. Try to keep the dog in the sitting position for a few seconds, continuing to praise, and using the word "stay" occasionally. Release the dog after no longer than 15 seconds and praise again. Be consistent with your release words; for example, use "O.K." every time. Repeat this procedure once or twice, with rest and attention in between.

Heeling – The dog is placed in a sit at the handler's left side with the leash gathered up in the handler's right hand. Handler gives the cue, "Heel." Stepping out with the left foot, walk briskly about, encouraging the dog to stay in the area of the left leg. If the dog pulls on the leash, slow up and keep encouraging the dog to stay near you with pats on your leg and kind words of inducement. Repeat the command now and then. At one point back up and call the dog, gently tugging on the leash to see if the dog is willing to come when called. Be sure to praise the dog for any success.

Spend no more than 30 seconds on this exercise at a time. Repeat the exercise once or twice, with rest and attention in between.

Observations:

Did the dog pull on the lead? Yes___No___

Did the dog start to assume the heel position after several 30-second sessions? Yes___No___

Was the dog willing to sit and remain sitting? Yes___ No___

Does the dog seem willing to please and to cooperate? Yes___ No___

Did the dog require much encouragement to come when called? Yes___ No___

Is the dog mannerly enough at this point for a half-hour visit? Yes___ No___