

**MODULE 1**

**PET PROTECTOR  
ANIMAL  
CHARACTERISTICS**



**Proudly developed by:**



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# Module 1: Animal Characteristics

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Welcome to Pet Protector for dog owners. This first module examines the history of dogs and the various breeds and breed groups, and discusses ways of accurately identifying individual dogs. The way that dogs communicate with each other and with humans is also addressed. As pet owners and pet advocates, it is particularly beneficial to be able to read and understand a pet's body language.

## Dog Breeds

Domestic dogs are related to wolves (through a common ancestor) and became associated with early hunter-gatherer humans about 15,000 years ago. They assisted them with hunting and, in return, received a share of the spoils.

The term **canine** is used to describe the dog family. The word **dog** also refers to the male, while the word **bitch** refers to a female. An offspring is called a **pup** or **puppy** until it is about a year old.

Most canine breeds are, at most, a few hundred years old. They were selectively bred to enhance natural behaviours and physical features for particular roles that suited humans. Through this selective breeding, dogs have developed into over 150 different breeds.

Clubs of hobbyists, called breed clubs, define dog breed groupings. Dogs of the same breed have similar characteristics, such as appearance and behaviour, primarily because they come from a select set of ancestors who had the same characteristics. A dog is said to be purebred if its parents were purebred and it meets the standards of the breed. These standards are defined by the various breed clubs, and will vary from country to country.

National kennel clubs categorise breeds into groups for the purpose of dog show competitions, where individual animals are judged against the breed standard. Breed groups are based on ancestral dog types, and vary from country to country.

The Kennel Club (UK) is the original and oldest kennel club. It places dogs in the following groups:

- Gundog Group
- Hound Group
- Pastoral Group
- Terrier Group
- Toy Group
- Working Group
- Utility Group

## Toy

These are generally small breeds that are kept primarily as companions and pets.



Examples of toy group. 1. Bichon Frise. 2. Yorkshire Terrier. 3. Pug. 4. Maltese.

## Gundog

As the name suggests, these dogs spot/retrieve shot prey and are used for hunting.



Examples of gundog group. 1. Cocker Spaniel. 2. Golden Retriever. 3. English Setter. 4. Hungarian Vizsla.

## Working

These are dogs that have specific 'working' roles, e.g. herding sheep.



Examples of working group dogs. 1. Kelpie. 2. Border Collie. 3. German Shepherd. 4. Bernese Mountain Dog.

## Terrier

Terriers were originally kept to hunt vermin, especially mice, rats and rabbits. Some terriers were bred to go down holes or burrows in order to chase vermin out for the hunter.



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3 By Meglaser (Own work), via Wikimedia Commons



4 By Hurdhater, via Wikimedia Commons

Examples of terrier group. 1. West Highland White Terrier. 2. Australian Terrier. 3. Wire Fox Terrier. 4. Bull Terrier (left) and Staffordshire Bull Terrier (right).

## Hound

These dogs are used to hunt or track by sight or scent.



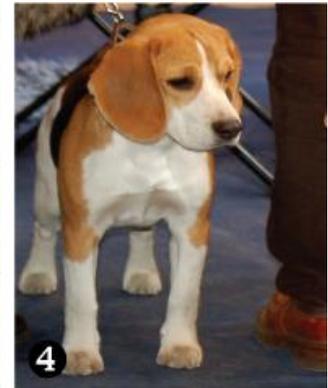
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Examples of hound group. 1. Afghan Hound. 2. Greyhound. 3. Basset Hound. 4. Beagle.

It is often useful to know what your dog was originally bred for. The instincts that many breeds possess are strong and may influence their behaviour. Having an awareness of these traits means that you are more able to identify them early and train them out if they are undesirable. For example, many herding breeds, such as Border Collies and Cattle Dogs, have the tendency to 'round up' cyclists and cars. The urge to chase anything that is small and furry is still very strong in many terriers that were bred to hunt. If they are to live in harmony with cats and other small animals, they need to be introduced to the other animal early and carefully. Working dogs are often very intelligent, and may benefit from mental as well as physical exercise to prevent boredom-associated behaviour issues - see Module 2 for more on this topic.

# Pet Identification

It is important to be able to identify your pet in case it escapes or becomes lost. If this happens, you need to be able to give an accurate description of your dog to local authorities, rescue centres, veterinary clinics or anyone else who may be able to help you locate them.

## Appearance

An accurate description is relatively easy if you own a purebred dog, particularly one of the more popular ones, as most people will be familiar with their appearance. However, if your dog is an unusual breed, or a mixture of more than one breed, it becomes more difficult.

Physical descriptions need to include the breed, or predominant breed(s) if the dog is a crossbreed - For example, Labrador Cross or Cattle Dog x Kelpie, and the colour of your dog.

Colour descriptions can vary from breed to breed. For example, a Labrador may be described as yellow, whereas a Retriever may be golden. People's interpretation of colours can also differ. Again with dogs of more than one colour, the predominant colour is usually mentioned first. A Rottweiler would be described as black and tan.

The type of coat may also be a useful inclusion, and may range from wiry to smooth and longhaired to short. You should also make a note of any unusual markings on your dog that may aid in identifying them. Their sex, neutered status and age should also be added.

A colour photograph is the most effective means of showing other people what your dog looks like.

## Collar with identification tag

Most local councils insist that every dog wears a collar with an identification tag at all times. It is a good idea, even if it is not law where you live. Ideally dogs should wear their collar at all times, even in the house, in case they escape when a door is unintentionally left open. A collar and ID tag are of no use if your dog doesn't have them on. Your new puppy may not be keen to wear a collar at first, and many pups scratch at them for the first day or so. Using a soft fabric collar is advisable. Put it on, making sure it is neither too tight nor too loose, and leave it on so that your pup gets used to it. A metal ID tag, engraved with details such as name and phone number, should be attached to the collar.

## Microchips

The best method of permanently identifying your pet is with a microchip. A microchip is very small and is 'injected' under the loose skin over the back of the neck between your dog's shoulder blades. The chip contains its own individual ID number that corresponds to pet and owner information stored on a central database.

The procedure is straightforward and relatively pain free. Some puppies feel a little discomfort, but it passes quickly.

Local council pounds, rescue charity groups and veterinary clinics all have scanners capable of reading microchips. They also have access, via a secure PIN, to the central database that stores your contact details, enabling them to get in touch if your pet is brought in to their facility.

It is vital that you update your contact details on the database if you change phone numbers or move house.



Enlargement of a microchip. The microchip is approximately the size of a grain of rice.



# Dog Behaviour

Wolves and domestic dogs are descended from a common ancestor. This makes wolves the present-day wild cousins of domestic dogs. Wolves live in packs that hunt together and share food. The packs are ruled by a dominant 'alpha male' and 'alpha female'. They use complex behaviours and body language within the group. Despite a long association with humans, domestic dogs retain many of these wild behaviours. Humans use these behaviours to train dogs, as they adapt well to domestic households.

Dogs have adapted to human coexistence and do not need to be housed in packs. They consider the humans in their household as part of their pack. It is important that dogs treat the humans as 'alpha' in these situations, otherwise they may develop aggression towards humans.

Because dogs have descended from pack hunters, it is desirable to provide ample opportunities for exercise, particularly running activities.

## Communication

### Vocalisation

A dog communicates using a range of sounds, including barks, growls, whines, whimpers and howls.

#### **Bark**

This is a loud, sharp, explosive cry used for a number of reasons:

- When intruders approach the dog's home territory
- When seeing or hearing something unfamiliar or unexpected
- To express emotions such as loneliness, fear, suspicion, stress and pleasure

Playful or excited barks are often short and sharp, and often made when a dog is attempting to get a person or another dog to play.

The bark of a distressed or stressed dog is high-pitched, repetitive, and increases its pitch as the dog becomes more upset. For example, a dog that suffers from separation anxiety may bark when left home alone.

#### **Growl**

A growl is a low, guttural sound made in the throat. Typically it expresses anger, hostility or is used to discourage some action by another party, such as when food is being taken away, or the dog is being picked up. It is often heard just before outright aggression.

#### **Howl**

A howl is a long, wailing cry, probably used as long-range communication with other dogs or humans. Howling can be used to locate another pack member, to keep strangers away, or to call

the pack for hunting. Some dogs howl when they have separation anxiety. Some dogs will howl in response to emergency services' sirens, or to musical instruments.

### **Whine**

A whine is a long, high-pitched, complaining cry. It is often produced nasally with the mouth closed. A dog may whine when it wants something, such as food, wants to go outside, wants to be let off the leash (possibly to greet another dog or a person), or just wants attention. A very insistent dog may add a bark at the end of a whine, in a whine-bark, whine-bark pattern.

### **Whimper and yelp**

A whimper is a series of low, feeble sounds. A yelp is a short, sharp cry. They both express fear, pain or discontent.

The whimper or yelp is used only when the dog intends to communicate its distress to a pack member (or human) to whom they are submissive or friendly, and the other dog or human is expected to react positively to the communication. Dogs engaged in serious fights do not whimper lest they betray weakness. Dogs also whimper when they are physically abused or neglected by humans.

Yelps are often associated with the lowering of the tail between the legs. Yelping can also indicate strong excitement when a dog is lonely and is suddenly met with affection, such as when a dog is left alone in a house during the day and its owner comes through the door late at night. Licking, jumping and barking often accompany such yelping. Yelping is distinct from barking, in that it is softer, higher pitched, and quieter.

## **Body language**

Body language is a form of visual communication using the body, or specific parts, such as the ears, eyes, eyebrows, mouth, nose, head and tail. Dogs have been bred to many different shapes and sizes and, depending on the breed, the expression of body language may vary. For example, Basset Hounds have large floppy ears that are less mobile than a German Shepherd's ears. Basenjis have tightly curled tails that sit close to their body.

### **Ears**

Ear position gives information about the level of attention. Ears facing forward mean the dog is very attentive to something in front of them. Ears to the side or facing backward mean the dog is paying attention to everything around them.

Ears back and flat against the head indicate fear or alarm.

### **Eyes**

Intently staring at another dog indicates dominance, while averted eyes indicate submission. Eyes narrowed to slits indicate affection for the person or animal the dog is looking at. Eyes that shift towards and away from a person or animal indicate fear and anxiety.

Raised eyebrows suggest interest, lowered brows suggest uncertainty or mild anger, and one eyebrow up suggests bewilderment.

## Mouth

The mouth also gives information about the dog's mood. Lips retracted with teeth exposed usually indicate aggression and a willingness to bite. Growling, barking and snapping often accompany this. Some dogs will pull back their upper lip, in an apparently aggressive way, when they are excited or happy. In this case, there is no growling, and there may be other signs of happiness, such as tail wagging.

Dogs lick other dogs' faces and mouths, or the hand of a human, as a greeting and to indicate friendliness. Licking is used also as social bonding.

Dogs that are happy will hold their mouth relaxed and slightly open with lips covering teeth.

## Head

When the head is held high and pushed forward this indicates interest and confidence. It can also mean an aggressive mood if there are other signs of aggression. Head lowered can indicate both fear and submission. A very submissive dog will turn its head away from another dog or person, and often rolls onto its side.

The head held to one side, with an ear held forward, indicates curiosity.

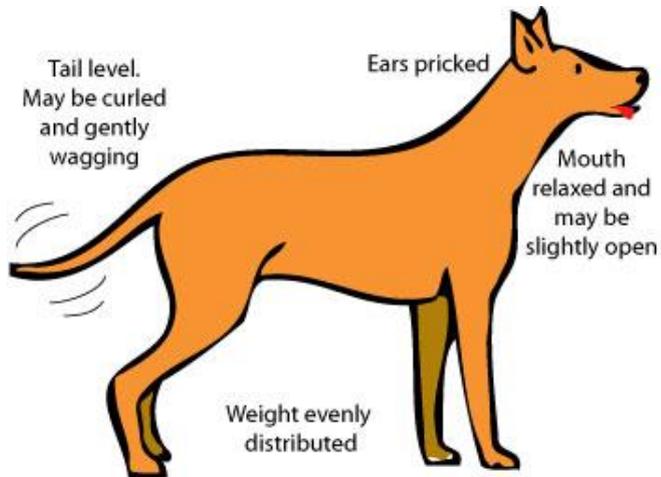
## Tail

How a dog carries its tail signifies its mood. Various dog breeds have different 'natural' tail positions, and this must be taken into account.

A tail held high indicates the dog is alert, while a tail held between the legs indicates submission.

The way the tail wags also indicates mood. A tail held stiffly and high, with rapid wagging in a short arc, indicates friendliness towards a dog of similar rank. A tail held stiffly and high, with slower, regular wagging in a longer arc, indicates dominance and willingness to fight. A relaxed tail waving gently in a wide arc indicates friendliness and interest.

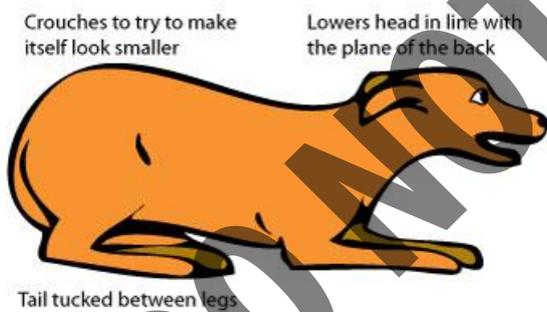
**Relaxed and confident dog:** A confident or contented dog stands with its weight evenly distributed on all four feet. It may curl its tail over its body and/or wag in excitement. Ears, if not naturally floppy, are held high. Eyes are bright and alert and the lips are relaxed.



*Relaxed and confident dog*

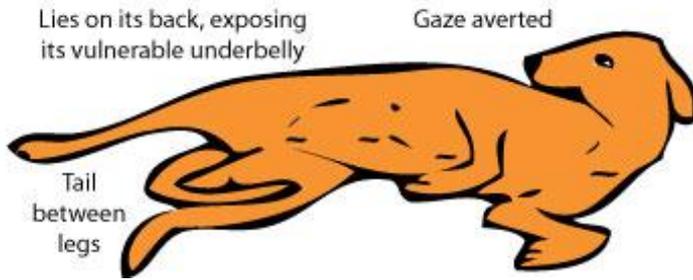
**Fearful dog:** A frightened dog will instinctively make itself look smaller, and signal to the aggressor that it is already beaten and not worth worrying about. It will also avoid eye contact and lower its head in line with the plane of its back. Ears are laid back. The tail lowers as fear increases, and may be tucked between the legs.

A terrified dog's eyes are wide and staring, with pupils dilated and the whites of the eyes obvious.



*Fearful dog*

**Submissive dog:** A submissive dog tries to avoid confrontation by offering appeasement gestures, such as crouching, cowering and placing its tail between its legs. It may even lie on its back, exposing the most vulnerable part of the body. This is to let the aggressor know that it is no threat.



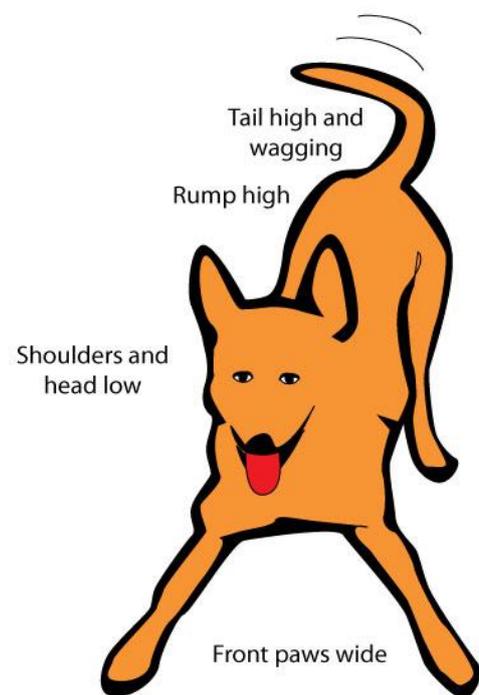
Submissive dog

**Aggressive dog:** A dominant dog advances confidently with its head and tail held high, looking straight ahead. Its hackles bristle to make it appear bigger, and the ears face forward, indicating that it is alert, ready, and not concerned about any outcome. The tail is held high to expose the scent glands, which communicate dominance to other dogs. As its aggression increases, it will snarl and wrinkle its nose to expose its teeth. It will stalk on stiffened feet, ready to lunge. Hair stands up (piloerection) along the neck and back. Ears will be pulled back against the dog's skull just prior to attacking.



Aggressive dog

**Playful dog:** The dog that wants to play may appear similar to the submissive dog, with its head held low and back bowed inwards, front paws stretched out and bottom up, but its tail will be held high and wagging. This is known as the 'play' posture or 'bow'.



*Playful dog*

### **Pet Protector Pointer**

Don't punish your dog for growling – it's their way of warning prior to biting. If dogs are punished for growling, they have no way of letting us know that they don't like what is happening, and warning or allowing us to stop interacting with them. Children must be taught to take a growling dog very seriously.