



## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION OF DOGS

Lesson by Christine Vosseller

Ever wonder what your POOCH would say to you; if only they could talk? Dogs have been our “best friend” for thousands of years, yet it seems they still read us much better than we read them! CANINE intelligence expert Dr. STANLEY COREN insists that the average dog can learn roughly 165 words. His tip for success? CONSISTENCY. Pick a word for dinner and stick with it! Supper? Din din? Go for it! So that is how we train our dog; how do they train us?



What are we talking about today? communication of dogs

How long have dogs been our best friend? thousands of years

What does Dr. Stanley Coren specialize in? canine intelligence

How many words can the average dog learn? 165

How many words can you think of to use for “dinner?” Give me a few!

Why do you think using one consistent word for dinner would be helpful to train your dog?

So how do you think our dogs train us? Any guesses?

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Some folks think that dogs have little to say because they do not ‘speak’ our LANGUAGE. Why are we so focused on our language? Just as a tourist can repeat a phrase over and over in a foreign language, trying to be understood; so have our puppies! Our language is largely AUDIBLE and/or VISUAL using sounds and letters (just like in S2C!). Dogs are largely visual too in that they use their bodies! They ‘speak’ to us with the direction of their GAZE, the STANCE they keep, ARC of their body and tilt of their heads and tails! Some would call this a rich language; one steeped in social form and cooperation.

Some people would say dogs don’t speak our \_\_\_\_\_? Language

Human language is both visual and \_\_\_\_\_? audible

Tell me a way in which we might consider a dog’s language to be visible? direction of gaze, stance, arc of body, tilt of head, tails

Why do some folks think dogs have little to say?

What does it mean to say human language is audible or visual?

What makes the visual/physical language of a dog ‘rich.’

Why is important to get to know a dog’s language? It can be dangerous for both the dog and the human if we are not communicating effectively. Roughly 45 MILLION people are bitten by dogs in the U.S. each year; many of them children. If we are better ATTUNED (in harmony; paying attention to) to the message our dogs are providing via their visual language, we may be more safe and trade a few of those NIPS for kisses!

If we are not communicating effectively with dogs it can be \_\_\_\_\_? dangerous

What word did I use for in harmony; paying attention to? attuned

How many people are bitten by dogs in the U.S. each year? 45 million

What word did I use for bite? nip

What’s another word for bite? nip, gnaw, chew, munch, etc.

Have you ever encountered a situation where you were unable to interpret warnings from a nervous puppy?

So how do we get better attuned to the messages our puppies TELEGRAPH to us? Pay close attention to the ears, tail and body. A BASELINE (starting point) posture for a relaxed, chilled out dog is ears up and tail down. When alert the dog may raise his body, extend the tail straight behind and arch ears forward.

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Interpret dog communication by looking at the ears, tail and \_\_\_\_? body  
What three areas of a dogs body can you examine to interpret a dogs message or level of anxiety? ears, tail and body  
What does a baseline, relaxed poster look like? dog is ears up and tail down  
When a dog raises his body, extends the tail straight behind and arches ears forward, it usually means a dog is \_\_\_\_? alert  
What is one way your body communicates?

An ANXIOUS dog will tuck his tail, lower his body and pull back the corners of his mouth. Use extra CAUTION if you see the HACKLES raise and nose wrinkle. Hackles are the hairs along the back of the dogs neck. This is a sure sign that the dog may bite. If a dog has stiffened his tail and begins wagging it slowly or freezes and begins staring at your hard, this is a final sign to abandon interaction! What am I missing here? The GROWL. You know – some dogs growl and some don't. The body is really what communicates louder than barks here!

What are the tell 'tail' signs that a dog is anxious? tuck tail, lower body, raise hackles, nose wrinkle, pull back corners of mouth  
The hairs along the back of the dogs neck are the \_\_\_\_\_. hackles  
What are hackles? hairs along the back of the dogs neck.  
Raising the hackles is a sign the dog may \_\_\_\_? bite  
What is a sure sign that a dog may bite? raising hackles  
If a dog begins wagging it slowly or freezes and begins staring at your hard, you should abandon \_\_\_\_\_? interaction  
Name one sign that indicates you should abandon interaction with a dog.  
stiffened his tail, wagging tail slowly, freezes, staring hard  
Will a dog always growl before becoming aggressive?  
What is a sign that you are anxious?

Dog trainer TURID RUGAAS says there are over 30 CALMING signals that a dog often puts out to deflect trouble or say they are sorry. Some can be SUBTLE (barely noticeable) so we may not notice them! A flick of the tongue, gentle turning of the head or gaze of the eyes in a different direction may be a sign that

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they want to say “I am sorry.” Further, suddenly plopping on the ground or sitting, yawning or shaking of their body may be a calming signal. The best sign for “I am sorry” is often when your puppy approaches you on a curve!

How many calming signals does Turid Rugass say dogs have? 30

A flick of the tongue, gentle turning of the head or gaze of the eyes in a different direction may be a sign that they want to say “I am \_\_\_\_\_?” Sorry

Name one subtle sign that a dog may want to say I am sorry. flick of tongue, turning of the head, gaze of the eyes,

What word did I use for barely noticeable? Subtle

Suddenly plopping on the ground or sitting, yawning or shaking of their body may indicate \_\_\_\_\_? Calming

How do dogs show they are calming? plopping on ground, sitting, yawning, shaking of their body

What’s the best sign a dog is sorry? approach on a curve

How do you indicate you are sorry?

So we know the danger signs of puppy anxiety, and we have identified when our best friend is calm and/or wants to say “I’m sorry,” how about a hug? Or not! Oh boy, do we like a full body hug. We extend our arms and throw them around the necks of our parents, friends and even siblings! We are PRIMATES and built to hug! Dogs are not primates; what feels natural to us can actually feel like a threat to our four legged friends. Reaching across a dogs neck is actually taken by them as a sign of INTIMIDATION. Will they tolerate it from their owner? Sure, but they don’t like it. When children or strangers lock on to the neck of a dog, pat their head or stare closely into their eyes they see this as a sign of AGGRESSION. Quite often this is how small children get bites to the face – ouch!

One way that feels natural for humans to show affection is through a \_\_\_? hug

I said humans are classified as \_\_\_\_\_? Primates

Why doesn’t a hug feel natural to a dog? not primates; feels aggressive/intimidating

How is a hug often interpreted by a dog? Intimidation

Staring into a dogs eyes and patting it’s head may be considered a sign of \_\_\_\_\_? aggression

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Why do you think a dog may accept a hug from its owner, but not a stranger or child?

Have you ever witnessed mans best friend with a GUILTY look? Yeah, that time when Jacques ate my favorite sharpie pen off the table. Or what about that time when Henri held it as long as he could, but had to go relieve himself on the living room run! SLINKY posture, lowered head and half stare was a guilty, heart felt apology, right? Nope; it was actually a sign of STRESS. It could have even been a request from my puppy to stop yelling at him; a CEASE and DESIST order!



A reaction to do something we should not have done is to feel \_\_\_? Guilty  
What happens with the poster, head and stare of a dog that may have just done something bad? lowered head, half stare  
What is this a sign of? Stress  
Knowing this is a sign of stress, what would you do differently if you found your puppy ate the leftover cake on the table?

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Let's wrap this up on a happy note! My puppies are happy indeed – and they love me – and there are tell 'tail' signs to prove it! Author MELISSA HOLBROOK PIERSON gives one great example of the “rocking horse” run; a jaunt as vertical as it is forward! How about the greeting stretch; “Hello mom... (stretch)... welcome home!” One of the best examples Pierson provides is the C shaped body bend which shows up as dogs maneuver in your grasp for the perfect scratch and smile! Smile? Yes... dogs do smile – very often at you!



What do dogs wag when they are happy? tail

What do you imagine the greeting stretch looks like?

What shape does a dogs body take when they are enjoyed a scratch? C shape

Have you seen a dog smile?

### CREATIVE WRITING:

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If you have a pet, what do you do to try to keep your pet happy? Of you don't have a dog yourself, how could you greet a dog (that has been identified as friendly and safe to approach) in a way that puts that dog at ease?

Write a brief guide for dogs to understand YOUR unspoken communication so they can successfully communicate with you!!



Christie Vosseller is not a practitioner but IS an ally of the nonspeaking community and a great lesson writer. She works in Human Resources and enjoys traveling with her wife, Elizabeth and taking long walks with her papillon puppies, Jacques and Henri.

How Many Words do Dogs Know? (N.D.). Animal Planet. Retrieved on May 16, 2015 from: <http://www.animalplanet.com/pets/how-many-words-do-dogs-know/>

Peirson, Melissa H. (Saturday/Sunday May 9,10). Learn to listen to dog language. The Wall Street Journal Weekend.

*The mission of I-ASC is to advance communication access for nonspeaking individuals globally through [training](#), [education](#), [advocacy](#) and [research](#). I-ASC supports all forms of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) with a focus on methods of spelling and typing. I-ASC currently offers [Practitioner training](#) in [Spelling to Communicate \(S2C\)](#) with the hope that other methods of AAC using spelling or typing will join our association*

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