



Module 13 : Understanding Dog Communication

- How smell is one of the most important senses that your dog has
- Why sound is not only about the barking that your dog is doing
- The body language in your dog is extremely important to their communication
- How a dog communicates through taste and touch

Module 13 will explore a variety of topics on understanding dog communication, including the following:

- How smell is one of the most important senses that your dog has
- Why sound is not only about the barking that your dog is doing
- Body language in your dog is extremely important to their communication.
- How a dog communicates through taste and touch

Understanding Dog Communication - 5m29s

13.1 Introduction

Dog communication is about all of the following:

- Smell

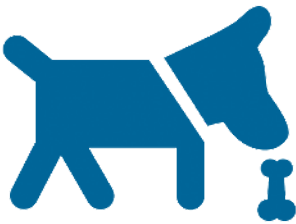
- Sound
- Body Language
- Taste
- Touch

Dogs have their own way of communicating. It comes from their ancestry with wolves. A lot of dog behaviour that you have learned about and will learn more about is tied to their evolutionary chain from wolves to domesticated dogs.

To become a better trainer for your dog, or as a trainer for other people's dogs, you will need to understand dog communication.

You have already received a small introduction to communication in animals so now you can apply that knowledge to specific topics.

13.2 Smell



Smell is one of the most important senses your dog has. It is a main requirement for their communication. In the wild, wolves, wild dogs and domesticated dogs leave their scents as warnings of territory. Dogs also use their sense of smell as a way to understand other animal communication. The natural instinct of your dog is to leave their scent behind through urination and rubbing. Since a dog's sense of smell is one of their best tools they are very interested in other scents like that of cats, small animals and other humans. Their natural instinct is to smell everything and decide what is or is not a threatening scent. You may have been on a walk with your dog and your dog goes running up to certain people. It could be the dog is extremely interested in the scent of that person because the person has their own dog or cat. Another example is if you move into an apartment that had pets living there before. Your dog might start to exhibit different behaviours, such as urinating in the home or rubbing along certain surfaces. It is often in response to another marker that is now in their territory. The other pet is long gone but the scent may remain and your dog feels they need to cover it up to show it is his/her place now. Smell can also provide information to your dog. A dog will sniff another to learn their sex, status and age. Another dog's scent can contain information such as social status, confidence, mood, and whether the dog is a stranger or friend.

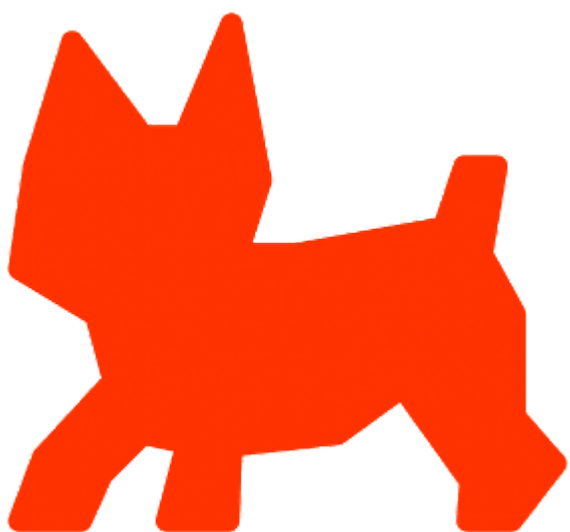
Dogs can use smell to tell them if there is something wrong or incorrect. Their ability to detect odours allows them to provide a way to locate drugs, missing people and lost items. If food is not

fresh enough they may tell you it is bad, often by sniffing it and then barking.

To a dog, every person and animal has a unique 'scent fingerprint'.

We may bathe and wear perfume, but our pets can smell our sweat, oil glands and shedding skin flakes perfectly. Research also indicates that a dog's sense of smell can pick up on fear, anxiety and sadness. Increased adrenaline during fight-or-flight responses can send body chemicals shooting to the surface and dogs are able to pick up on this with their sense of smell. In fact, their sense of smell is so keen, they often feel overpowered with strong fragrances and deodorants. Spray yourself in another room with the door closed before coming close to your pet.

FACT



Dogs have a remarkable sense of smell, they are capable of differentiating odours in concentrations nearly 100 million times lower than humans can.
Source: sciencekids.co.nz

13.3 Sound

Sound is not only about your dogs bark, but also about other sounds they hear. All animals will communicate vocally and your dog will bark for several reasons. Your dog may bark with an alert, alarm, boredom, fear, suspicion, demand, distress, or for pure pleasure.

A distress bark is one of consistency. It is often high, repetitive and will increase in pitch the more upset your dog becomes.

The behaviour may be seen when you are away from home. For example, a neighbour might hear this distress bark because your dog is feeling isolated or experiencing separation anxiety. It can happen when your dog is locked somewhere, perhaps their kennel or in a room. An alert bark is a staccato sound. It is usually sharp and done once, but possibly repeated if you do not come quickly. An alarm bark is intense. It will be like the alert sound but with more intensity to the barking. The dog will attempt to get you or their housemates roused, moving and keep everyone safe. When a dog

is bored you can expect a monotone bark with plenty of repetition. This is a bark saying there is no danger, but that they want to play, get your attention and simply break the boredom they feel. This bark is also one neighbours might hear often when you are not around. It is particularly heard when the dog is left inside alone for several hours. A demand bark is very persistent and sharp. It tends to be directed at the person who will address their needs. Suspicious barks are slow and low in tone, while fearful barking is low but extremely fast. You can always distinguish all of these barks from a dog's playful bark. The bark will not continue for long and is often associated with play movements. Barking is not the only sound your dog can make. There are a few others that are used for communication as well.

Growling

Growling is to warn of a perceived threat. It can also tell other animals that this dog is there and does not like this other animal in their territory. Dogs will growl in play, such as when tugging on a toy. Some dogs like Rottweilers will grumble when they are playing or being petted, and as long as you observe no stress then it is just play fun.

Baying

Baying is a deep throat sound. It is usually heard when a dog is going after prey; however, it can also be a sound used for challenging an intruder.

Howling

Howling is triggered by other high-pitched sounds. It goes back to their ancestry where wolves howl communications, such as warnings. Most dogs will start to howl when they hear police or fire sirens. Howling is usually used for hunting or if the animal is in extreme distress. Rather than barking your dog may howl due to separation or isolation distress.

Whimpering, Yelping and Whining

A whimper or yelp is usually a sound your dog makes when they are in pain. For example, if their foot is accidentally caught in a closing door, or when another dog bites a little hard during play. The yelp is used with humans and other pets to show that there is distress and pain. Whimpers can also be about excitement, such as when an owner returns home for the day. This extreme excitement can cause your dog to whimper in pleasure. It is usually combined with licking, barking and jumping. It is also a softer sound than whining. Whining is high pitched and produced through the nasal cavity with the mouth closed. Dogs will whine when they want something, such as to go outside. They can also whine if they feel restrained by a lead, kennel or something else. Whining can also be a sign of wanting valuable attention from their owner due to separation or a lack of attention. Whining will increase in intensity when your dog is stressed.

13.4 Body Language



Body language in your dog is extremely important to their

communication. While barking and sounds can help you figure out what is happening with your dog their body language can help reinforce the sounds. Sometimes their body language will tell you more about what they are feeling or fearful of. Dogs can express fear, sadness, happiness, nervousness, anger, and other emotions with their bodies. The eyes, within limits, can show what a dog is feeling. A relaxed and happy dog will leave their eyes in their normal shape. Think of when you feel emotions and how your eyes may change, such as widening in surprise or squinting to get a better look at something. Your dog can change his/her eyes to show aggression, fear or submission. The direction of your dog's gaze, along with other body language, can tell you if they hear something threatening, fun or interesting. For example, a dog when looking for a missing person will often bark once to alert and will then arrange their body in the direction of the person. When a dog shows a lot of whites of the eyes and will not look directly at you, it is usually in an aggressive stance.

They are guarding something or getting ready to protect you. It is often a sideways look to make certain nothing will hurt them or be stolen from them. Their bodies will be tense when guarding, but if your dog is not tense then you might not see the whites of the eyes as much. Without sound the mouth can also tell you a lot about what your dog is feeling. A mouth is not just for eating and barking. A dog that is submissive or frightened will usually have their mouth closed, with lips pulled back slightly. A flick of the tongue in and out can also be a sign of submission. An anxious dog might yawn widely a lot. Dogs that retract their lips and show their teeth are showing aggression. Most often a happy dog will have their mouth slightly open, the tongue hanging out sometimes, and licking can also be a part of this happiness. Dogs may also press up tightly to you. If their lips are pulled back and they are growling then this is a warning and a sign of protection. They are staying close in order to defend against the danger. However, dogs that feel fear may also become tense and press against you. For example, a dog afraid of a thunderstorm may press closely to you and be extremely tense. This is often accompanied by shaking. This shaking or quivering is a sign of extreme fear, so they are trying to get comfort from you. It can also happen in other situations, such as at a dog park.

13.5 Taste

Your dog can also communicate through taste. Your dog might taste their food and stop eating it. They might also taste something that you would never put near your own mouth. Dogs have 1,700 taste buds on their tongue. These taste buds are tuned to chemical groups in the brain which allows a dog to recognise certain tastes.

Your dog may taste something as a way to decide what it is, if they like it and then communicate to you whether it is something they will consume. Taste is not as common in communication as the other three senses we have discussed in this module. However, it is important to watch your dog when eating something new, or when they are outside and decide to taste something out of curiosity.

Dogs will tend to actively seek out meat-flavours and their tongues are covered with specific, meat-seeking buds over nearly two-thirds of the front part. They also like to curl their tongue when they drink water as they can actually taste the water (which humans can't). It's due to these special-water-tasting buds that dogs like to drink copious amounts of water.

13.6 Touch



Touch or tactile communication is another way your dog is trying to tell you something. Tactile communication can show love, happiness, fear and their desire to protect you. Protective touch can also be defensive. For example, a mother will crouch over her puppies when there is a perceived danger. Older dogs have been known to lie down near their favourite toys to feel comforted or may groom their companion. Dogs can also cuddle, lick or press against you in protective behaviour. Defensive touch is all about protecting through body language and nose bumps. A dog might poke at another pet in their vicinity to get them away from something the dog is trying to protect. A dog can also nip as a way to reinforce the point. Dogs will rub against you, lick you or jump on you to show their affection. Some dogs will even try to get onto your lap, sleep with you or stick close to your heels. This touching is meant to show their affection, but it may also be about calming your dog in the event something scared them, or they felt you were never coming back. Dogs love to be close to other dogs as well as humans. Your touch can be just as important to their communication. Dogs expect to be touched by their companions as a way to communicate. It means you can use your own touch to show how you are feeling or as a way to help calm your dog. A nervous dog can become calmer if you apply a firm full hand pressure to their body, along their head or back. Stroking your dog or letting your dog be in your lap are also methods that you can use to communicate through touch. Dogs will touch items that they want to play with or bring them to you as a way to communicate their desires.

Summary

In this module you explored the five senses as a means of communication for dogs. You learned to differentiate between the types of barks your dog might use to communicate with you and other dogs. You explored a dog's sense of smell in terms of the information they can glean from sniffing a variety of things, including other dogs and humans. As you progressed through this module you should have picked up information regarding body language and how your dog might pose, become tense, or change its posture in different situations. Lastly, you learned that touch and taste are also a part of a dog's communication repertoire.

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