



Module 19: Learning About Cat Communication

- How cats communicate with scents
- Cat talk and what it means
- Cat body language
- How a cat uses touch and taste to communicate

In many ways cat communication is similar to a dog's; however, each species is unique. You will learn:

- How cats communicate with scents
- Cat talk and what it means
- Cat body language
- How a cat uses touch and taste to communicate

Learning About Cat Communication - 5m04s

19.1 Introduction



Cats use scent, sound, touch, taste and body language to communicate their feelings and needs.

As a pet owner it is imperative that you learn how to understand cat communication.

Anyone who works with cats must learn how cats communicate in order to interact on a better level. Whether you are studying their behaviour for research, working as a vet, trying to train your feline or simply enjoying their company, it is best to understand scents, cat talk, cat body language, touch and taste.

19.2 Olfactory Communication

Cats, like dogs, are scent oriented. Each cat has an individual smell.

This scent is used to determine a cat's sexual status, how other cats should interact socially, how to communicate and to determine territory.

Your cat's olfactory abilities begin with their scent analysing cells that line the nose. In fact cats have up to 200 million compared to a human's 5 million.

Not only is their nose an exceptional scent detector but they also have scent glands between the pads of their feet and their toes. Their scent glands in their paws are used for marking inanimate objects. The cat's scent glands between the face and ears are used when marking human beings. Cats rub against new furniture or scratch it in an attempt to mark them with their scent. Contrary to popular belief, they also dislike scented litter boxes.

If you notice your cat constantly licking her nose, this could be due to two reasons:

1. She may want to clean her nose of any residues that interferes with her sense of smell
2. She may be anxious or stressed

Scratching

Cats, whether in the wild or in a home, will scratch.

This scratching is part of their instinctive behaviour regarding scents. Cats will leave visible marks

but they are also leaving behind their personal fragrance. Scratching is about leaving a scent to signal ownership of territory. Even declawed cats will still scratch because it will leave behind their scent. Cats will target areas they are highly territorial about, such as doorways, sleeping areas and their litter boxes.

Litter box scratching to cover up their use is different from the scratching that happens after their toilet business is concluded.

Scratching is also to sharpen and maintain claws, which is why you need to understand their instinct to leave their scent behind and how you can claw train; to ensure your pet does not ruin carpets, couches and other items.

Bunting

Bunting is another way to leave a scent behind.

The head-rubbing or bunting behaviour has several objectives:

3. For comfort
4. To develop social bonding
5. To show their affection
6. To seek attention

Your cat will rub against various things in order to leave his/her scent behind. It is also about scent sharing.

Your cat will rub against you, things you wear and other safe objects as a way to say it is his/hers. Bunting can also occur with a head bump, rub between your ankles, or when the tail is twined around your leg. Your cat may rub their cheek against your items (such as your computer screen, tablet or book) as a way to leave their scent behind. It is a sign of trust when your cat approaches you and rubs its head or cheek against you. Their eyes are a sensitive and vulnerable part of their body that they do not want harmed by claw and tooth, so the head bump is one of trust and friendship.

Nose touches and hip leans are also other signs of friendship, particularly when combined with rubbing to leave their scent. You should realise that your cat is not only sniffing handbags or shoes to determine where you have been but also freshening their scent on the item to ensure it still smells like them. Social grooming, meaning grooming of you or another pet, is not just about friendship and trust - it is yet another way of sharing scents.

Urination

Urinating is a part of a cat's communication of their scent.

Urine spraying is often about spraying pheromones to alert other cats in the area that it is their territory or that they are currently ready to mate. A cat's sexual status is learned through hormones called pheromones, which tell when a female cat is in heat and when a male is ready to mate. The

body language of these markings will differ from a territorial spray and simply marking to find a mate. A marking is done when your cat backs up to the location, lifts its tail high and shoots out the urine onto a vertical surface. The posture in a litter box, or when they are about to urinate for elimination needs elsewhere, is very different.

Your cat can use scent and elimination to tell you they are unhappy. If the litter box is dirty, or if your cat has a medical problem or another issue with their litter area, they will show it by urinating on something you like, something soft or where you can clearly see them.

19.3 Cat Talk



Cats have a variety of meows that they use to communicate with you and others.

Many of these meows are actually going to manipulate you into meeting your cat's needs. For example, a high pitched meow can mean your cat is in trouble or in pain. However, they could also use this same meow to get your attention; knowing you are going to respond.

Most cats are not vocal among their peers, but will be very vocal with you to get approval, greetings, food, and any other need they wish you to satisfy.

A meow followed by purring is a signal that your cat is attempting to bribe you.

This bribe begins by showing their happiness but ultimately they want something, whether it is to be petted, fed or taken for a walk. Purring is definitely a sign of contentment. This same purr can be used when they want food. They know you respond well to the bribe so they attempt to use it by also adding in body language. Your cat may meow, purr, stretch or wind around your legs in the kitchen or area where they are normally fed to entice you to feed them.

A gurgling or chatting sound, which many Siamese use, is about chatting with you. Your cat has something to say. It may be that they want you to find them and give them attention. Others may just meow as a way to say "look at me" or "look what I see". Sometimes this higher pitched meow is used to tell you that your cat brought you a present.

A back of the throat sound that is more like a cross between a purr and growl is often used when they spot birds or other prey. They are chatting about it to say there is something there. It is an instinct.

Cats hiss and spit when they feel threatened. Hissing and spitting is often accompanied by puffed hair, arched tail and rigid body. In general, abused, feral or stray cats are more likely to display hissing behaviour compared to sociable, domestic pets.

You may be surprised to learn that cats communicate in the same pitch, volume and intensity as human speech.

Caterwauling is a very loud sound. It is a guttural pronunciation of danger or threat. Males often use this before they have been neutered, but can also use it afterwards. It is a territorial noise. For example, if a neighbourhood cat walks by your male cat's home then he may use this near "scream" sound.

Although there are certain sounds we often hear from cats and can liken them between the overall species you have to realise that each cat has distinctive sounds too. Three cats in the same household can all have different meows, purrs and ways to bribe you.

FACT



95% of all cat owners admit they talk to their cats.

Source: 4yourcatshealth.com

19.4 Cat Body Language

Your cat's body language is the most important way they will communicate with you that you will be able to interpret.

You can understand marking and rubbing, but it is still abstract since your sense of smell is not the same. With body language you have the ability to read it with ease as long as you pay attention.

Tummy Display

Your cat can be very trusting and expose their belly to you.

This exposure can be met in two different ways. They may allow you to scratch their tummy and even enjoy it by stretching and purring happily. They may fall asleep in that position on your lap with their paws tucked in. However, at times the belly exposure is met with aggression when you try to pet them. Your cat is certainly content and relaxed, but in other situations your cat can also be in a playful mood or feel threatened.

A playful mood is usually one where your cat rolls over, stretches and lays there looking at you or another pet. They wait for you to get close and then nip lightly with their claws retracted. If they feel threatened this behaviour can change to one involving claws, growls and sharp teeth. It is important to realise that not all cats like their tummy rubbed. Some will enjoy it and let you go on for hours, while others will accept it for a short time only before they nip and move off.

The Fluttering Blink

Languid slow blinks are a sign of affection. For cats in the wild closing eyes can mean death. Therefore, it is a sign of trust if a cat is willing to blink slowly while also rubbing against you.

When your cat gives you this signal you can respond with same type of blink to show you share that affection.

Halloween Pose

Anyone who has ever seen a cat jump due to some loud scary noise will understand what the Halloween pose is. This is where your cat will hold its tail high. The tail fur will puff and typically your cat's hair will rise on its back. Your cat will also arch its back and stand high on its paws. The claws will also come out. This is a behaviour that clearly says you need to back off and let your cat calm down. If you were not the cause of the behaviour you may be able to approach your cat. Usually they will seek you out but all the while remaining puffed and alert. They may rub against you and want to hear your voice. You can calm them down and help return their fur to its rightful position. Cats, like dogs, are scent oriented. Each cat has an individual smell.

The Inching Sloth

Your cat has a behaviour that involves slow movements, where they inch forward. This behaviour is typical when they stalk prey right before the pounce.

Even domestic cats retain this behaviour although you are going to see it in play more than due to aggression or threats.

Typically your cat will have its head down, its eyes open wide and their paws are very deliberately being moved forward. Sometimes your cat will raise its rear end, wiggle it and then pounce. It is all about play in this scenario. There are other situations where your cat's ears will be laid back, their tail will be twitching and their pupils will be dilated. This position indicates your cat is feeling threatened and they want you, or anyone else, to back off.

The Direct Stare

Your body language can affect your cat just as much as how you read your cat's body language. Your cat perceives a stare as threatening. While you may mean your gaze to be affectionate your cat might stop what he/she is doing because of your gaze. Often he/she will assess the situation and determine if there is something to worry about. It is a tactic of protection because a gaze from another animal can be a threat in the wild.

19.5 Touch and Taste



Many of the ways cats communicate are about body language, sound and scents, but can also include touch and taste.

Body language is often about touch. Your cat is asking for your touch or giving you some love as a way to get attention. Touch is also a way for your cat to figure out certain things. They can tentatively put a paw in the water and decide they do not like wet things. Your cat may paw you a little just to get your attention or get right up to your face to wake you up.

Taste is not as significant to cats as it is to dogs. Dogs like to go around tasting a lot of things, but cats are highly selective. If their olfactory senses like it then your cat will be willing to steal food, taste your hand or lick leftover salt from your fingers.

Summary

Cats survive by using their instincts and communication methods.

Your cats are trying to tell you things using scents, body language, talk, touch and taste. Some of the senses are combined through the use of body language and scents.

If you observe and listen to your cat you will start to understand what he/she is trying to say to you. You will learn the cues for food, play and anxiety.

You will also learn to interpret sounds of distress accurately, such as a cat using it to get your attention versus being in harm's way. It depends on how your animal is trained and what it learned as a kitten with regards to their communication bribes.

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