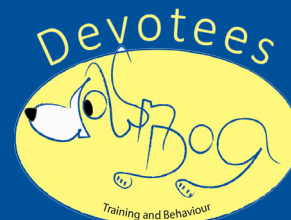


Down Dog Digest

No. 8



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What's my dog saying?

How to understand what your dog is telling you

Did you know your dog can tell you how he feels? He can't talk, but he can and does communicate - all the time.



We humans are generally good at reading each other's body language. When we look at someone else's face we notice those fleeting expressions - called micro-expressions - that give us clues about what the other person is really feeling or thinking, even if they say something different.

When I was young, my mum could silence any argument with just a look. She never needed to say anything, her face told me when I'd gone too far. Being good at "reading" non-verbal signs is the basis of good communication amongst humans.

Every part of your face gives clues to what you're thinking - eyes, ears, facial muscles, mouth. And how you stand, your posture, and how you position your body, gives similar clues. My mum used to tap her right foot and fold her arms along with "that" face...

Where you are and what you're doing - the context - also gives strong clues to help other people "read" you correctly.

Your innate ability to "read" other people will help you understand dogs too. Dogs tell us how and what they're feeling in much the same ways people do. To understand what your dog is telling you requires you to 'read' their facial expressions and body language *and interpret it depending on the context.*

I've emphasised that last bit for a reason: you need to see and understand the whole picture to properly interpret any particular signs your dog shows. Context is everything.

Take yawning as an example. You yawn when you're tired. But you might also yawn when you're embarrassed, or frustrated.

Dogs may yawn because they are tired, too. But they also yawn at other times:

- Stress can cause yawning. Typically, uncertain or worried dogs do a "shallow" yawn, where their teeth remain hidden.

- Dogs who feel threatened will do a "wide"

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yawn, showing all their pearly-white weaponry – this can be a low-level threat, or it can also show arousal.

- Dogs who yawn during training may be stressed, under pressure, or confused.

- Dogs also yawn in happy anticipation. Gus will yawn, usually accompanied by a particular “oww-wow” noise, when he’s excited to be going to do some training, or go for a walk.

What about eyes? The eyes tell us exactly what the dog is thinking and feeling. Dogs (and humans) find direct, open staring quite rude and a bit threatening. But staring into another being’s eyes can also be a sign of attraction, fascination or adoration.

Dogs who are friendly and social will generally use soft, ‘squinty’ eye contact -and they will blink frequently too, just like humans do.



But dogs (and humans) don’t just blink when they’re being friendly. Dog and people blink more frequently when they are under pressure. Just watch any interview on TV where a politician is being grilled and you’ll see what I mean.

Dogs ears aren’t just for hearing – they’re for talking too and the ear position will help you understand what your dog is feeling. When dogs are relaxed or asleep, their ears are held in a neutral position.

If your dog’s ears flick back and forth they might be listening intently, trying to work out what you’re saying, or what that noise outside is. Ears that are pinned back can signify that the dog is particularly happy about something – or alternatively, that he is very unhappy about

something. You have to look at the whole body language picture and the context to be able to tell. Take a look at Gus in the picture below.



Can you see that his ears are back and his eyes look quite round? His mouth is closed too. In this photo he is looking worried about something. Compare this picture with the one of him on the front page, where he is very relaxed and happy.

Mouths can be slightly open, wide open or closed, with the lips loose, or pulled back. The tongue can be hanging out a lot or a bit or not at all, or flicking in and out. The mouth area gives us a lot of information too..

Then there are tail and body movements, which are a great indicator of your dog’s emotional state. A fast wag can be happy and friendly - or it may be a danger sign.

Dogs who are nervous or feel threatened will often try to make themselves as small as possible, and they’ll lean away from any perceived source of danger or from things they find unpleasant. A dog who lies down or rolls over frequently is often nervous or lacking in confidence – that’s why it’s so common in puppies.

Getting good at reading how your dog is feeling will build your confidence. It will also build your dog’s confidence in you as he’ll know you’ll always spot when he’s uncomfortable or afraid - and that you’ll help him.

How to learn "dog"

Last summer I was asked by several of our Down Dog Devotees if there was a course I could recommend where they could learn more about canine communication.

There are several courses on various learning sites and some are run by well-known figures in the dog world. But our Devotees asked me if I would run one.

So I did. It ran over 8 weeks in the autumn with six Devotee guinea pigs. Here's what they thought:

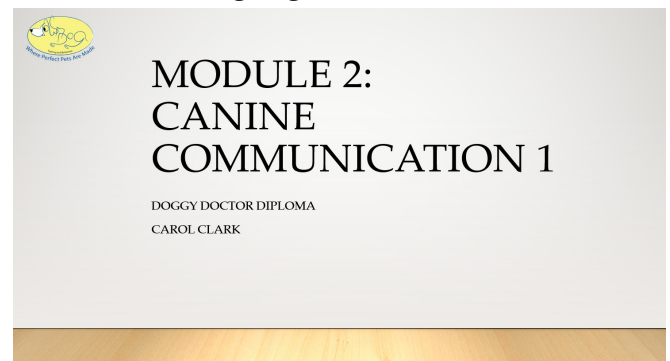
"How little we knew! There is so much more to understanding your dog and a whole new level of communication opened up, module by module, throughout the course."

"We loved the course. We are now looking at situations with different eyes and always keep in mind "context is everything". It was intense, interesting, joyful, educational, refreshing & mind opening."

"I wanted to be able to read my dog better in order to help make her life less stressful and my own easier. As a result of buying this course I am more aware of doggie body language and I am able to read her better and so able to be a better owner."

"The relationship with our shy girl has improved enormously. She has developed from being an introvert dog who was not enjoying cuddles or touches at all to looking for being close to us and clearly trusts us more. We still have a

way to go, but now we seem to communicate in the same language."



I also asked them who should do the course:

"Any one who has an interest in dogs especially someone who wishes to be employed in the canine business."

"If you have not done this course, you will not know how much your dog is trying to tell you, all the time!!"

"I would highly recommend this course to anyone interested in improving their understanding of dogs but especially if you want to work with dogs professionally."

"Every dog owner should do this course! You don't know what you don't know and if you had dogs all your life like we did, you will be surprised how much more there is to gain!."

If you'd like to find out more go to the website at www.downdog.co.uk/Online where you can book a place on the next course.

Myth-busting

There are quite a few myths around about what dogs are saying, Let's bust some:

- If a dog stares at you they're not "being dominant"
- Ears held back is not always a sign of fear
- Yawns don't always mean your dog is tired
- A wagging tail does not always mean your

dog is happy

- Lifting a paw is not just a cute trick
- Rolling over is not a sign of "submission"
- Jumping up may or may not be friendly
- Dogs never "just play"

Finally, never let dogs "just work it out" - help your dog whenever you see he is stressed.

Carol's Challenge

Each month I'm going to set you a challenge.

This month your challenge, should you wish to accept it, is:

Learn how dogs talk to you and work out what they're saying.

First, find or buy a notepad and pen - the old fashioned methods really are best for this.

Watch your dog for two minutes at a time. (If you haven't got a dog, do this when you're out and about and can sit and watch other people's dogs.) Note down what the eyes, ears and mouth are doing, where the body weight is, what their posture is and what their tail is doing.

Watch your dog in all sorts of places, doing all sorts of things. For example:

- when you are about to feed them
- when they are playing with you
- when they are interacting with other dogs
- when they are greeting people
- when they meet other dogs
- and any other time you want!

You'll start to learn more than you ever realised about how your dog uses all their body parts to "say" things.

And if you really want to understand and speak "dog", join my course. See the next panel for details.

Doggy Doctor Diploma

Canine Communication Course

This course is designed to give interested dog owners, and people who are working, or want to work, in the pet industry a good basic knowledge about how dogs communicate and, most importantly, help you put that knowledge into practice so you can become effective trainers.

It'll also bust many of the common myths that abound. My aim is to give you some light-bulb moments and help you understand our four-legged best friends better.

The course will explain how dogs develop and provide detailed and comprehensive insights into what dogs are saying to us – all the time - and why being able to "speak dog" will give you the confidence to manage and train your dog in a way he'll fully understand.

By the end of the course you'll have learnt:

- how canine communication is developed and learnt
- how to find out what your dog is trying to tell you and what to look for
- how dogs communicate with us and with other dogs
- play – the good, bad and plain ugly
- how dogs react to stress and threat
- and how to help them

See www.downdog.co.uk/Online for details

We hope you've enjoyed this Down Dog Digest. Please feel free to share it with any friends, neighbours or family members you think might find it interesting,

Sign up for Carol's regular emails, giving you all sorts of free information on training, behaviour and other doggy-related topics here: <https://www.downdog.co.uk/signup>

If you'd like more information, tips, and advice about owning, training, caring for and enjoying your dog more, check out our website www.downdog.co.uk. Visit the blog and download our free helpsheets on a wide range of topics. Get it right from the start with your new pup, book group or one to one training, and check out our Down Dog Devotee membership programme to have fun with like minded owners.

If you've got a Problem Pooch, why not visit the Doggy Doctor's Surgery for help, in person or online www.doggydoctor.co.uk.