

## Body language: Dogs

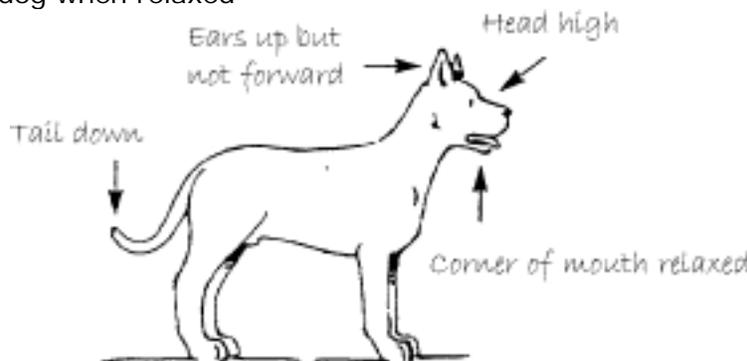
Dogs are very social animals. The ancestors of today's domestic dogs lived in packs. Communication among the members of a pack is necessary for the pack to cooperate to hunt, raise the young, and to get along. We can see pack behavior when watching two or more dogs together.

For the most part dogs communicate through body language, that is, dogs use their bodies to explain their moods and thoughts. Dogs in a pack communicate easily with each other. It is important for every dog owner to learn to read these messages so we can adjust our training to how the dog is feeling.

A dog basically uses five parts of his body to communicate. These are the tail, ears, mouth and teeth, eyes and the fur along the dog's back (which are also called the hackles). A dog's posture, that is whether it is standing, crouched or lying down, is also very important.

### BASELINE POSTURE

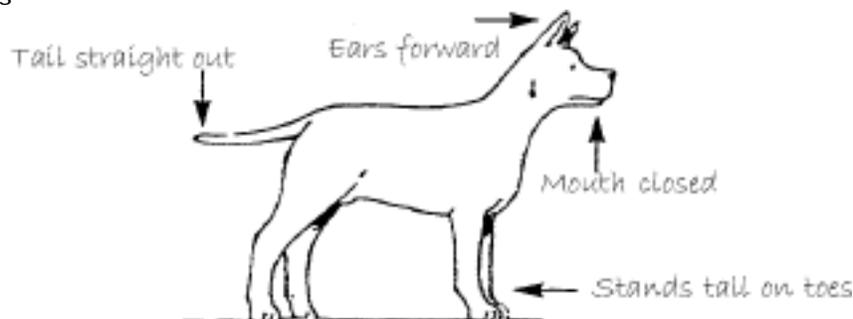
- Normal posture for a dog when relaxed



**ALERT/INTEREST:** Dogs often simply show interest on meeting another animal for the first time. The dog has not yet decided if it needs to communicate submission play, aggression, or fear. This state usually lasts only a brief moment before the dog chooses to show another feeling.

### ALERT POSTURE

- Prelude to another behavior/emotion
- Head high Ears up but not forward
- Tail down
- Corner of mouth relaxed
- Ears forward Tail straight out
- Mouth closed
- Stands tall on toes



**FEAR:** A frightened dog can very easily become an aggressive dog, and many people have been bitten by dogs showing signs of fear.

**DEFENSIVE THREAT POSTURE**

- Fear-based posture
- May bite if cornered
- May be growling
- May urinate and/or express anal glands

**AGGRESSION:**

**OFFENSIVE THREAT POSTURE**

- Dominant/confident posture
- Dog is dangerous, may attack at any time
- May be growling/barking
- Tail may be held high & stiff while wagging slowly

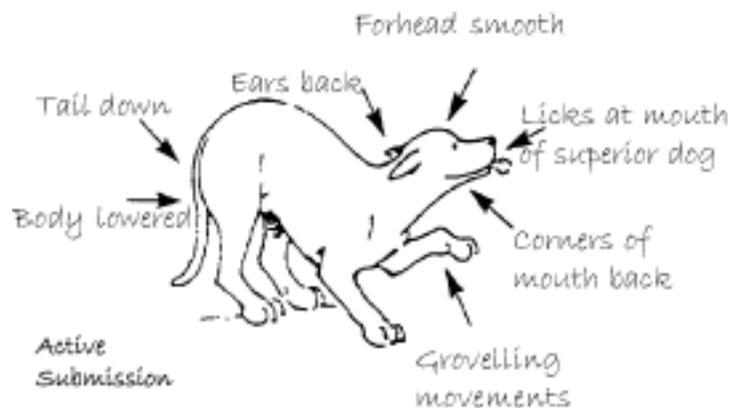
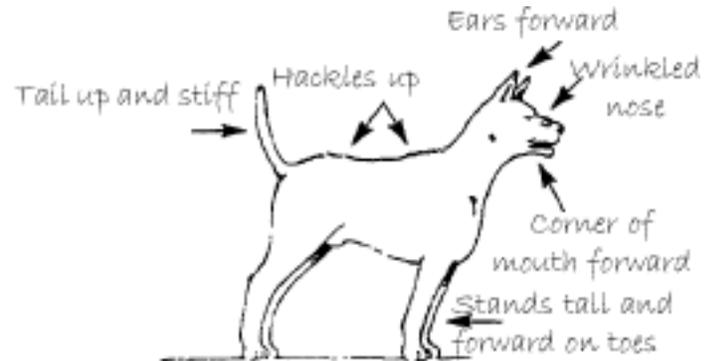
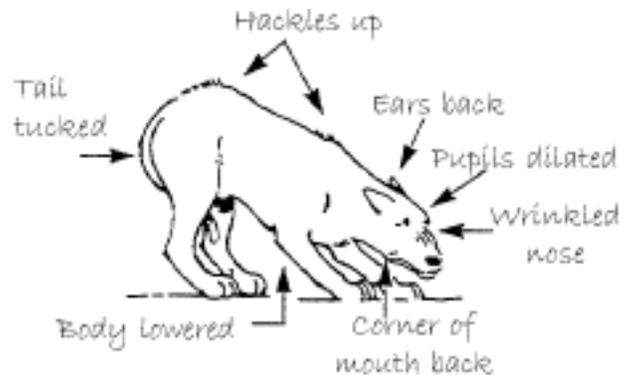
**SUBMISSION:**

**ACTIVE SUBMISSION**

- May urinate
- May be whining
- Avoids eye contact
- Tail may be wagging and held low OR
- Tail may be tucked completely under body

**PASSIVE SUBMISSION**

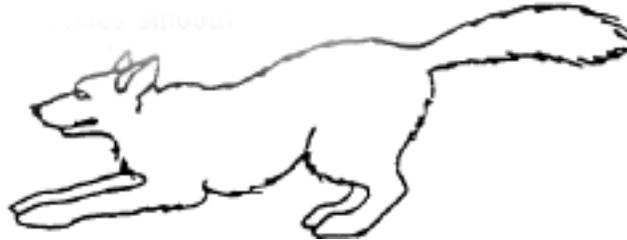
- Most submissive posture for a dog
- May urinate
- Wrinkled nose
- Pupils dilated
- Tail tucked
- Corner of mouth back
- Body lowered
- Ears back
- Hackles up
- Corner of mouth forward
- Body lowered
- Corners of mouth back
- Licks at mouth of superior dog
- Forehead smooth
- Ears back
- Tail down
- Groveling movements
- Eyes looking away and tail tucked
- Rolls onto back
- Tail up and stiff
- Stands tall and forward on toes
- Wrinkled nose
- Ears forward
- Hackles up



**PLAY:** May look like submission in some aspects but the dog will be active and excited. It is the way he says, "Play with me!"

### **PLAY BOW**

- An invitation to play!
- Front end lower than hind end
- Tail up and wagging
- May bark & run in circles
- Ears up or slightly back
- Hackles smooth



**STRESS:** A dog that is showing signs of stress is telling the rest of the world that he is uptight and unsure about his situation. The more signs of stress a dog is showing, the more anxious he is becoming. Some stress in training is natural but a dog that is severely stressed cannot learn. He needs to rest. If pushed much further in the current situation he may react with fearful aggression.

### **SIGNS OF STRESS**

- Sniffing
- Licking lips
- Scratching
- Excessive blinking
- Dilated pupils
- Panting and salivating
- Increased activity or pacing, restlessness, distraction, agitation
- Whining, excessive vocalizing
- Shaking
- Hiding behind owner
- Need for repeated commands when ordinarily responds to one command
- Excessive shedding
- Loss of appetite (will not eat treats ordinarily loves)
- "Shutting down" by turning away or avoiding eye contact or freezing in place
- Diarrhea
- Sweating through the pads of feet



### **RECOMMENDED READING:**

- **CANINE BODY LANGUAGE - A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE** by Brenda Aloff
- **DOG LANGUAGE - AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CANINE BEHAVIOR** by Roger Abrantes
- **ON TALKING TERMS WITH DOGS - CALMING SIGNALS, 2ND EDITION** Turid Rugaas
- **CANINE BEHAVIOR - A PHOTO ILLUSTRATED HANDBOOK** Barbara Handelman
- **STRESS IN DOGS - LEARN HOW DOGS SHOW STRESS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**  
Martina Scholz & Clarissa von Reinhardt