



Handout: Understanding Animal Body Language Before Handling

Introduction

Recognising and interpreting the body language, facial expressions, and vocalisations of animals is crucial for safe and effective handling. This handout focuses on these aspects for a specific animal: **dogs**.

Main Facial Expressions and Body Postures in Dogs

1. Body Posture

- **Ears:**
 - **Relaxed:** Ears are in their natural position, slightly forward or to the side.
 - **Alert:** Ears are upright and facing forward.
 - **Fearful:** Ears are pinned back against the head.
 - **Aggressive:** Ears are forward and erect, indicating focus on the target.
- **Eyes:**
 - **Relaxed:** Soft, normal blinking.
 - **Alert:** Wide open, pupils may be dilated.
 - **Fearful:** Whites of the eyes (sclera) are visible, often called "whale eye."
 - **Aggressive:** Staring intensely, direct eye contact.
- **Tail:**
 - **Relaxed:** Tail is in its natural position, gently wagging.
 - **Alert:** Tail is held high and stiff.
 - **Fearful:** Tail is tucked between the legs.
 - **Aggressive:** Tail is rigid, bristling, and held high.
- **Head Position:**
 - **Relaxed:** Head is held naturally.
 - **Alert:** Head is held high, focused on the stimulus.
 - **Fearful:** Head is lowered.
 - **Aggressive:** Head is thrust forward or held high.
- **Mouth:**
 - **Relaxed:** Mouth is closed or slightly open, may be panting calmly.
 - **Alert:** Mouth is closed or slightly open.
 - **Fearful:** Lips may be pulled back slightly, showing teeth.
 - **Aggressive:** Lips are curled back, showing teeth, growling, or snarling.

2. Vocalisations

- **Submissive:**
 - **Whimpering:** High-pitched, quiet sounds.
 - **Submissive Yelping:** Short, high-pitched yelps.
- **Aggressive:**
 - **Growling:** Low, rumbling sound.
 - **Barking:** Sharp, rapid barks, often combined with growling.
- **Fearful:**
 - **Whining:** High-pitched, prolonged sounds.
 - **Yelping:** Sharp, sudden sounds indicating distress.
- **Protective:**
 - **Barking:** Deep, continuous barking.
 - **Growling:** Defensive growling when feeling threatened.



- **Dominant:**
 - **Barking:** Loud, commanding barks.
 - **Growling:** Assertive growling without backing down.

3. Submissive Behaviour

- **Body Posture:** Lowered body, crouching, or rolling over to expose the belly.
- **Facial Expression:** Avoiding direct eye contact, ears back, mouth relaxed or slightly open.
- **Vocalisations:** Whimpering, submissive yelping.

4. Aggressive Behaviour

- **Body Posture:** Stiff, upright posture, leaning forward.
- **Facial Expression:** Intense stare, bared teeth, snarling.
- **Vocalisations:** Growling, barking, snarling.

5. Fearful Behaviour

- **Body Posture:** Crouched, tail tucked, body trembling.
- **Facial Expression:** Whale eye, ears back, lips slightly pulled back.
- **Vocalisations:** Whining, yelping, low growling.

6. Protective Behaviour

- **Body Posture:** Standing tall, body slightly forward, tail up.
- **Facial Expression:** Focused stare, alert ears.
- **Vocalisations:** Deep barking, growling.

7. Dominant Behaviour

- **Body Posture:** Standing tall, confident stance.
- **Facial Expression:** Direct eye contact, relaxed or assertive mouth.
- **Vocalisations:** Commanding barks, assertive growling.

Worksheet: Identifying Dog Body Language

Instructions:

Match the description of the behaviour to the correct type (Submissive, Aggressive, Fearful, Protective, Dominant). Provide an explanation for your choice.

1. **Description:** Ears back, tail tucked, body trembling, avoiding eye contact.
 - **Type:**
 - **Explanation:**
2. **Description:** Stiff posture, direct stare, bared teeth, low growl.
 - **Type:**
 - **Explanation:**
3. **Description:** Standing tall, tail up, focused stare, deep barking.
 - **Type:**
 - **Explanation:**
4. **Description:** Lowered body, rolled over exposing belly, whimpering.
 - **Type:**
 - **Explanation:**
5. **Description:** Standing tall, confident stance, direct eye contact, assertive growling.
 - **Type:**
 - **Explanation:**