

## READING CANINE BODY POSTURES

Dogs can reveal their emotions and their intentions through their body language. If you watch your dog carefully he can tell you what he is feeling and what he is likely to do next. Being able to read your dog's body language can help you identify when he is fearful of something or someone, when he is angry or aggressive, when he is trying to give in to you or to others, when he is unsure of things or distressed and when he is playful.

The drawings below show the basic body language of dogs. These are not all the postures that may reveal your dog's emotions, but they are the basic ones. Sometimes dogs may give mixed messages because they aren't sure how they feel in a situation or what they want to do next. Sometimes dogs may change their body postures rapidly, because something in the environment has changed or their emotions have changed. Finally not all dogs will show exactly the same postures or movements. For example, some dogs don't show clear ear movements or tail movements. Some don't even have tails! So to read the body language of dogs, you must look at all the elements of a posture to judge what your dog is feeling. No one element, such as tail position or tail wagging will always tell you what is going on. If you want more information about how to read the body language of dogs see the DVD "Canine Body Postures" available from your pet professional.

When reading the body language of dogs, look at their body position such as standing up stiffly or lying down. Watch for tail position, body shape, and hair erection.

Look at the facial features such as ear position, showing of teeth, dilation of eyes and position of eyes. Listen for vocalizations such as barks, growls, hisses, whines or whimpers. Threats and aggression can be offensive such as in territorial or possessive aggression or it can be defensive such as in fear-motivated aggression.

Drawing 1 shows an offensively threatening dog.

Offensively threatening dogs will usually show one or more of the following:

1. Standing up tall with a stiff body posture
2. Hair on the back standing up
3. Tail straight up, it may be wagging
4. Ears rotated forward
5. Direct eye contact or staring
6. Lips puckered, teeth bared from the front of the mouth
7. Barking and/or growling
8. May lunge, snap at or chase others
9. Body pointed directly toward victim

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You must look at all the elements of a posture to judge what your dog is feeling.

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Offensively threatening dogs try to make themselves look bigger and more menacing.

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**Drawing 1.**  
*Offensively threatening dog*

Drawing 2 shows a fearful or submissive dog. The postures are very similar.

Fearful or submissive dogs will usually show:

1. Crouched body posture, or lying down even rolled over on the back exposing the belly
2. Tail tucked between the legs
3. Ears laid back
4. Looks away avoiding direct eye contact
5. Lips retracted in a submissive grin
6. May try to avoid the other individual

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Fearful or submissive dogs try to make themselves look smaller and less menacing.

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**Drawing 2.**  
*Fearful dog*

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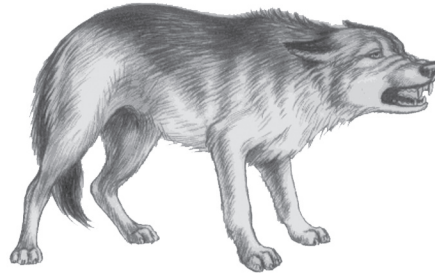
Defensive dogs will show a mixture of threat and fear.

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Drawing 3 shows a defensively threatening dog.

Defensively threatening dogs will usually show one or more of the following:

1. Crouched or lowered body posture
2. Hair on the back or on rear standing up
2. Ears back or down
3. Teeth bared from the back of the mouth
4. Barking or growling
5. Tail straight out, down, or tucked



Drawing 3.  
*Defensively threatening dog*

Drawing 4 shows a playful dog. Playful dogs can be difficult to describe but most people know play when they see it.

Playful dogs will usually show one or more of the following:

1. A play bow where the forelegs are down on the ground and the hind legs are erect.
2. A mixture of different kinds of behavior such as threats, courtship, submission and predation all jumbled together with quick changes back and forth.
3. Both play partners alternating the postures they are showing.

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Play shows a mixture  
of many different  
behaviors.

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Drawing 4.  
*Playful dog*

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