

Temperament Testing of Free Roaming Dogs



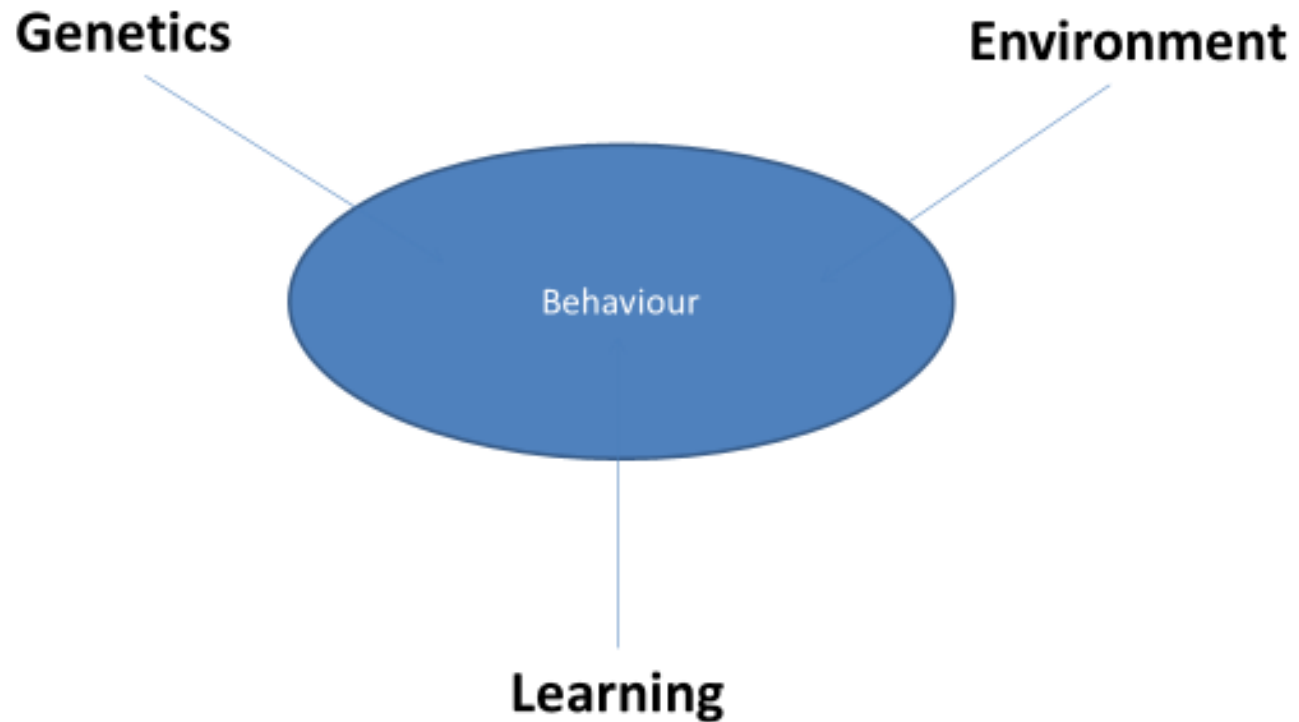
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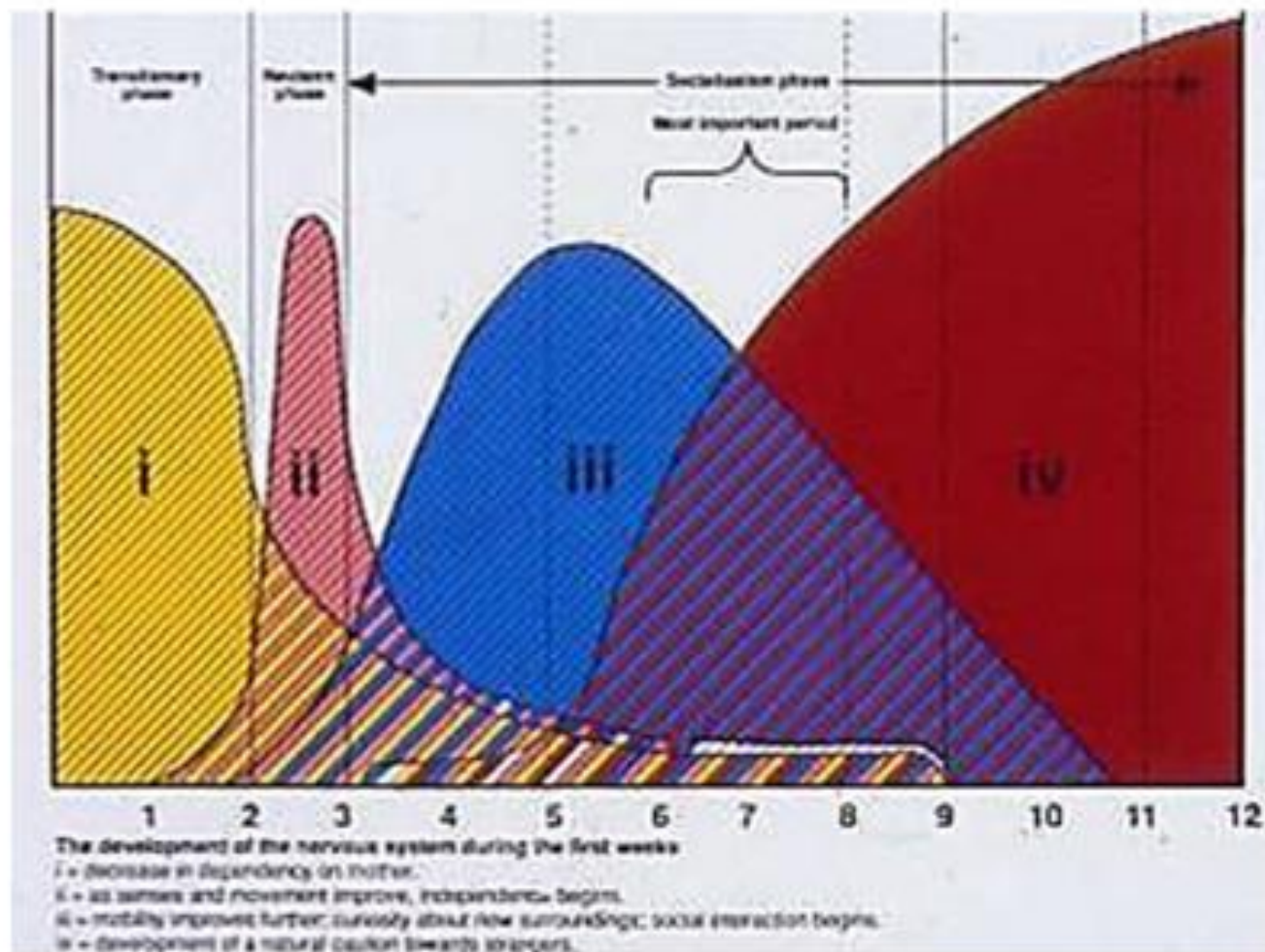
What is temperament? How is it different from behaviour, character, and personality?



- **Character:** is considered the product of the animal's environment and experiences. The behaviours seen are the animal's habits of responding to stimuli. These develop secondary to experiences, a learning history. It is influenced by changing environment.
- **Temperament:** the animals natural or innate responses to its environment, its emotional responses. It is considered stable over time, and is the foundation of personality. The character can influence it but cannot change it.
- **Personality:** combination of temperament and character, an animal's overall way of responding to the environment. It is based on past experience and genetic tendencies

The major influences to any behaviour





Socialisation in dogs

A prime factor that determines whether or not a dog is friendly humans is positive exposure to humans at the critical social development stage. Average between 4 – 10 weeks of age.

The Canine Temperament Test



Temperament testing is designed to evaluate an individual dog's temperament through a series of tests that measure traits including:-

- Stability
- Confidence
- Shyness
- Friendliness
- Aggressiveness
- Protectiveness
- Prey instincts
- Playfulness
- Defensive behaviour
- Ability to distinguish between threatening and non-threatening situations

What are we really testing and what are we testing for?



- More recently, most of the research has been done in shelters to predict aggression in potential adoption candidates, and also to screen for specific behaviour problems such as separation anxiety and food or resource guarding. Much of the rest has been used to predict a dog's success as a working dog.
- In its simplest form, a temperament test is testing a behavioural response to a specific stimulus at that time in that environment by that individual dog. It is a behaviour evaluation, a snapshot in time.
- The attempt is then made to correlate that specific response in that situation as a predictor of how that same animal may act or respond in a similar situation at another time, therefore predicting temperament and/or personality.



All current tests are biased towards pet, or owned dogs not free roaming dog populations. Therefore we need to look at a range of current tests and modify or adapt for free roaming dogs.

Temperament testing of free roaming dogs could provide a useful indicator for aggression.

This is the only behaviour that would be of interest to municipalities when considering releasing dogs back to the streets.

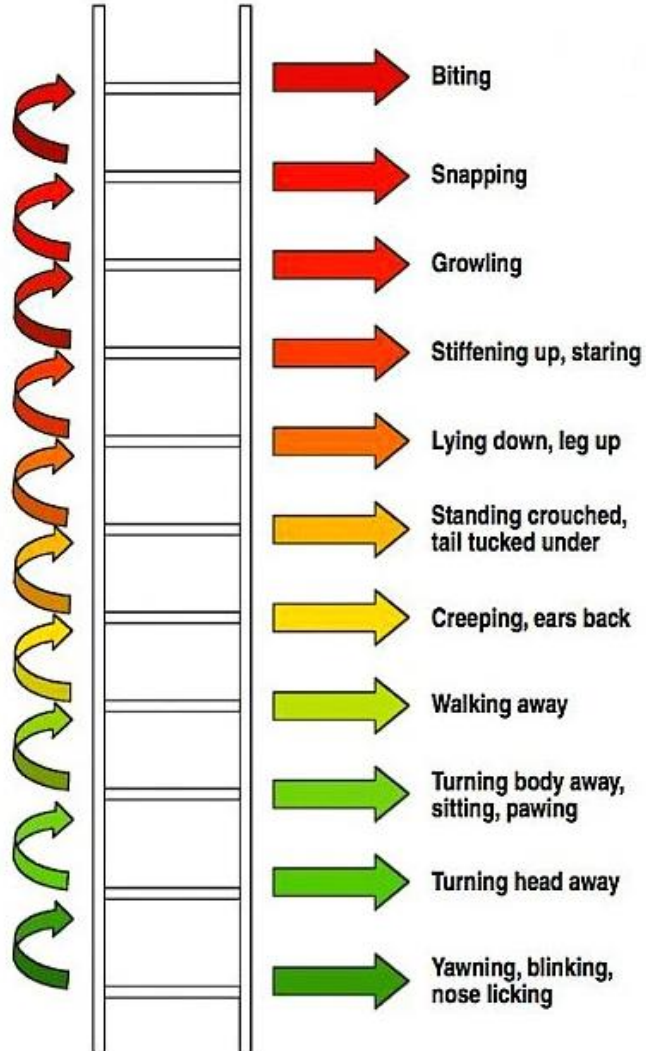
A Definition of Aggression

“Acts or threats designed to cause injury”



- Displays of aggression in dogs include lunging, snapping, and biting.
- Threat behaviours include freezing, staring, snarling, and growling.

Canine ladder of aggression



Aggression is Adaptive



- The goal of adaptive behaviour is to survive. in order to survive, an animal must adapt and control events that impact their "very desire to survive".
- Animals are genetically prepared to use behaviour that will ensure their survival and control their environment."
- Aggression is one behavioural response towards that goal.

Two basic categories of aggression

Respondent Aggressive behaviour

A reflex-like aggression evoked or elicited by aversive stimulation (pain-elicited aggression).

Unless injured this is less common in free roaming dogs.



Operant Aggression

Goal directed behaviour which allows the aggressor to obtain something desirable or escape or avoid something undesirable. “

More common in free roaming dogs.



With Operant Aggression there is always reinforcement.

External reinforcement

Perceived “threat” retreats.

Retention of something they are coveting.

Internal reinforcement

Satisfaction of a “drive”

Surge of epinephrine (adrenaline)



The most fundamental law of behaviour is
consequences drive behaviour.

Summary of learning

- Dogs learn through observation, classical and operant conditioning.
- Learning takes place whether we are aware of it or not. The dogs environment provides myriad consequences.
- Learning is not a linear process.



Aggression can be either offensive or defensive



- Offensive aggression stems from anger.
Angry dogs, like angry humans, may use violence to express their rage.
- Defensive aggression stems from fear.
Scared dogs, like scared humans defend themselves if necessary (flight or fight)"

Categories of Aggression

Aggressive behaviour is one of the most common problems encountered in dogs.

There are different types of aggressive behaviour and to respond to them requires identification of the different types.

In free roaming dog populations, the most common forms of aggression are related to fear or dogs with a strong predatory drive.

With this in mind, any temperament tests designed for free roaming dog populations must expose these dogs to potential “triggers”



DOG AGGRESSION
MY DOG IS:

- Territorial** aggressive
- Dominant** aggressive
- Maternal** aggressive
- Fear** aggressive
- Pain** aggressive
- Predatory** aggressive
- Punishment** aggressive
- Possessive** aggressive



Triggers

Unless suffering from injury or illness, in particular rabies, there is no such thing as a truly "aggressive dog". No dog walks around exhibiting aggressive behaviours 24 hours per day. Aggression is always a response to something in the dog's environment, whether it is the action of a human, the sudden appearance of another dog, pain caused by injury or illness, and more. These are referred to as cues or "Triggers"

Triggers can be:-

Location specific

Time specific.

Sex specific (M/F).

Species specific.

Object specific.

Current temperament tests can not cover all "triggers"



Types of test



There are 4 types of temperament test that have been classified.

1. Test Battery: expose a dog to a variety of specific stimuli artificially elicited and to record the dog's reactions.
2. Rating of Individual Dog: Information is gathered about an individual dog's behaviour and history from an "informant". This can be the owner, former owner, handler, or caretaker.
3. Expert Rating of Breed Prototype: "experts" on dogs, such as veterinarians, trainers, and judges, are asked to describe, rank, or rate breeds of dogs as a whole rather than individual dogs.
4. Observational Test: Dog is exposed to a natural less controlled environment and the behaviour exhibited is recorded to describe broad conclusions. This has been used most often when trying to select service dogs.

Types of test

Socially acceptable behaviour test (SAB test)

Based on C-BARQ questionnaire

Conducted outdoors and takes approximately 15 mins per dog.

Subtest Description

Presence of the owner

1 Friendly approach by one person who tries to pet the dog with an artificial hand	Yes
2 Exposure to an unfamiliar visual stimulus (e.g. flapping blanket, umbrella opening)	Yes
3 Exposure to an unfamiliar visual stimulus such as silhouette of a giant cat that suddenly appears from behind a screen)	Yes
4 Exposure to an unfamiliar sound (horn)	Yes
5 Exposure to an unfamiliar sound (metal cans behind a screen)	Yes
6 Neutral approach by three persons in a normal way	Yes
7 Neutral approach by three persons in an accelerated way	No
8 Approach by an unfamiliar dog of the same size, different breed and same sex	No
9 Friendly approach by one person who tries to pet the dog with an artificial hand	No
10 Exposure to an unfamiliar sound (bell)	No
11 Exposure to an unfamiliar visual stimulus (umbrella that is opened and closed rapidly)	No
12 Exposure to an unfamiliar visual stimulus (doll in a sledge that is pulled towards the dog)	No
13 Friendly approach by one person who tries to pet the dog with a doll	No
14 Approach by a person who is staring at the dog	No
15 Friendly approach by this same person, who then tries to pet the dog with an artificial hand	No
16 Friendly approach by the owner, who tries to pet the dog with a doll	Yes





I would also test the dog for predatory behaviour on SAB Test.

ASPCA SAFER[®] Test

(Safety Assessment for Evaluating Rehoming)



is intended to be one tool used to help identify the risk of future aggression and individual behavioural support needed before adoption for each dog in a shelter.

Conducted indoors, in a room at a dog shelter environment.

1. Tester gives a hungry shelter dog a bowl of food. When the dog starts to eat, the tester takes away the food, using an “assess-a-hand” to see if the dog has a negative reaction.
2. Tester introduces the dog to various toys and chews, then removes them to see if the dog has a negative reaction.
3. Tester squeezes dog in sensitive areas of the dogs body, shoulders, sides and between the toes to see if the dog has a negative reaction.
4. Tester holds eye contact with dog to see if the dog has a negative reaction.
5. A colleague introduces another dog, briefly, to assess any negative reactions.

Protocol for assessing aggression in dogs by veterinarians on behalf of animal welfare groups



1. Dogs should be assessed for aggression during a physical, veterinary, examination which necessitates the dog accepting authority and physical control.
2. The animal should be approached and initially assessed with its usual handler. This may show the handler's degree of control over the animal, and also whether it is inclined to be protective of the handler.
3. The clinical examination itself should be conducted without the current handler.
4. A dog examination must be conducted in a quiet room at the pound or shelter, after the animal has been given time to acclimatise to the room.
5. The dog must be on a leash.
6. If the dog is too excited or distressed in the examination room before the aggression assessment, it should be given more time to settle down in the room. If this is unsuccessful, it should be returned to a kennel and the assessment rescheduled for another day.
7. No other animal should be in the room during the examination, and the only people in the room should be the examining veterinarian and dog handler.
8. The eight-point protocol should be conducted in a friendly and positive way with plenty of stroking and patting, and talking to the dog. There must be no sudden approaches towards the animal or contact with it, if it is unaware that this is to occur.

Assessment Criteria



Any assessment of aggression is partly subjective, but consideration of the following will make the examination more objective.

In each case (a) is acceptable, (b) is borderline, and (c) is unacceptable.

1. How does the animal react at the sight of an unfamiliar person?
 - a) Shows little reaction or shows sociable behaviour
 - b) Growls and barks
 - c) Is overly aggressive.
2. On being approached by an unfamiliar person, how does it react?
 - a) Shows little interest
 - b) Withdraws
 - c) Exhibits aggression.

Assessment Criteria



3. How does the dog react when a hand is passed from the top of the head, to the neck and between the shoulder blades?

- a) Shows little response or reacts submissively
- b) Moves away
- c) Becomes aggressive.

4. During a full clinical examination the veterinarian should be able to examine an animal from head to tail. How does the dog respond?

- a) Submits readily to examination
- b) Is uncooperative
- c) Becomes aggressive.

5. How does the dog react when the veterinarian attempts to examine its mouth?

- a) Does not resist
- b) Attempts to turn and face you
- c) Becomes aggressive.

Assessment Criteria



6. How does the dog react when approached from the rear?
 - a) Stands and allows handling
 - b) Attempts to turn and face you
 - c) Becomes aggressive.

7. How does the dog react when its temperature is taken (rectal)?
 - a) Does not resist
 - b) Resists by sitting or turning
 - c) Becomes aggressive.

8. When prolonged eye contact is established between the veterinarian and the animal, how does the animal respond?
 - a) Averts its eye
 - b) Maintains eye contact with no result, or exhibits fear
 - c) Becomes aggressive.

Assessment Staff



In all tests dog's should be held by an experienced dog handler who is not the dog's usual handler.

Assessment staff should have undergone training in dogs body language and are capable of recognising the signs of aggression.

It is important that assessment staff are afraid or apprehensive of the dog to be examined.

Active steps must be taken to avoid being influenced by anecdotal evidence of the dog's behaviour while in the pound or shelter.

If any of the assessment staff have developed a negative attitude towards the dog, they must arrange to be replaced before the examination begins.

Case History: Ashley Heath Shelter UK



Final Thoughts



- No test is 100% reliable.
- During an assessment you are recording a snapshot of a dog's behavioural pattern.
- It is virtually impossible to cover the range of cues/triggers a dog may have learnt.
- Free roaming dogs probably have fewer cues for aggression than "owned" dogs.
- Pay attention from the moment you enter the assessing area.
- Look closely at the subtle body language.
- Don't push the dog beyond its threshold.
- If unsure then re-assess in alternative environments.