



# Animal Psychology

# Animal Psychology: Syllabus

## Course Overview

Welcome to the Animal Psychology course. The following material provides in-depth animal education essential to both professional and personal development, covering topics such as the neurological and environmental elements on animal behaviour, animal training, biological and environmental factors on animal behaviour and effective animal communication. This course is ideal for professional **development, creating potential opportunities in an array of animal related fields and providing immense personal education.**

## Assessment tasks

To adequately undertake the course, comprehension questions are available at the end of every Unit. All comprehension tasks are based on the Unit material and can be found throughout the text and information can be adequately accessed using this handbook.

## How to use the Course book

All information is provided in this course handbook, but students will further their knowledge through the reference links throughout the text. Further reading will develop the extensive educational material provided in this course.

## Unit Overview

Overview	Unit Topic
Unit One	Pet Evolution
Unit Two	Dog Communication
Unit Three	Normal Canine Behaviour
Unit Four	Understanding Canine Behaviour
Unit Five	Common Psychiatric Canine Challenges
Unit Six	Canine Anxiety, Fear and Aggression
Unit Seven	Cat Communication
Unit Eight	Normal Feline Behaviour
Unit Nine	Understanding Feline Actions
Unit Ten	Common Feline Psychiatric Challenges
Unit Eleven	Feline Anxiety, Fear and Aggression
Unit Twelve	Rabbit Psychology



# Unit One: Pet Evolution

## [Synopsis](#)

This unit provides an excellent foundation on the fundamentals of pet evolution. The pets we know today have developed extensively over centuries from vastly different animals with the help of human interaction. This historical process will be examined and assessed to gain insight into the transformation of domestic animals from original species to understand keywords such as anthropomorphism, domestication and selective breeding.

This Unit will also examine the use of media and selective breeding in accounting for the hundreds of thousands of unwanted animals worldwide, as well as understanding the readiness of pet ownership for individuals to ensure this statistic does not continue to climb.

Comprehension questions will be available throughout the Unit to assess student education.

[Unit One Overview](#)

### **By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- Have a clear knowledge of the process of domestication
- Know the functions of selective breeding
- Identify the different reasons why pets have a good therapeutic value
- Understand what Anthropomorphism is and how to avoid it
- Know how media affects the numbers of unwanted pets
- Identify the different questions that need to be answered before having a pet

## Domestication

To adequately understand the process of caring and communicating with animals, we must understand the history of domestic animals. Domestic animals are animals that have been biologically changed to live in a human environment. It is believed that domestic animals were exposed to humans to serve a beneficial purpose, which could occasionally deem mutually beneficial for both animals and people. The following outlines common types and periods of domestic animals and their proposed purpose.

### **These animals include:**

- Dogs (domesticated around 30,000-15,000 BC)  
Reasons behind domestication can include transportation, show, protection, herding, companionship, pest control and hunting.
- Sheep (domesticated around 11000-9000 BC)  
Beneficial attributes include meat, leather, fibre, fighting and religious reasons.
- Cats (domesticated around 8000-7500 BC)  
Reasons behind domestication include religious symbolism, show, pest control and companionship.
- Horses (domesticated around 4000 BC)  
Beneficial attributes include transportation, ploughing, servicing, racing, show and wedding ceremonies.
- Guinea pigs (around 5000 BC)  
Reasons for domestication include religion, racing, companionship and meat.
- Ferrets (around 1500)  
Beneficial attributes of domestication includes show, racing, pest control, hunting and companionship.
- Domestic rabbits (around 600 AD)

Benefits of domestication include fibre, meat, show, pelt and racing.

- Goldfish (around 300-400 AD)

Benefits of domestication for people include ornamental, show and religious/cultural affiliation.

Domestication is an evolutionary term that describes the process of changing animals, ultimately creating a dependency on humans. This process dates back to early man and provides insight into modern animals and the biological changes that have evolved extensively over time. Domestication has been strongly influenced over history by humans to benefit people dating back to early humans, especially in terms of companionship, protection and serving a job related purpose.

### Domestication: A Case Study



A popular example is the domestication process from wolves to domestic dogs. Dogs were historically the first animal to become domesticated, with continuing arguments surrounding whether the

domestic process was intentionally undertaken by humans, or whether wolves undertook a process of "self-domestication" in order to benefit their own species through easier access to food, shelter and warmth.

It is important to remember that the process of domestication occurs at a genetic, personality and biological level over periods dating back as early as the Ice Age, where early humans realised the potential of wolves for their own benefit. As more docile wolves began to gain exposure to humans through the desire for food scraps, warmth and shelter, people in turn realised the importance of wolves for security, warmth and hunting purposes. Wolves

began to look at a different species -humans- for commands, leadership and dependency.

The following provides an overview of changes developed overtime between domesticated dogs and wolves:

	<b><u>Dogs</u></b>	<b><u>Wolves</u></b>
<b>Species</b>	C. Lupis Familiaris	Canis Lupis
<b>Domestication</b>	Dogs can be domesticated, with a trainable, friendly nature. Domestic characteristics can be inherited.	Wolves are a wild animal but cannot be domesticated, although can be trained to a certain extent. Training is not inherited through offspring.
<b>Vocal Noises</b>	Howling, barking for joy or protection. Dogs can growl at disturbances	Use vocal sounds to communicate with their packs, howling softly with other wolves and softly barking at other unknown wolves
<b>Social integration</b>	Strong affiliation with humans, with puppies ready to approach humans at three weeks of age. Even street or stray dogs live close to humans and will eat human's waste.	Stays in pack with other wolves in a hierarchical system, living away from civilisation.
<b>Physical Characteristics</b>	Thinner coat that requires grooming, varied coats and colours, thinner legs and shorter muzzles	Longer muzzles, feet, legs, skull and brain size for hunting purposes.
<b>Loneliness</b>	Can be left alone during the day but require affection and exercise. Behaviour issues can arise from boredom and loneliness.	Occasional lone wolves, but will find a mate. Prefer wolf packs.
<b>Interaction with Children</b>	Usually good with children with early exposure unless roughly	Should not be allowed with children, even "tame" wolves.

	handled	
<b>Protection</b>	Highly protective of human family	Protective of wolf packs
<b>Affection</b>	Highly affectionate when well treated	Usually not affectionate towards humans

([http://www.diffen.com/difference/Dog\\_vs\\_Wolf](http://www.diffen.com/difference/Dog_vs_Wolf))

As wolves began living with humans, it is believed that humans discovered that when docile wolves were bred together until the deliberate influence of people, they created more offspring that had traits desired by people. These traits may vary but include trainability, calm personality and a non-flighty behaviour. Although interbreeding of wolves was common, canines may not always come from wolves; experts in the process of domestication believe that wolves could have been interbred with jackals, foxes, dingoes, some varieties of foxes and coyotes to further create these desired traits, all of which can be interbred successfully (StopnDog;2013).

Humans used a process of **selective breeding** to change wolves over history - to be examined further in this Unit. Selective breeding, also known as artificial selection, is a process whereby humans have bred animals to promote selective traits deemed as desirable by humans. There are usually two approaches to selective breeding:

Breeders approach -

Breeders promote the mating of specific pairs of animals with genetically desired traits to promote even more advanced offspring.

Natural selection –

A group of animals in a controlled environment allowing the reproduction process to be more natural, where the fittest and more virile of the group mate organically.



These processes have been used extensively by humans in the modern era. A notable example is racehorses, where the “breeders approach” is used by winning horses to create similar desired traits of fast running in a race environment. This process is not fool proof; genetics are a complex field with many uncontrollable factors. These breeders can potentially create a higher chance of a supreme race horse, but there are definitely no guarantees.

As noted, in early times of domestication, humans used selective breeding to genetically merge desirable traits to serve a specific aim, whether as protection; a form of locomotion; or, herding or companionship. Over time, people were able to promote the mating of animals to reproduce with a similar disposition of tamer wolves to create domesticated dogs and distinguishable breeds; ultimately changed from wolves on a biological level. Not only did domesticated dogs differ in appearance, they were altered on a personality level. They were gentler and responded to human commands, lacking certain traits that are found in the wild, creating a new distinct species. As these wolves with desired traits continued to breed by the promotion of humans, their dependency on their wolf pack lessened and reliance on humans strengthened. Overtime, domestic dogs’ paw and teeth size reduced; their hunting instinct disintegrated; and they responded to human voice over hand signals.

Their reproduction cycles are significantly earlier than wolves; with wolves usually reproducing at two or three years of age. Domestic dogs also come into heat up to double the amount of times as wolves.

Dogs in modern society significantly differ from wolves in the wild through long term changes of nature, biology and genetics. There is a very important



point to domestication; researchers state that dogs retain the puppy elements of a wolf throughout their whole lives, never reaching the level of adulthood seen in wolves (Gilbert *developmental biology* 2010). This means that juvenile behaviour in young wolves, such as trainability, submissiveness, whining and barking, are characteristics in modern canines throughout their whole lives.



Domestication process did not only occur historically; these images represent the interbreeding of foxes and domestic dogs in more recent times. Other interbreeding occurs on a frequent and worldwide basis, with

modern interbreeding including dingoes and domestic dogs, wolves and domestic dogs. This interbreeding can be deliberately undertaken by humans for status or protection, or undertaken in a more natural manner with tamer species and domestic dogs due to exposure.

(Image courtesy of <http://stopndog.com/Why-Dogs-Behave-That-Way.htm>)

# Unit Four: Normal Canine Behavior

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## Unit Overview

Dogs exhibit a range of actions that may be entertaining, repulsive or endearing to humans. All of these actions are undertaken for a specific purpose and to adequately understand canines, they must be comprehended by the learner. This Unit will examine these behaviours and provide the student with adequate canine action communication skills.

## By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

Know the reasons behind dogs circling; rolling in unpleasant things; and mad moments.

Identify the different ways humans communicate to dogs.

Understand why dogs chase their tails and eat grass.

Know how to use muzzle grabs and understand how they work.

Identify why dogs roll over showing you their belly.

## Typical Canine Actions

Canines undertake a series of sometimes confusing behaviours that undertake a specific purpose, whether it is a form of communication, release

energy, aid discomfort or guard their territory. In this element of Unit Four, we will examine typical canine actions that are regularly exhibited.

### **Rolling in unpleasant things**

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People can find these actions puzzling or humorous, but many find the common canine behaviour of rolling in unpleasant things abhorrent. Like many dog actions, there are numerous theories why canine's choice to roll in smelly substances such as rubbish, dead animals and manure. The main theories refer back to canine's wolf history, whereby dogs were identified by the scent. Rolling in overwhelmed smells changes their scent and could potentially reduce their chance in becoming identified by surrounding animals. Other theories claim that dogs use rolling in new, "foul" smelling things to communicate a story of their adventure to other dogs, which can also enjoy the smell of the latest escapade.

### **Chasing tails**

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Many dogs, especially puppies, can be seen chasing their tails in a manic manner- almost seeming surprised that the tail is part of their anatomy. Though dizzying and sometime humorous for humans, this

action is usually undertaken for a purpose. Dogs use tail chasing to alleviate certain emotions, such as boredom. In this case, exercise may be necessary to stop the puzzling behaviour.

Dogs also chase their tails for attention, especially if this has proved effective in the past. Stressful situations such as frequent loud noises can lead to obsessive actions that can involve manic tail chasing on a regular basis and for an extended period, as well as rare neurological conditions. Veterinary

intervention will be necessary in these cases.

### **Tails between their legs**

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Dogs with avoiding eye contact, with their tails between their legs and simpering can be devastating for people to view. This action can be viewed when a dog is scolded, in an anxiety ridden situation or fearing a negative response in their environment. This behaviour harks back to pack periods where a dog would exhibit a submissive posture to avoid an aggressive response, communicating that they are small and not dangerous.

Dogs displaying this behaviour can be calmed by avoiding eye contact and reassured by afar; approaching the dog can create more anxiety.

### **Eating Grass**

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Viewing a dog eating grass is a common action that can be concerning and perplexing for a human. There are numerous reasons behind eating grass, specific to the individual canine. Eating grass can be a behaviour exhibited to alleviate boredom, especially if the dog is

kept outside for an extended period of time, often requiring more stimulation through toys or exercise by the owner to avoid the behaviour.

Dogs may also consume grass if they have digestion distress, indicated by an anxiety to consume through grass rather than a casual grazing. After eating, dogs may instigate vomiting to alleviate their stomach distress (Caesars Way: 2014). If this behaviour is common, veterinary advice is recommended. It is also important to remember that a dog may like consuming grass, searching for nutrition and taste wherever it is available.

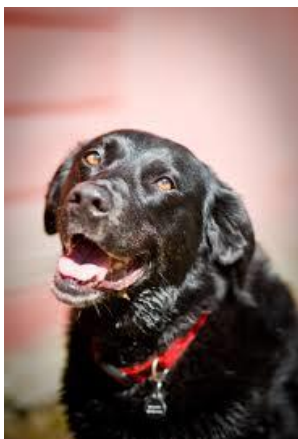
## Rolling Over and Exposing the Belly

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Dogs can be regularly viewed rolling over and exposing their belly with his tail gently wagging. Whilst this is commonly viewed as a request for a belly rub that's enjoyed by many canines, this is also a symbol of submission and trust from a dog.

By exposing their belly, dogs are exposing their vulnerability in a calm manner through a cry for affection. Highly social and loving animals, a canine rolling over recognises a human as a leader in a content, calm environment. Involuntarily leg jerking may be associated with the belly rubbing, caused by oversensitivity.

Similarly, a dog exposing their belly in a canine environment indicates to his fellow canine that he is submissive and causes no harm to the other dog. The visual signs of rolling over may alter when interacting with another dog; they may shake slightly and excrete a small amount of urine out of vulnerability. Another dog will usually recognise this submissive behaviour and act accordingly, until the dog jumps up and will either play with the other canine or go their separate ways.



## Circling

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It is common to observe dogs circling and pacing in a somewhat anxious manner. Whilst this can be difficult to view because of the perceived trauma a dog may be experiencing, there are numerous reasons behind this behaviour.

Dogs are prone to experiencing anxiety and circling or pacing can relieve nervous tension. Anxiety could be caused by loud noises, a stressful

environment or lacking physical or mental stimulation. If the cause of pacing or circling is obvious, relieve the stressor in the most efficient way possible. If boredom is a reason, a walk or bone usually helps release stress.

Dogs can be our best friends, but they are also animals – which mean they can experience a range of emotions and behaviour traits just like the rest of us. For the average pet owner, what looks like fighting with other dogs can actually be a canine's way of having fun or playing with other pets, but there are various signs to look for when identifying behaviour.

As a pet owner, it can be frustrating to find that a normally behaved canine is acting out or becoming aggressive, so it's essential to determine the source of the behaviour and manage it before it develops into something potentially dangerous. Whilst every dog experiences emotions differently, aggression is one trait that needs to be monitored and treated as it can become a habit in a short period. Whether the dog is a puppy or an adult canine, discipline is important in the daily life of a pet and it is up to the owner to instil ample training as soon as possible.

One of the first things to observe when it comes to a canine is possible 'mad moments,' similar to what humans might experience during a time of anger or hostility. There are various reasons why a dog might experience these sudden impulses or erratic mood swings, or simply a need to release energy. Mad moments, or aggression, can include any number of these sudden changes in temperament or mood, such as:

- Growling
- Snapping
- Showing teeth or snarling
- Quick nips at humans or other pets
- Rigid body or defensive positioning



To understand why dogs experience mad moments, it is important to identify the situations in which it occurs. There are a number of reasons why a pet might suddenly become agitated or upset – and while it might look like it comes out of nowhere, there are often good reasons (or so the dog thinks) to become aggressive. Different types of aggression include:

- **Defensive aggression** – Typically occurs when a canine experiences fear, but opts to use defensive behaviour to manage the situation rather than withdrawal. Signs of defensive aggression include lunging at a human or other animal, barking ferociously or growling. This type of mad moment is more common to adult canines over puppies, as they have more confidence in their ability to protect themselves.
- **Territorial aggression** – This is one of the situations most pet owners find a canine exhibits signs of aggression or mad moments. Canines are territorial by nature and have an innate ability to defend what they feel belongs to them – whether it's a toy, bowl of food or even a master. Owners will often see a pet become territorially aggressive when they are out with other humans – when a canine sees other people or animals coming into a space, such as a home, then they are prone to bark, nip or even bite those they deem as aggressors.
- **Social aggression** – When there are multiple canines in a home, there becomes a need to create a hierarchy between the dogs. These behavioural traits dictate which dog eats first, where they sleep or what toys they play with during playtime.

Social aggression could also develop between humans and canines living in the same home. For example, a canine might display social aggression to a spouse or children – simply because they are creating the hierarchy in the family. This is often one of the most surprising behaviours for pet owners when they see a typically happy, calm pet become agitated toward certain members of the family.



Dogs might also find certain behaviours threatening and not always consistently. Taking a bowl of food away from a pet during eating is one common occasion in which a pet might display hostility, while they are good-natured any other time. On other occasions, hugging a dog is enough to make them upset and snap, even though they can be hugged countless times throughout the day – it often depends on the mood or perceived behaviour that causes a dog to misbehave on a moment's notice. Other causes for mad moments or aggression include:

- Predatory aggression
- Frustration
- Protective aggression
- Fear

When managing this type of behaviour, it's important to determine why they are acting in a certain manner. Usually it's because the dog is being provoked – intentionally or unintentionally – and the mad moments can be prevented in the first place. When it's *not* something that can be managed, then intervention strategies are required. Working with a pet professional or veterinarian is the first step in determining why the dog is showing signs of aggression or mad moments, in addition to learning how to prevent them.

### **Muzzle Grabbing**

When it comes to aggression, it's also important for pet owners to know the difference between playing and hostility. Watching pets do the common 'muzzle grab' might be alarming for some pet owners, especially if they have not encountered that behaviour in the past.

A muzzle grab is when one canine bites down gently on the muzzle of



another canine. This behaviour is started as early as puppyhood – mother canines often gently bite down on the muzzle of her puppies during the nursing process, while puppies muzzle grab each other to show who's dominant over the other. As a puppy grows older, the muzzle grab becomes a universal action between canines to signify tolerance and friendship. During a

muzzle grab between two dogs, one might find that the 'submissive' canine will allow a 'dominate' canine to gently bite down.

Harking back from the wolf period, the muzzle grab is also a way in which two canines display a relationship and build trust. Biting too hard on a muzzle causes pain, which might create a hostile environment for the two canines – it is here that the dogs learn the boundaries of biting when it comes to other dogs. For pet educators, it's important to look at the muzzle grab as just that – a grab – rather than a hostile bite. Owners can also use the muzzle grab with pets to show hierarchy in a family. Often, pets will come up to owners and poke a nose onto the legs or hand and by gently grabbing the muzzle, owners show the pet that is in charge over the dog and house. Many dogs and owners can view this interaction as a loving one – showing each other they know which role is fulfilled in the household.

## Human to Canine Communication

For many pet owners, communication is an essential part of ownership and provides a deeper affection for beloved canines. Through body language, pets let owners know how they feel, whether happy, angry, sad or even nervous – many of the emotions pets feel are identified through various visual signs. Once an owner can learn to 'read' the pet's body language, it makes it that much easier to identify feelings and emotions of the dog. Taking inventory of the pet's face, tail movement and ear placement are all typical indications with how the pet is feeling. It's also important to note that not only a single behaviour can indicate to an owner how a pet is feeling – looking at various components of the pet's body language will help provide an accurate assessment of the emotional state of a canine.

For owners, a lack of proper communication with dogs can set them up for a range of poor behaviours – depression, aggression and even fear are all things a dog can experience when there is no communication between humans and dogs. Many owners have a love for pets that entice them to think canines can fully understand human emotions or communication, but they must remember that pets do not understand being scolded or talked to – they understand emotions and communication through sounds of a voice, affection and body language. These three components are also what make up effective training techniques – if the behaviour of a pet is good, reward the canine through love or the occasional treat.

This is especially important during and after training when a pet does something wrong. A dog understands right and wrong when there are rewards or consequences in place – such as stopping playtime immediately with a firm 'No!' should the pet nip at the owner's skin too hard. On the other hand, rewarding a pet for good behaviour immediately after it takes place is the essential way in which to reinforce that action. Staying consistent is key

when communicating with any dog – repetitive rewarding or consequences for a given action will ensure that the pet learns what is right or wrong.

Providing the canine with a sense of love and companionship is an essential way to nurture the communication between owner and pet. Neglecting or ignoring the dog is harmful and can eventually create fear or aggression in even the most docile animal. Patience is another trait to exhibit toward a canine – especially when they are puppies. Communicating with pets can