

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## Dog Sense

There are hundreds of different breeds of pet dogs—each with its own distinctive characteristics. So, what do these different looking animals have in common? What is it that makes a dog a dog?

Although dogs don't all look or act alike, they do share certain special features (adaptations) inherited from their common ancestor, the gray wolf. Before becoming domesticated (tame), dogs depended on these special features for their survival. Let's take a look at some of the important ones.

A dog experiences the world primarily through its super-sniffing nose. More than any other sense, dogs rely on their amazing sense of smell to tell them what is going on around them. A dog's sense of smell is so good that it can sniff out a bone that is buried several feet underground.

Dogs don't see things the way people do. They aren't able to see small things very well, but they see in the dark much better than we can. Their eyes are also more sensitive to motion than ours are. Many people think that dogs only see in black and white. Actually, dogs see in color, but they don't see all the colors we see. They only see in shades of yellow and blue. They can't see greens or reds.

Dogs hear slightly better than people do. They're able to hear high-pitched squeaky sounds that we cannot hear. They can also hear sounds from farther away than people can. And most dogs can move their ears around in different directions, so they are better at figuring out where a sound is coming from.

Dogs' tongues have the same types of taste buds as ours, but not as many of them. In addition, a dog has special taste buds at the tip of its tongue that allow the dog to 'taste' water—something that we *cannot* do. Pure water is tasteless to humans.

Most dogs have skin that is covered with two layers of fur. The bottom layer is dense and soft, while the outer layer is coarse and long. Together, the two layers keep rain and snow off a dog's skin and shut out the cold. When it's hot, dogs pant to cool off. Water evaporating from a panting dog's tongue lowers its body temperature. Dogs also sweat, but only from their noses and the bottoms of their feet. They do not have sweat glands all over their bodies the way we do.

Almost all dogs have tails. These can be short or long, fluffy or sleek, curvy or straight. Dogs use their tails to communicate, but a dog's tail can be useful in other ways as well. Swimming dogs have thick, strong tails that help them steer in water. Sled dogs have bushy tails that help them keep warm in freezing weather.

That's the dog from head to tail. The traits described here are shared by almost all dogs. The ancestors of today's dogs needed these traits in order to survive in the wild. You probably recognize some of them in your own pet.