

Wendy Volhard's  
*Puppy Aptitude Test*  
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## WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR

A good place to start is *The Complete Dog Book* by the American Kennel Club, which describes the breed standards for the different breeds recognized by that organization. Two other excellent resources are *Roger Caras Dog Book: A Complete Guide to Every AKC Breed* (Dorset Press, 1992) and *Paws to Consider: Choosing the Right Dog for You and Your Family* by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson (Grand Central Publishing, 1999).

Another wealth of information can be found at dog shows, where you can see a large variety of breeds and talk to their owners and breeders. But remember, they are obviously and naturally biased.

To help you get the dog you want we have devised a simple test, which is amazingly accurate in predicting inherited behavioral tendencies and how the puppy will turn out as an adult.

## WHAT IS PUPPY TESTING?

Some of the tests we use were developed as long ago as the 1930's for dogs bred to become Guide Dogs. Then in the 1950's, studies on puppies were conducted to determine how quickly they learned. These studies were actually done to identify children's learning stages.

**Top Dog Tips:** The ideal age to test the puppy is at 49 days of age when the puppy is neurologically complete and it has the brain of an adult dog. With each passing day after the 49<sup>th</sup> day the responses will be tainted by prior learning.

Later on in the early 60's more tests were developed to determine if pups could be tested for dominance and submission. These tests determined that it was indeed possible to predict future behavioral traits of adult dogs by evaluating puppies at 49 days of age. Testing before or after that age, effected the accuracy of the results, depending on the amount of time before or after the 49<sup>th</sup> day.

We took these tests, added some of our own, and put together what is now known as the Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test, or PAT. PAT uses a scoring system from 1-6 and consists of ten tests. The tests are done consecutively and in the order listed. Each test is scored separately, and interpreted on its own merits. The scores are not averaged, and there are no winners or losers. The entire purpose is to select the right puppy for the right home.

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Guide dog trainers have the greatest faith in this test. A dog that retrieves nearly always works out to be a Guide Dog because it indicates a willingness to work for the owner. Other organizations that use dogs from a shelter, such as those who use dogs to sniff out contraband or drugs, and police departments, place almost sole reliance on this test. They know that if a dog brings back the object, they can train him to do almost anything.

Wherever you get your dog, use the tests that you can do and act accordingly. By the way, it's not too late to use some of the tests with the dog you already have. It just might explain some of your dog's behaviors.

## **THE LEAST YOU NEED TO KNOW**

- There are many breeds to choose from and if there is a secret in getting that "perfect puppy", it is doing your homework.
- A good place to start is "The Complete Dog Book" by the American Kennel Club, which describes in detail the different breeds recognized by that registry.
- Carefully consider the time you have available for the necessary up-keep and exercise the dog requires.
- Don't get a dog on impulse!
- Use the Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test in selecting your dog, whether a puppy or an older dog.

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**The Tests Consist of the Following:**

1. Social Attraction - degree of social attraction to people, confidence or dependence.
2. Following - willingness to follow a person.
3. Restraint - degree of dominant or submissive tendency, and ease of handling in difficult situations.
4. Social Dominance - degree of acceptance of social dominance by a person.
5. Elevation - degree of accepting dominance while in a position of no control, such as at the veterinarian or groomer.
6. Retrieving - degree of willingness to do something for you. Together with Social Attraction and Following a key indicator for ease or difficulty in training.
7. Touch Sensitivity - degree of sensitivity to touch and a key indicator to the type of training equipment required.
8. Sound Sensitivity - degree of sensitivity to sound, such as loud noises or thunderstorms.
9. Sight Sensitivity - degree of response to a moving object, such as chasing bicycles, children or squirrels.
- 10 Stability - degree of startle response to a strange object.

During the testing make a note of the heart rate of the pup, which is an indication of how it deals with stress, as well as its energy level. Puppies come with high, medium or low energy levels. You have to decide for yourself, which suits your life style. Dogs with high energy levels need a great deal of exercise, and will get into mischief if this energy is not channeled into the right direction.

Finally, look at the overall structure of the puppy. You see what you get at 49 days age. If the pup has strong and straight front and back legs, with all four feet pointing in the same direction, it will grow up that way, provided you give it the proper diet and environment in which to grow. If you notice something out of the ordinary at this age, it will stay with puppy for the rest of its life. He will not grow out of it.

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## HOW TO TEST

Here are the ground rules for performing the test:

The testing is done in a location unfamiliar to the puppies. This does not mean they have to be taken away from home. A 10-foot square area is perfectly adequate, such as a room in the house where the puppies have not been.

The puppies are tested one at a time.

- There are no other dogs or people, except the scorer and the tester, in the testing area
- The puppies do not know the tester.
- The scorer is a disinterested third party and not the person interested in selling you a puppy.
- The scorer is unobtrusive and positions him or herself so he or she can observe the puppies' responses without having to move.
- The puppies are tested before they are fed.
- The puppies are tested when they are at their liveliest.
- Do not try to test a puppy that is not feeling well.
- Puppies should not be tested the day of or the day after being vaccinated.
- Only the first response counts!

**Top Dog Tips:** During the test, watch the puppy's tail. It will make a difference in the scoring whether the tail is up or down.

The tests are simple to perform and anyone with some common sense can do them. You can, however, elicit the help of someone who has tested puppies before and knows what they are doing.

1. **Social attraction** - the owner or caretaker of the puppies places it in the test area about four feet from the tester and then leaves the test area. The tester kneels down and coaxes the puppy to come to him or her by encouragingly and gently clapping hands and calling. The tester must coax the puppy in the opposite direction from where it entered the test area. **Hint:** Lean backward, sitting on your heels instead of leaning forward toward the puppy. Keep your hands close to your body encouraging the puppy to come to you instead of trying to reach for the puppy.
2. **Following** - the tester stands up and slowly walks away encouraging the puppy to follow. **Hint:** Make sure the puppy sees you walk away and get the puppy to focus on you by lightly clapping your hands and using verbal encouragement to get the puppy to follow you. Do not lean over the puppy.
3. **Restraint** - the tester crouches down and gently rolls the puppy on its back and holds it on its back for 30 seconds. **Hint:** Hold the puppy down without applying too much pressure. The object is not to keep it on its back but to test its response to being placed in that position.
4. **Social Dominance** - let the puppy stand up or sit and gently stroke it from the head to the back while you crouch beside it. See if it will lick your face, an indication of a forgiving nature. Continue stroking until you see a behavior you can score. **Hint:** When you crouch next to the puppy avoid leaning or hovering over the puppy. Have the puppy at your side with both of you facing in the same direction.

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**Top Dog Tips:** During testing maintain a positive, upbeat and friendly attitude toward the puppies. Try to get each puppy to interact with you to bring out the best in him or her. Make the test a pleasant experience for the puppy.

5. **Elevation Dominance** - the tester cradles the puppy with both hands, supporting the puppy under its chest and gently lifts it two feet off the ground and holds it there for 30 seconds.
6. **Retrieving** - the tester crouches beside the puppy and attracts its attention with a crumpled up piece of paper. When the puppy shows some interest, the tester throws the paper no more than four feet in front of the puppy encouraging it to retrieve the paper.
7. **Touch Sensitivity** - the tester locates the webbing of one the puppy's front paws and presses it lightly between his index finger and thumb. The tester gradually increases pressure while counting to ten and stops when the puppy pulls away or shows signs of discomfort.
8. **Sound Sensitivity** - the puppy is placed in the center of the testing area and an assistant stationed at the perimeter makes a sharp noise, such as banging a metal spoon on the bottom of a metal pan.
9. **Sight Sensitivity** - the puppy is placed in the center of the testing area. The tester ties a string around a bath towel and jerks it across the floor, two feet away from the puppy.
10. **Stability** - an umbrella is opened about five feet from the puppy and gently placed on the ground.

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## WHAT DO THE SCORES MEAN?

The scores are interpreted as follows:

### Mostly 1's -

Strong desire to be pack leader and is not shy about bucking for a promotion

Has a predisposition to be aggressive to people and other dogs and will bite

Should only be placed into a very experienced home where the dog will be trained and worked on a regular basis

Top Dog Tips: Stay away from the puppy with a lot of 1's or 2's. It has lots of leadership aspirations and may be difficult to manage. This puppy needs an experienced home. Not good with children.

### Mostly 2's -

Also has leadership aspirations

May be hard to manage and has the capacity to bite

Has lots of self-confidence

Should not be placed into an inexperienced home

Too unruly to be good with children and elderly people, or other animals

Needs strict schedule, loads of exercise and lots of training

Has the potential to be a great show dog with someone who understands dog behavior

### Mostly 3's -

Can be a high-energy dog and may need lots of exercise

Good with people and other animals

Can be a bit of a handful to live with

Needs training, does very well at it and learns quickly

Great dog for second time owner.

### Mostly 4's -

The kind of dog that makes the perfect pet Best choice for the first time owner.

Rarely will buck for a promotion in the family

Easy to train, and rather quiet.

Good with elderly people, children, although may need protection from the children

Choose this pup, take it to obedience classes, and you'll be the star, without having to do too much work!

Tidbits: The puppy with mostly 3's and 4's can be quite a handful, but should be good with children and does well with training. Energy needs to be dispersed with plenty of exercise.

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Mostly 5's -

Fearful, shy and needs special handling

Will run away at the slightest stress in its life

Strange people, strange places, different floor or ground surfaces may upset it

Often afraid of loud noises and terrified of thunder storms. When you greet it upon your return, may submissively urinate. Needs a very special home where the environment doesn't change too much and where there are no children

If cornered and cannot get away, has a tendency to bite

Top Dog Tips: Avoid the puppy with several 6's. It is so independent it doesn't need you or anyone. He is his own person and unlikely to bond to you.

Mostly 6's -

So independent that he doesn't need you or other people

Doesn't care if he is trained or not - he is his own person. Not likely to bond to you, since he doesn't need you.

A great guard dog for gas stations!

Do not take this puppy and think you can change him into a lovable bundle - you can't, so leave well enough alone

## **INTERPRETING THE SCORES**

Few puppies will test with all 2's or all 3's - there will be a mixture of scores.

For that first time, wonderfully easy to train, potential star, look for a puppy that scores with mostly 4's and 3's. Don't worry about the score on Touch Sensitivity - you can compensate for that with the right training equipment.

Tidbits: It's hard not to become emotional when picking a puppy - they are all so cute, soft and cuddly. Remind yourself that this dog is going to be with you for 8 to 16 years. Don't hesitate to step back a little to contemplate your decision. Sleep on it and review it in the light of day.

Avoid the puppy with a score of 1 on the Restraint and Elevation tests. This puppy will be too much for the first time owner.

It's a lot more fun to have a good dog, one that is easy to train, one you can live with and one you can be proud of, than one that is a constant struggle.

## **CHOOSING A BREEDER**

Once you have done your research and you have decided which breed is most suited to your lifestyle and expectations, it is time to choose a breeder. You can meet breeders at dog shows, through the local newspaper, or popular dog Magazines, such as The American Kennel Club Gazette, Dog World or Dog Fancy.