Overview of the AKC Temperament Test

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August 28, 2019
Welcome to the AKC Temperament Test!

The purpose of this module is to teach you:

• general information pertaining to canine temperament, and

• about the AKC Temperament Test, also known as the ATT.
What is temperament?

• Early definitions of temperament include:
  • Personality
  • Makeup
  • Disposition and natural predisposition
  • Constitution
  • Nature
  • Combinaton of mental and emotional traits
  • Individual differences in behavior that are biologically based
Temperament is not...

- Physical characteristics of a dog
- Learned behaviors such as sit, down
- The AKC Canine Good Citizen test is a test of behavior – it is not a temperament test.
Early temperament tests

Early temperament tests were thought to be predictive, that is, if a dog did not pass a temperament test, it was often deemed unsuitable for certain types of work in the future.
Modifying behaviors related to temperament

With the increase in dog trainer knowledge about behavior, behavioral procedures such as exposure therapy (desensitization) are now used to modify behaviors (such as fearful reactions) that may be related to temperament.
With the realization that behaviors can be modified, the ATT is meant to provide a “prescriptive” approach to temperament.

This means if when tested on the ATT, a dog shows fear during a test item, dog owners can work on improving the problem.
Modifying behaviors related to temperament

When we modify a behavior related to a dog’s temperament, did we change the temperament?

No, we simply changed behaviors such as those paired with fear, sociability, biddability, etc.
Modifying behaviors related to temperament

A human example of this would be the person who was shy from the time she was a child.

Using Behavioral Skills Training, this person can be taught to be a great public speaker, but she may still be basically shy.
Modifying behaviors related to temperament

Even though we can often change a behavior related to a dog’s temperament, there still may situations where not passing a temperament test might suggest a dog is not the best candidate for a specific job.

An example of this would be a fearful dog who is being considered for police, military or protection work.
A modern definition of temperament

Considering that we can change behaviors related to temperament (such as when a dog is afraid to walk on an unfamiliar surface), here is a modern definition of temperament:

An individual’s natural predisposition to react in a certain way to a stimulus. Behaviors related to temperament may be modified over time with exposure and learning.

- Burch & Ljungren, 2019
Temperament for specific breeds

There are approximately 200 (purebred) AKC recognized breeds.

One of the things that makes a specific breed unique is not only the dog’s physical appearance, but each breed also has its own distinctive temperament.
AKC Parent Club Breed Standard

- Each AKC breed has a national parent club. You can find your breed’s parent club at akc.org

- Parent clubs have a section on the breed’s temperament in their breed standard.
Across all of the breed standards, there are some commonly used terms.

ADAPTABLE  ALERT  ALOOF  BALANCED  BRIGHT  CLEVER
CONFIDENT  DEVOTED  GAME  GUARDIAN  INDEPENDENT  LOYAL
MERRY  PROTECTIVE  RESERVED
SELF-ASSURED  SMART  Stubborn  TRACTABLE

The standards also state undesirable traits in a breed such as aggressive, fearful, etc.
For some breeds, the breed’s temperament standards include terms related to the job the breed was originally bred to do.
Sometimes, when dog owners read the temperament part of the breed standard for their breed, they may say, “This says my dog is reserved around strangers. My dog loves everyone! This isn’t right.”

As with anything else, there can exceptions with regard to some of the temperament characteristics of individual purebred dogs within a litter.

For example, in the case of a breed that can be reserved around strangers, depending on the amount of socialization and training a dog owner provided, the individual dog may be friendly and sociable with people.
The Need

Temperament is an important consideration for all breeders and owners.

The ATT was developed to bring focus and meaningful evaluation to assess the temperament of our canine companions.
The Test
AKC Temperament Test (ATT)

• The ATT tests how a dog reacts to a variety of stimuli.

• Desirable traits are that the dog will be emotionally stable, inquisitive, cooperative, appropriately social for its breed, biddable and recovers from a startling situation in a reasonable amount of time.

• Undesirable traits are fear, shyness, lack of cooperation, and an inability to recover from unfamiliar or unexpected situations. Examples of undesirable behaviors include being afraid of friendly strangers or unfamiliar stimuli, obsessive barking, and aggression.
AKC Temperament Test (ATT)

In the ATT, dogs are tested in 6 categories of stimuli that include:

1. Social
2. Auditory
3. Visual
4. Tactile
5. Proprioceptive (motion)
6. Unexpected Stimulus
Who Can Evaluate the ATT?

- The ATT may be administered by specially trained AKC Obedience judges, AKC Rally Judges and CGC Evaluators. All of these must have completed online ATT training and passed an online test.

- The testers for the ATT, whether they be judges or CGC Evaluators, are referred to as “ATT Evaluators.”
Getting Ready to Test

• All AKC licensed or member clubs may hold an ATT test.

• Clubs submit an Event application and events are listed on the AKC Event Search web site.

• ATTs may be held in conjunction with another AKC event or as a stand alone (AKC club) event.
Becoming an ATT Evaluator

ATT prospective evaluators submit an application for ATT Evaluator approval attesting they have completed the four required online training modules. They must also take and pass an online test.

- Overview of ATT (this module)
- Video of ATT in action
- ATT Evaluator Guide
- Assembling Test Materials
- Online Test
The Online Test

After completing the modules, you will take the online ATT test. Once you’ve passed, you are ready to evaluate AKC Temperament Tests!
What happens at an ATT

Dog owners/handlers bring their dogs to be tested. At the test, they complete the paperwork required for testing.

These forms include the 1) Evaluator Score Sheet, 2) ATT Title Application and 3) Your Breed’s Temperament.
What about mixed breeds?

Handlers of purebred dogs will use the Breed Temperament Guides to fill out the form called, “Your Breed’s Temperament.”

Handlers of mixed breed dogs will also complete this form based on their description of the temperament of their specific dog.
Taking the Test

At the ATT, the Evaluator begins by greeting the handler/dog.

Then the dog will proceed through the test. There will be a total of 18 test items (3 each for the 6 categories of stimuli).

If the dog passes the test, the Evaluator will give the handler the Evaluator Score Sheet that will be sent to AKC with the ATT Title Application.

MORE DETAILS ON THE ATT ARE IN THE ATT EVALUATOR GUIDE.
Earning the ATT Title

The ATT is a pass-fail test.

Dogs must pass the test twice under 2 different evaluators to earn the AKC’s ATT title. The dog owner must submit the Title Application and Evaluator Score Sheets from two passed tests to AKC.
Thank you for reading this introductory module on the Overview of the ATT.