



Temperament Testing An Older Dog

If you're thinking about adopting an older dog, find out as much as you can about her previous situation. Was she neglected, isolated for long periods of time or abused in any way? A dog's personality is affected by how she is treated in puppyhood. While love and consistency can help a dog feel more secure, memories can play like bad records and result in behaviors that you have little control over.

Find an adult dog whose personality meshes with your habits and lifestyles, and whose personality is trusting and open to new love.

Get ready to visit a potential dog by preparing an assessment kit: a handful of dog treats in a cup, an umbrella and two kitchen pots. You'll see why in a minute.

If you're in a kennel or shelter, bring the candidate into secluded area. Allow about 5 minutes for the dog to acclimate – dogs "see" with their noses and need some time to sniff around and feel relaxed.

Now you're ready to test.

**Walk around the enclosure like you were a fellow dog, checking things out.
Does the dog:**

Run over to explore with you.		A
Ignore you.		B
Bark and react assertively.		C
Run and hide or freeze in fear.		D

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Put some treats in a cup. Shake the cup and pretend to eat the treats—ham it up, act like these things are delicious!. Does the dog:

Run over to you and when offered a treat, take or sniff it.		A
Ignore you.		B
Bark and react assertively.		C
Run and hide or freeze in fear.		D

Take out your pots. Face away from the dog and bang the pans together three times. Calmly place the pans on the ground and turn around as if nothing happened. Does the dog:

Run over to explore the pans.		A
Ignore you.		B
Bark and react assertively.		C
Run and hide or freeze in fear.		D

Take out your umbrella. Facing away from the dog, open and shut the umbrella two times, then place it -- opened -- on the ground. Does the dog:

Run over to explore it.		A
Ignore you.		B
Bark and react assertively.		C
Run and hide or freeze in fear.		D

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If you're still comfortable with the dog, kneel on the floor and pet her. Does the dog:

Calm to your touch -- immediately or after a flush of enthusiasm.		A
Get excited and unmanageable.		B
Becomes hard or aggressive. If so, step away.		C
Grow fearful and nervous.		D

Finally, try to take the dog for a walk on the leash. Leash walking does not come naturally for dogs -- they prefer to sniff, play and meander -- but it's an important part of living in the people world. Does the dog:

Accept your guidance.		A
Strain to get away or freeze up.		B
Jump at you or mouth the leash.		C
Freeze in a fearful pose or nervously dart away.		D

In a shelter or kennel environment, a dog will show slightly exaggerated reactions. While a mix of letters is not uncommon, one letter should prevail. Read on to see how your candidate measures up.

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Mostly A: This dog is more receptive to human interaction and relationships. Some dogs are more likely to listen to an authority figure and refrain from taking matters into their own paws...and this dog is a likely listener. Eager to follow your lead and participate in family fun, this dog may be prone to separation anxiety.

Mostly B: A confident dog, less dependent on people when it comes to making decisions. This dog is independent and self-directing. A “B” dog can live happily with people and may do well with other pets, but she won’t need human interaction to thrive. This dog is a good choice for busy families.

Mostly C: This dog has some pretty strong memories and has adapted a defensive attitude towards things that are unfamiliar. She will need consistency from people and unyielding direction to thrive in a home. Usually quite intelligent, assertive dogs can thrive if their intelligence is put to a task—such as agility or tracking or other athletic endeavors.

Mostly D: This dog is also playing old records or past experiences but has a much more anxious reaction. A dog of this nature needs patience, calm direction and positive reinforcement to thrive. I call these dogs “Worriers” and they do not thrive in chaotic households.

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