

Do Dogs Understand Words?

Have you ever wondered if your dog really knows what you are saying to him? Do dogs understand the words that are said to them? There are arguments both ways in this situation. Why would your dog understand what you are saying? Take a look at how dogs communicate with each other, it is different than other animals. If dogs could truly understand what we were saying why wouldn't they speak the same way that we do?

Yes, dogs do associate certain words with certain actions, but is it just the word alone that is being associated with the action? There was a test done to see if just words are what the dog associates with actions. A dog was given commands from a human who was standing in front of him, and the dog did as he was told. This same dog and human were used again, but this time the command was given over an intercom system instead of in person. The dog did not do well with these commands.

Dogs rely on more than just words to know what they are supposed to do. Body language is a very important key in the dogs ability to understand what to do. Stop and think about the body language that is used when telling your dog a command. If you want him to get off the couch a motion is made with the arm to cue the dog to get down. Most often you point at the dog, and then to the floor as you say get down. If the command is outside, a motion towards the door is usually made. The dog associates the motions we make and the command that is said to know what he is supposed to be doing.

Other studies have been done to determine a dogs understanding. Russian speech scientists have done testing to see if a dog can be trained to understand the words that are being said to them. In these studies it has been shown that dogs can be trained to learn the difference in vowels. A voice synthesizer was used in these studies, and the dogs could tell the difference in the vowels.

Something to try at home would be using the same vowels in a command, but make the other letters in the words different. For example, tell your dog to fly clown, and he will probably lie down. The vowels in these words are the same, so your dog will think he is being told to lie down.

Dogs probably do not understand the words we are saying, but rather associate certain sounds and gestures with an action. When a command is given they know what to do based on these sounds and gestures you are making, and will do as told.

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