



Avidog® Puppy Evaluation Test

Helping Breeders Make the Best Match for Puppies and Owners



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Introduction

The Avidog® Puppy Evaluation Test (APET) arose from our 20-year search for an evaluation tool to help us best match puppies' to owners. Not only were we looking for a temperament test that would closely capture our puppies' characters and talents but we wanted a tool to enable us to best inform and guide our owners as they started training and developing their new puppy. We started with the Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test, borrowed the philosophy of Sheila Booth's Positive Puppy Preview and others, and then added, tweaked and changed the exercises to create the test that worked best for us—the APET.

Today we use the APET as one of our four key tools for matching our puppies to their new homes. It is a vocational test for our pups; it helps us understand what work or living situation each puppy is drawn to. Of course, we take other things into account as we match puppies, such as structural/conformation evaluations, health examinations, and tests of natural working ability, but the APET is the foundation. It also helps us create the individual training plans that we create for each puppy to help its new owners make it the best it can be.

Finally, we also use the APET to examine each litter overall. Did we get what we expected from a breeding pair? If not, how did the pups differ from what we expected? What were the litter's overall strengths and weaknesses? If we see a consistent area that we are not happy with, is there something we can do to tweak our puppy rearing to address this?

Since its creation, we have used the APET to help breeders from many breeds evaluate and place their pups, as well as guide their owners. We created this e-book to help you use the APET to evaluate, match and place your litters. We hope you find it useful!

Why Another Temperament Test?

With a number of temperament tests available to breeders, why did we create another one? The most important reason that we built the APET was that we

wanted a more inclusive temperament evaluation that would both help us match our puppies to their new homes but also to provide valuable insights and guidance to each pup's new owner regarding their initial training plans for their puppies and what to expect over a lifetime. But the APET is also deeply connected to our philosophy about puppies and matching to their new owners.

There Is No Perfect Puppy Only a Puppy That Is Perfect For You. Despite what you read on the Internet or in dog books, there is no list of perfect canine temperament traits for all owners. So the APET does not identify “correct” or “ideal” scores on any characteristic because we do not believe there are any. What is “ideal” for you is likely to be far from ideal for me. In fact, each of us will thrive with a puppy with a different combination of traits even if we have the same goals for our dog.

However, there are patterns of temperament traits that work best for the kind of work a dog may do best and type of partner he may become. Dogs can be trained to do many things but they do best those things that come naturally to them, that feel good to them.

At the most basic level, we know that a puppy that has eyes only for people may work well in an obedience home but would be at a real disadvantage in a hunting home. A high energy puppy is likely to be a poor match for a quiet pet home but is perfect for a search and rescue home. The sound sensitive puppy will thrive with a quiet elderly couple but might struggle in a home with young children.

Yet it is at the more complex level, where multiple traits are combined into patterns where the best matching between owners and puppies occurs. An ideal dog-owner partnership depends upon many complementary characteristics rather than just one or two. The APET helps breeders and owners capture these characteristics in an object way so they can be used to place puppies with the owners they will do best with.

Puppy eHarmony.com! Not only does the puppy's future “work” dictate which traits are most important but its new owner's characteristics and desires do, too. Some people love an intense, opinionated dog while others would be

overwhelmed by such an animal. Some owners are loud, excitable trainers while others are quiet and unemotional. In addition, each of us has traits in dogs that we do not care about and others that we cannot live without. For example, I love a dog with an intense, natural desire for birds but do not care if that dog naturally brings a retrieve object back to me. A highly independent puppy is likely to fit companionably with a similarly independent owner but will confuse a more physically demonstrative owner.

The APET allows breeders and buyers to examine each puppy in detail to see what traits will work well with owners and which will not. At the same time, it enables breeders and owners to examine their own needs and desires in a dog because the goal is a good match, not a perfect puppy (...because, see above, there are no perfect puppies there are only puppies that are perfect *for you*.) So APET is sort of like a puppy eHarmony.com, helping owners find deep, meaningful dog love!

Some Puppy Traits are Stable. Second, we also believe that there are no perfect matches between puppies and new owners across all temperament traits. Some canine temperament traits are relatively stable, even as early as seven and eight weeks. These traits, such as energy level and forgiveness, will change little over the puppy's lifetime. Thus the pup's new owner must either want a puppy with that trait or be willing to adapt to it. Because the APET lays out traits without judgment, it paints a rich picture of the puppy for breeders and new owners so the best possible match can be made.

But Puppies Can Also Be Tweaked. Other traits, such as play drive and sight sensitivity, can be influenced with well-designed training and development opportunities early in the puppy's life. These traits are most easily changed during the Sensitive period, before sixteen weeks of age. However, with concerted effort on the owner's part, tweakable traits can be further influenced up till six months of age and then again, to a lesser degree, till twelve months of age. After that, a dog's personality is relatively rigid and can only be influenced slightly through experience, training and socialization.

Thus if there is a mismatch between puppy and owner on tweakable traits, the new owner can influence the trait somewhat as soon as it gets his pup home. In

these cases, the APET helps breeders create training and development plans that will allow new owners to tweak these more flexible traits in the direction that they want using thoughtful, focused development, socialization and training experiences. The most important thing to remember is that one size does not fit all in developing young puppies. Instead, tailoring development to the match will produce the best outcome for puppy and owner.

A Little about the APET

The APET evolved from our philosophy that the match between puppy and owner is essential to the long-term success of their relationship. Furthermore, owners armed with good training plans can help mold some of their puppy's less-than-ideal characteristics to increase the likelihood for lifelong canine-human bliss.

The APET differs in a number of ways from earlier temperament tests. Here are a few distinguishing APET characteristics:

23 Test Components. The APET consists of 23 subcomponents or tests that flow easily from one to another. Some are brief, taking only a second or two, while others are longer, typically taking around 30 seconds. All are easy to do for experienced dog people who are comfortable engaging with puppies.

33 Temperament Traits. Since our puppies go to a wide array of homes from active pet homes to National-level dog sport competitors, we wanted an aptitude test that would examine a broader collection of puppy characteristics than found in other temperament tests. So rather than the more common dozen traits, the APET examines 33 distinct characteristics. Some of these traits are important for most owners while others are very specific to a single type of home. For example, every match between puppy and home should consider the pup's energy level. However, three-dimensionality is an interesting trait that it is only important when placing pups in search-and-rescue and hunting homes. Thus, the APET can be tailored to the type of pups and the homes they will be going to.

Long and Distracting. Although quick tests with no distractions are easier to conduct and interpret, they are not able to evaluate a puppy's stamina or its

response to a more realistic environment that is filled with distractions. The APET seeks to evaluate both of these things. It is relatively long, typically 20 minutes per puppy so requires more of a commitment from breeders. But as a result, puppies get all the time they need to warm up to the tester and test environment. Slow starters are still able to show their strengths. Sprinters will usually show if they lack the ability to concentrate for long periods. If stress is going to build in a puppy without a release through play or relationship, it will show during the APET.

Once it goes to its new home, a puppy will live in a stimulating and distracting environment. The APET enables breeders to see if pups are over stimulated, overwhelmed or unduly stressed by distractions. In addition, a puppy's engagement with specific distractions gives important clues to what will attract or repel it over the long term. Puppies that love to smell interesting scents are likely to make great tracking dogs but challenging agility dogs. Avid retrievers that stop chasing as soon as food appears give their new owners a strong hint at where to focus their early training efforts.

The APET's First Product—Individual Trait Profiles. Like all temperament tests, when you have finished the APET you will have a temperament trait profile for each puppy in the litter. Combined with your other assessment tools, such as structural or conformation evaluations, APET trait profiles will help you match puppies to homes.

The APET's Second Product—A Tailored Training Plan. Unlike most temperament tests which seek only to place puppies in their new homes, the APET has a second outcome. Equal to (and possibly more important than) the right match is the written training plan. This plan provides long-term guidance to puppy buyers regarding their pup's unique temperament and how they should either adapt to or work with it. Although relatively short, each training plan highlights the most important aspects of a pup's temperament and how they may show up in daily life. This focuses each owner's efforts in training and developing their pup, as well as reminds them of why they might be facing specific challenges.

The APET's Third Product—Litter Trait Profiles. Taken together, the trait profiles for all of the puppies in the litter gives breeders an idea of the temperaments they got in the litter as a whole. Breeders can see if there is consistency across the litter in some areas. Or perhaps there is wide variation among pups in the litter, showing a lot of heterogeneity. These results can help breeders consider future breeding decisions, as well as tweak their puppy rearing processes.

Who and What You Need for an APET

Now that you know a little about the APET, let's get started preparing to put one on. Here are the details you will need to test your litter.

When to Test

There is no right answer to the question “When should I test my litter?” but there are some wrong ones. In our experience, no puppies are mature enough to be tested on or before 49 days of age. Although this has been the standard for decades, it is based on a misinterpretation of Scott and Fuller’s ground-breaking research at the Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine.¹ Dr. Ed Bailey wrote an excellent explanation about how the results of these studies were misinterpreted and how we should more correctly interpret them.² You can read Dr. Bailey’s [Why Not Seven Weeks? The Forty-Ninth Day Revisited](#) on our website.

So if we should not test puppies 49 days or earlier, when should we test? From our experience, the date is breed dependent. The majority of sporting, working, non-sporting and herding breeds do well if tested between 52 to 55 days. Toy breeds and some spaniels need more time to mature so can be tested up till 70 days. We have not tested puppies of all breeds and crosses however, so talk to others in your breed to pinpoint when most breeders feel their pups are “mature” enough to evaluate. Then experiment to see what works best for your breed and lines.

Because of the APETs flexibility, it is also fine to test larger litters over two consecutive days. We have found that splitting litters of nine or more ensures the test and resulting evaluations are more consistent. Everyone, pups and people, wear out after many hours of focus so do half your litter one day and half the next to get the best results.

¹ Scott JP and JL Fuller. 1965. [Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog](#). The University Of Chicago Press.

² Bailey, E. 1994. [Why Not Seven Weeks? The Forty-Ninth Day Revisited](#). *Gun Dog* 13:5. Apr/May.