

# In-shelter behaviour assessments: What does the science say?



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Canine Research

No better than flipping a coin: Reconsidering canine  
behavior evaluations in animal shelters

Gary J. Patronek <sup>a</sup>, Janis Bradley <sup>b</sup>



Applied Animal Behaviour Science

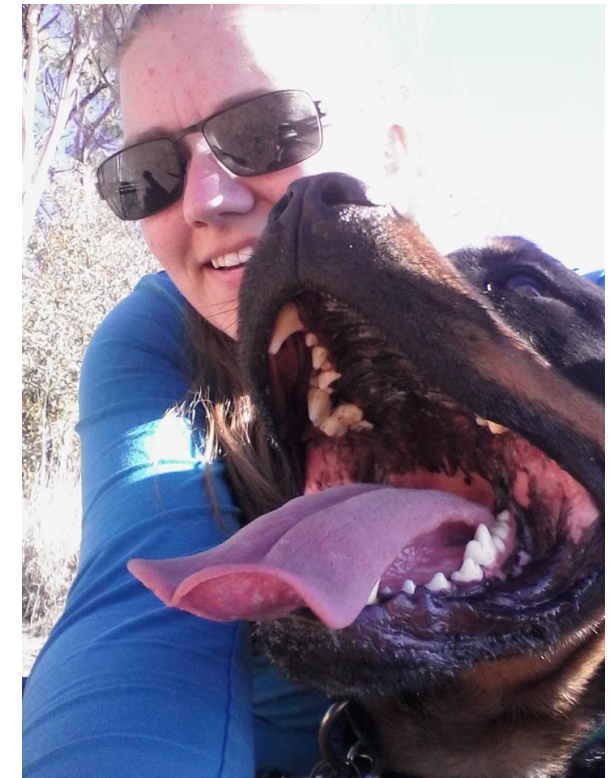
Volume 163, February 2015, Pages 1–18



Review article

Applied personality assessment in domestic dogs: Limitations  
and caveats

Diana J. Rayment <sup>a</sup>, Bert De Groef <sup>b</sup>, Richard A. Peters <sup>c</sup>, Linda C. Marston <sup>d</sup>



Diana Rayment, BAnSci

THE MATCH-UP II SHELTER  
DOG REHOMING PROGRAM



BECAUSE EVERY DOG IS DIFFERENT.



CENTER FOR  
**Shelter Dogs**

A PROGRAM OF THE ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE OF BOSTON

Match-Up II



## Understanding Sociability

A Guide to the foundation of Sue Sternberg's  
Assess-A-Pet® temperament test



By Sue Sternberg



**MYM**  
MEET YOUR MATCH®



Does this...



Predict this...

# The quick and dirty of the science

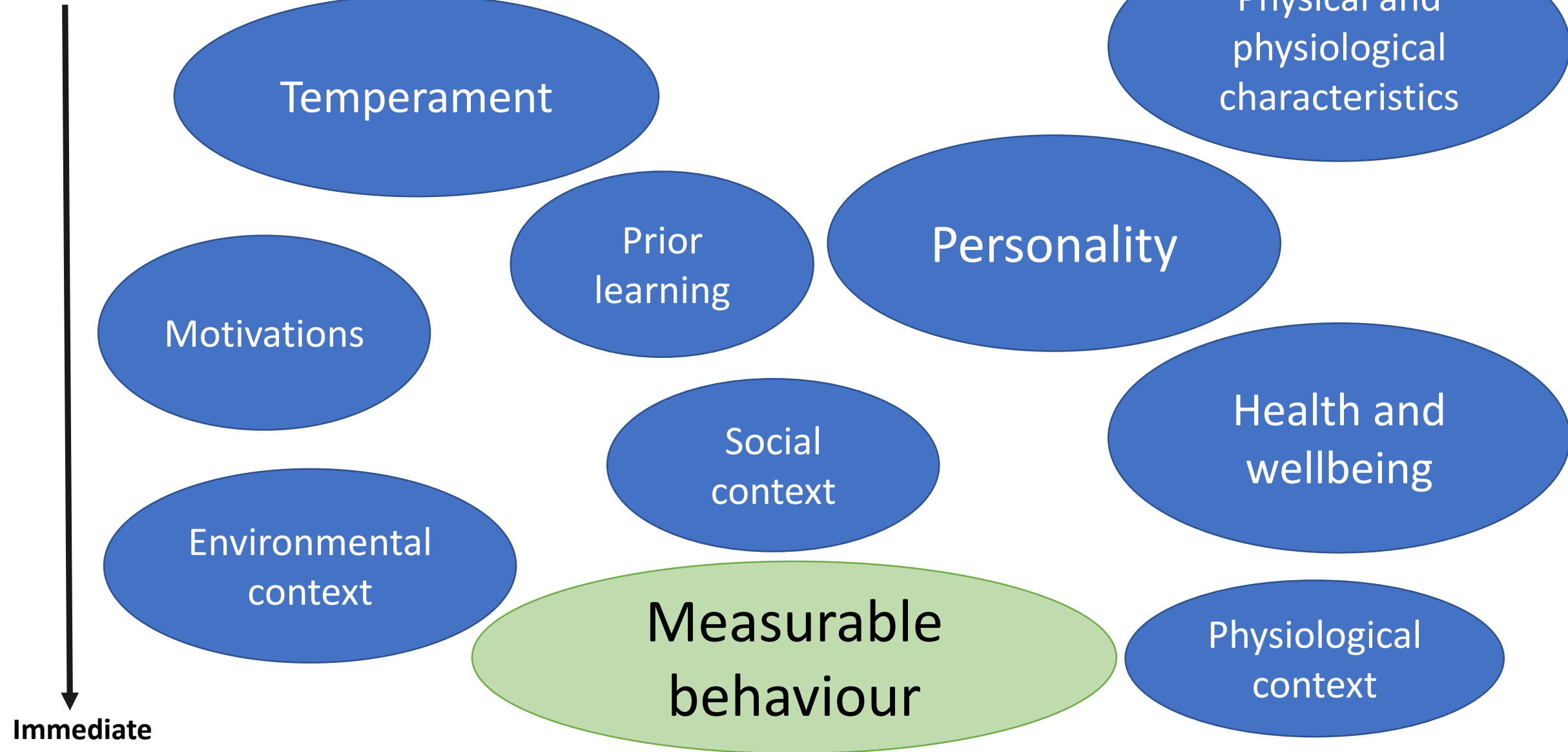
- Even with extensive training and experience, it is difficult to achieve inter-rater reliability for passive behaviours (Valsecchi et al. 2012, ...)
- Fearful responses to novelty appear to be somewhat reliable (if you can recognise them) (Mornement et al. 2015, ...)
- 'Food guarding' test is not predictive (Mohan-Gibbons et al. 2012, Marder et al. 2013, ...)
- 'Fake dog' test is only partially predictive (Shabelansky et al. 2015, ...)
- You can't assess personality from a single interaction (Rayment et al. 2015, ...)
- One-time tests are not valid for assessing coping strategies (LOTS! In many species, including dogs)
- Mathematically, it's virtually impossible to valid tests properly, when you are missing half of your data! (Patronek and Bradley 2016)

# Words matter...

- **Temperament:** Early appearing, innate behavioural tendencies
- **Personality:** Stable behavioural traits that are consistent across time and contexts
- **Behaviour:** What you can *see*!
- **Test:** A procedure for critical evaluation; a means of determining the presence, quality, or truth of something
- **Assessment:** The evaluation or estimation of the nature, quality, or ability of someone or something.

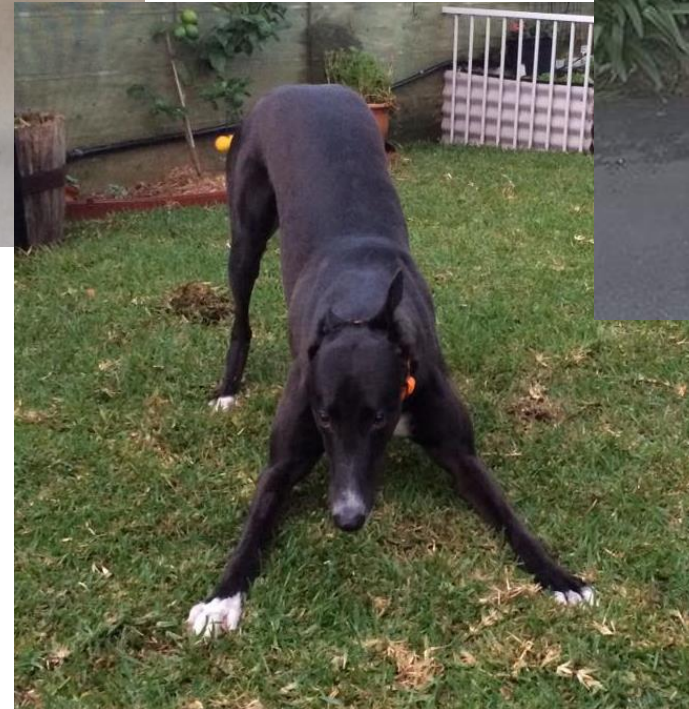
# What are we assessing?

Long term

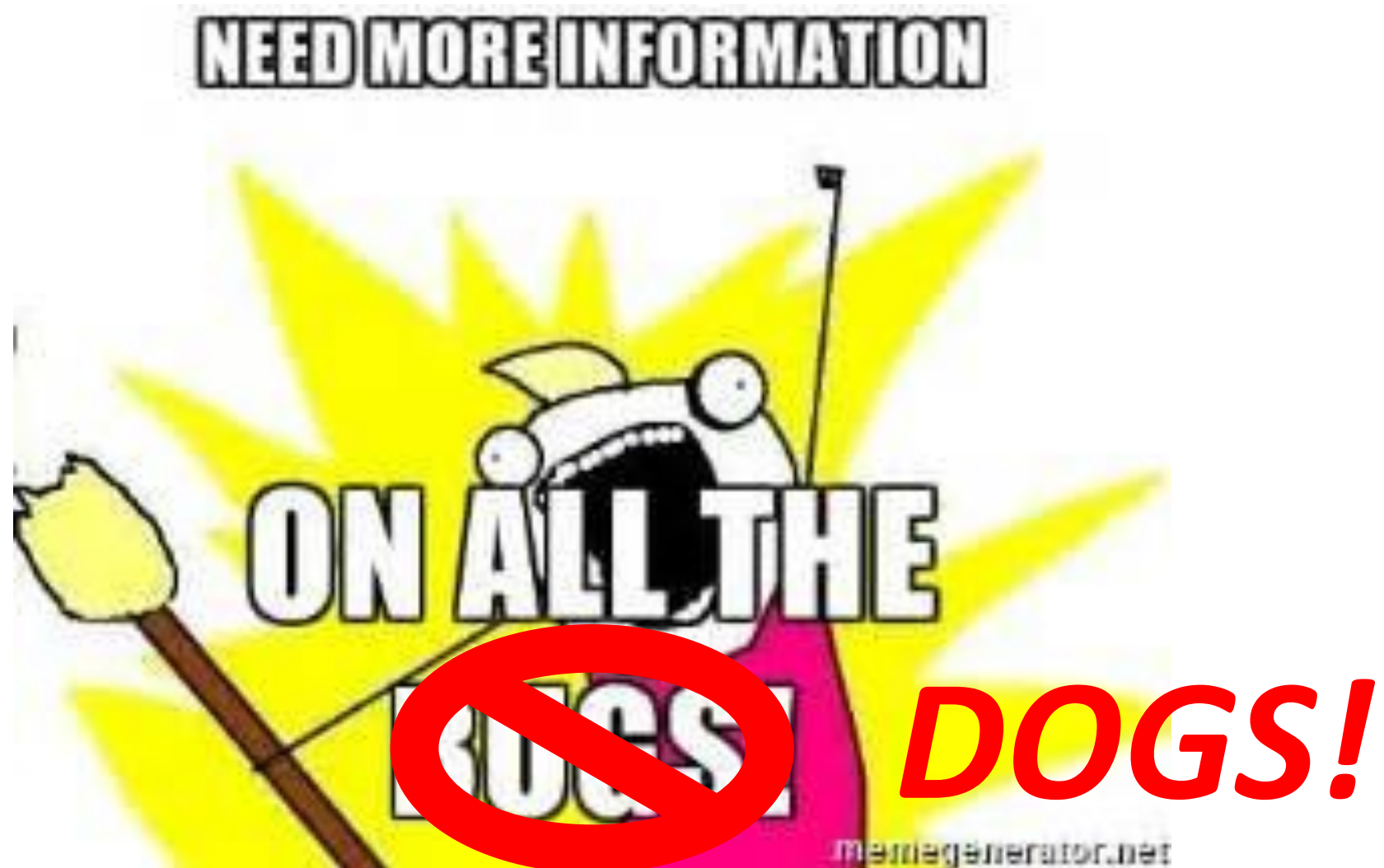


Immediate

# When 'having a bad day' is understandable...



How do we assess without 'temperament tests'?



# What staff need to assess well

**Every person** involved in handling dogs within your organisation should be trained in the following:

- Low stress animal handling
- Defensive dog handling
- Recognising and understanding canine behaviour and communication

## Canine Communication Webinar Series

Reading dog body language is critical to keeping canines happy and healthy and staff and volunteers safe. With this 4-part webinar series you can significantly build your skills in interacting with dogs.

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## Defensive Handling with Aggressive Dogs

[Register Now](#)

This course will be available to view as many times as you like for 60 days from your date of purchase.



# So how do we know when NOT to assess?

- **Hypervigilance, hyperactivity, restlessness and poor sleeping** or resting habits
- **Increasing reactivity** to handling, other dogs and/or environmental stimuli
- **Dull or withdrawn** behaviour, **failure to engage** with the environment or handlers
- Changes in **appetite or water consumption** (notable increases or decreases)
- Changes to **faecal consistency**
- Changes to **vocalisation patterns** (e.g. excessive barking or suppression of vocalisations)



GAP Behaviour Observation Sheet 2

Name \_\_\_\_\_ GAP No. \_\_\_\_\_ Microchip No. \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_\_

*In this space please describe the behaviour and the context in which it occurred as accurately as you can*

Different floor surfaces

Food behaviour

Lead

Ken

Body

Response to loud noises

General BOC

Stray Animal Intake Form

Thank you for bringing this stray animal to the shelter so that we can provide it with the care it needs.

It would help us if you please answer the few questions below.

Staff and  
volunteers

Finders

- Is this the first day you have seen this animal or have you previously seen it around?
 

If the animal has been around previously:

  - For how long?
  - Has the animal been aggressive to anyone? If so, who?
  - Did it bite or scratch and break skin? If so, how long ago?
  - Would you consider him/her to be friendly?
- Would you be at all interested in adopting this animal if its owner does not claim it within the 5 day legal holding period for strays?

## Canine Behavioral Assessment & Research Questionnaire (short version)

### SECTION 1: Excitability

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Some dogs show little reaction to exciting events, while others become highly excited at the slightest novelty. By circling a number on the following 5-point scales (0=Calm, 4=Extremely excitable), please indicate your own dog's recent tendency to become excitable in the following circumstances (**please circle only one number**):

- Just before being taken for a walk.

Calm: little or no special reaction 0 ..... 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 .....  
Mild—Moderate excitability  
Extremely excitable: over-reacts, hard to calm down.

- Just before

Calm: little or no special reaction 0 ..... 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 .....  
Mild—Moderate excitability  
Extremely excitable: over-reacts, hard to calm down.



Relinquishing  
owners

### SECTION 2:

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Most dogs display aggressive behavior from time to time—e.g. barking, growling, baring teeth, snapping, etc. By circling a number on the following 5-point scales (0= No aggression, 4= Serious aggression), please indicate your own dog's recent tendency to display aggressive behavior in each of the following circumstances (**please circle only one number**):

### Medical Exam Assessment

Animal's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
ID # \_\_\_\_\_ Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**Veterinary Staff – Please complete this form following the medical exam.**

\*Attach the form to animal's paperwork.

Please rate responses from the choices below

Vet staff

Look into ears	5	4	3	2	1
Look in mouth	5	4	3	2	1
Blood draw	5	4	3	2	1
Receiving oral medication	5	4	3	2	1
Receiving injections	5	4	3	2	1
Physical Exam	5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

## What to Expect

### Surrendering ownership of your pet

In order to best help your pet, we conduct an interview with the owners of all incoming animals. The staff who do these interviews are available from 9am-7pm weekdays and 9am-4pm on weekends. During this interview we gather all the information a future adopter might need about your pet. We also determine if your pet is a good candidate for our adoption program. We will not place an animal for adoption that is a danger to the community.

# Making decisions about problematic behaviour

You should have a framework for decision making which takes the following in to account:

- What resources are available?
  - To hold the dog
  - To work with the dog
  - To place the dog
- Can you get more information from another source?
- Do you have an outside expert to consult?
- Are you able to network to find someone else to help the dog
- Does the behaviour REALLY indicate an increased safety risk?

# LIABILITY HYSTERIA



## ANIMAL FARM FOUNDATION, INC.

Securing equal treatment and opportunity for "pit bull" dogs

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### Resources

#### For Shelters & Rescues

##### Adoption Best Practices

##### Successful Adoptions

##### Adoption Counseling

##### Increasing Adoptions

##### Liability Hysteria

##### Notes on Language

Many organizations have concerns about safety and liability when adopting dogs to the public. Refusing to adopt out certain breeds or types of dogs, or placing blanket restrictions on certain types of dogs, is not the answer to reducing your organization's liability.

#### **INSTEAD, MANAGE RISK AND INCREASE ADOPTIONS BY:**

- Observing the dog in your care
- Document all observations and information provided by previous owners, if that information is available
- Disclose all known facts to the new owner. This does not include stereotypes, fears, and myths. This only includes observations and documented facts about the dog while in your custody and details you may have gleaned from a previous owner. This does not include speculations. Stick to the facts.
- Transfer ownership of the dog, fully and finally, to the new owner.



# High risk behaviours

- Human-directed aggression
  - History of hard bites causing tissue damage
  - Quick escalation to biting, especially at low levels of arousal
  - Aggression with multiple or varying triggers (e.g. resource guarding stuff AND people)
- Dog-directed aggression
  - History of hard bites causing tissue damage
  - Overt aggression when introduced appropriately to suitable dog
- Predation
  - Predation towards people or other dogs
  - High level predation towards other animals (making management difficult)

# Canine Bite Levels

Designed by Dr. Sophia Yin, Illustrated by Lili Chin\*

## Level 1 (Pre-Bite)

Snapping (air bite, no contact)



Get help before it progresses to an actual bite. Do not punish these warning signs or the dog may progress to biting without warning. Instead, learn the signs of fear and anxiety that the dog may show prior to this situation and the common human actions that might contribute.

## Level 2 (Near-Bite)

Tooth contact on skin but no puncture



This near-bite is concerning even though it is inhibited and has not yet broken skin. Ask yourself what earlier signs (i.e. of fear/anxiety) you missed.

## Level 3

3A. Skin punctures, single bite (all punctures shallower than the length of the canine tooth)



Even though the bite may not be severe it is still reportable. Reporting is mandatory if the victim is treated in a hospital. Once your dog has actually bitten at this level (or higher) he will always be considered a liability, even if, with behavior modification he is 99.9% improved.

3B. Skin punctures, multiple bites (all punctures shallower than the length of the canine tooth)



Multiple bites generally mean the dog is in a higher arousal state. The dog is reacting without thinking in between bites.

## Level 4 (Very Serious)

Single bite with punctures deeper than the length of the canine (the dog bit and clamped down) or with slashes in both directions from the puncture (the dog bit and shook his head)



This is a harder bite than a level 3 bite. It's no longer inhibited. Therefore, it represents a much higher liability. This level bite can kill a child.

## Level 5 (Very Serious)

Multiple-bite attack with deep punctures, or multiple attack incidents



Dogs that bite at this level have generally had previous biting at levels 3 and 4 already. Some dogs are so fearful that a scary event triggers such a high arousal state that they get stuck in a reactive mode and continue to bite.

## Level 6 (Death)

Victims killed or flesh consumed



It's important to realize that even little dogs and puppies can kill infants and small children and that death may be due to overly aroused play, rather than viciousness or fear. It's best to seek qualified help before the dog even reaches a level 2 bite.

\*These levels are based on the levels developed by Dr. Ian Dunbar

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Dr. Sophia Yin, DVM, MS  
The Art and Science of Animal Behavior

For additional free dog bite prevention resources and more dog behavior books and products, visit [www.drsophiayin.com](http://www.drsophiayin.com)



## Dog 1.

- Multiple bite history with no clear triggers
- Escalates to hard bites with little warning
- Staff note dog is easily frustrated
- Fearful of unfamiliar people
- Dog is slow to respond to basic training

## Dog 2.

- Multiple incident history in kennels with single trigger (high value food)
- No escalation past snapping with prolonged warning period
- Staff have noted other signs of kennel stress
- Responds quickly to basic training



## Changes to Local Rule 42.6

### Part 2: Reasonable efforts to re-home

*Re-homing efforts are described in LR 42.6 (c) (ii).*

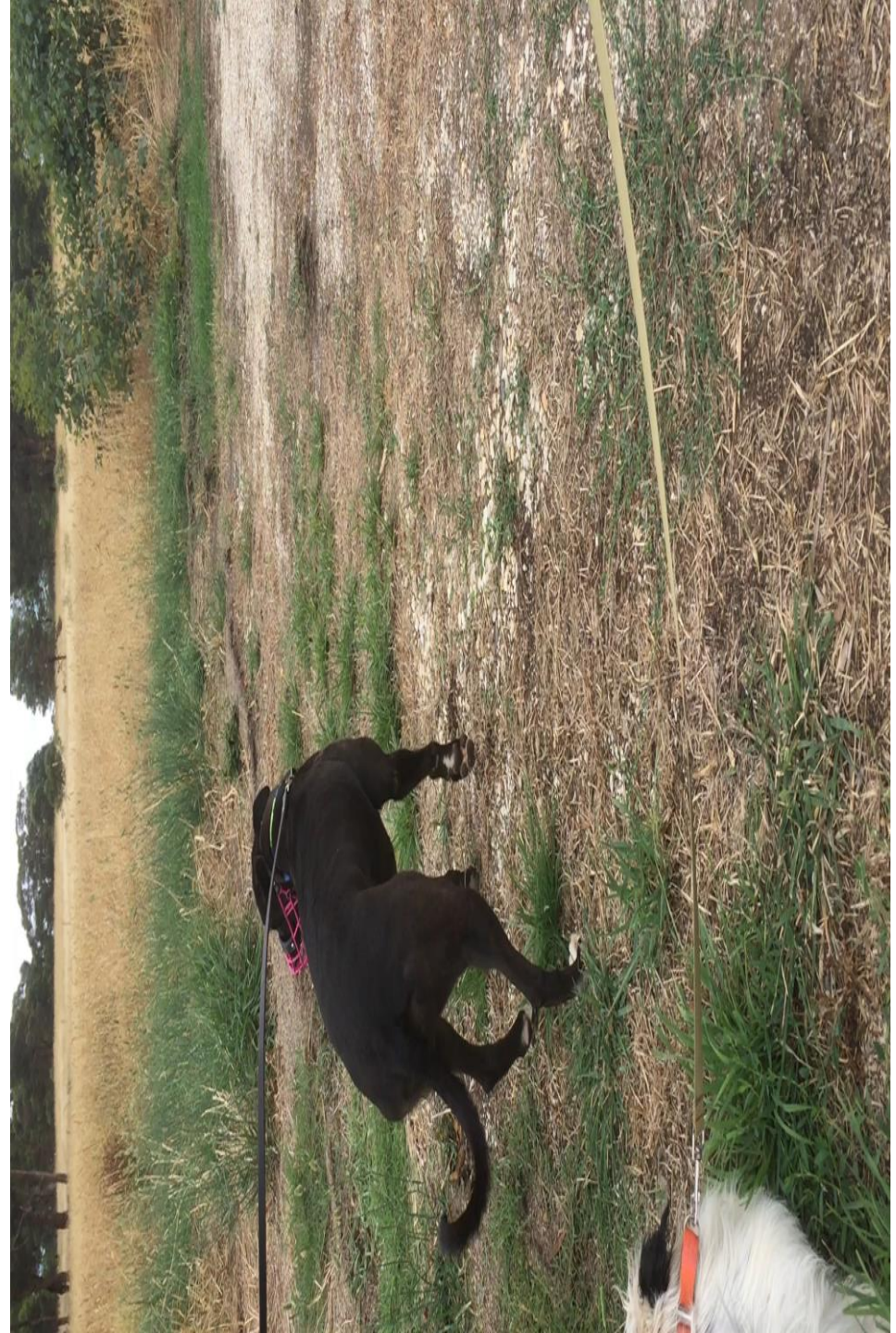
From 1 October 2017, LR 42.6 will require Owners to make at least one genuine attempt of each of the following re-homing options before lodging a Notice of Intention to Euthanase:

- (a) seek to re-home the greyhound with at least **two appropriate third parties**; and
- (b) seek the greyhound's admission to the **Greyhound Adoption Program**; and
- (c) seek to re-home the greyhound through at least one **other re-homing or rescue agency**.

# Assessing dog-on-dog predation

- Appetitive behaviour, so behavioural suppression is problematic
- False negatives common
- Chase-proneness, behavioural plasticity and sociability are completely independent
- Often, but not always accompanied by high arousal





# Practical guidelines for assessing behaviour in shelter dogs

- **Train**, don't complain (works for both people and dogs!)
- **Context is important** - provide quality care, enrichment and monitor welfare
- Many hands make light work - **build your network** to include volunteers, foster carers, rescue partners and professional partners.
- **Collect information** from the moment the dog enters your care... and **then use it!**
- Develop **protocols and adoptability criteria** as a team, and revisit regularly
- **Transparency and accountability** are your friend - develop systems for raising and addressing concerns
- **If in doubt, get more information!**
- Last but not least, **follow up post-adoption** to track your progress