
Excerpts from “The ABC’s of Dog Language” by Anders Hallgren
Learn How Dogs Communicate

The Body Language

The face

Let’s start surveying the dog’s facial expressions by looking at the structure of the face. Perhaps I let my admiration for Nature’s perfect order blend with my sense of drama, but I hope that won’t distract you.

Look at the way the fur grows. Start with the small, short hair at the nose, and notice how the fur gets thicker and thicker along the bridge of the nose. Every single hair points toward the forehead. All are parallel. Closer to the eyes, they start to converge. Space becomes cramped, as if they were forced to close up in order to yield space for the eyes. This is a very intensive area. The hairs grow in different directions around the eyes, just as if they constituted a variety of kinds of fur, all of which were to be present in the limited space.



*The way the hairs grow underline
the facial expression*

On the sides of the muzzle, the fur seems to grow as it pleases. There is no pattern. However, the small hairs point more and more backwards and downwards the closer they come to the neck where they unite with the thinner fur coming from the chin.

Right under the ears, the fur from the back of the neck meets with the fur from the cheeks and the chin. They meet as if they were two hostile armies fighting each other. Whirls and waves are created. Uproar and conflict. They form a ruff. For long-haired dogs with a tight coat like the wolf’s, this ruff becomes a frame all around the face, from one ear, down underneath the chin, and up to the other ear. Thus the face is framed in soft, tight fur.

But suddenly beyond the eyes, the fur spreads out over the forehead, as when silence spreads over the open ocean after a storm. The fur reaches towards the temples and the ears, resembling a brush stroke on a canvas. In quiet stretches, the fur hairs grow down the back of the neck, and from there, the fur is divided down either side of the neck. On the sides of the neck, things revitalize and intensify. This is where the hairs from the back of the neck intersect with the hairs from the cheeks and the sides of the muzzle.



*On the scruff of the neck, the hairs
provide a characteristic framing of
the face, thus enhancing the facial
expressions.*



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Face markings

Not only does the structure of the fur enforces the dog’s facial expressions, but the markings of the face (the face mask) also do. For the uninitiated, the markings seem to form random patterns. However, upon a closer inspection, you will discover how the markings all collaborate enhancing the important characteristics of the face.

A dark face is typically framed by a somewhat lighter fur. Just look at the wolf in the picture:



The wolf – Nature’s masterpiece.

The face is framed by lighter colour markings that enhance the facial expressions. Study the picture carefully, and you will notice still more details in the facial markings, all of which contribute to a clear and distinct communication with others.

Nature, a master artist, is not mistaken in a single detail. See how the lighter cheeks accentuate the face. See how the fur closest to the black lips becomes lighter. Notice the dark markings between the eyes and the wrinkle on the forehead. See how the eyes are framed by lighter colours, and notice the strongly deviant colour of the eyebrow. Observe the dark edges and the lighter interiors of the ears. The interaction between reflected light and colour co-ordinates all details in a harmonic unity.

Dark and light areas of fur are contrasted against each other and support the facial expressions. A dog with light eyes often has a dark frame around them. A dog with a light face often has a dark ruff and dark cheeks. Every aspect of appearance is perfectly coordinated.