

How to Understand "Cat"

Knowledge of the feline language can strengthen the bond between cat and owner. Learn to recognize the meaning in your cat's meows and actions.

Marty Becker, DVM

Posted: Thu Jul 1 00:00:00 PDT 2004

Body Language BalletAs feline aficionados know, cat communication isn't limited to the voice box; cats also use a ballet of body language.

Sometimes it's easier to understand a cat's body language than it is to figure out sounds: the widening pupils, flattened ears, a swishing tail, an arched back and the rubbing against your leg. It is likely that with cats, body language is the dominant communication method.

A great deal of cat communication, however, is psychological. Cat owners often wonder why their cat that was just winding itself around their legs a few minutes ago, is suddenly nowhere to be found once the carrier comes out.

Consider this experiment: Get up from your chair with a picture in your mind of something in the refrigerator or treat cupboard that your cat would crave. It is almost guaranteed that your cat will meet you there before you can get the door open. Certainly, cats are better at reading our body language than we are at reading theirs.

Most cats develop a litany of verbal and physical signals they believe people can master. If the human family is alert and willing to learn, they will soon learn to distinguish between the call that says, "dinner is due" and the one that announces, "that nasty neighbor cat is back!"

Or, when a human family member is sad, cats may not send a Hallmark card, but they might snuggle close and offer a furry, warm head and purrs.