

# It's a dog's world!

By Mandy Penisten

The dog's world, though technically the same as yours and mine, is perceived very differently by your canine species than it is by the human species. Your dog makes sense of the world through his nose; while you and I primarily use visual cues.



A dog's sense of smell is amazingly more capable than that of any human. Their genomic set-up provides their nose with millions of receptor sites in their nasal passages, which allows a dog to detect and code smells far more than you or I. They also have an additional organ in the nose, the vomernasal organ, which allows them to further detect smells through pheromones and other chemicals the dog is able to bring into its mouth. Imagine that everything you see has a smell to it and that each smell is available to you at all times ... so the jacket across the room not only smells of the person who wears it, but also the office they wear it to everyday, the car they drive and the coffee they drink (and tend to spill on the front). It tells a story through scent that you and I are completely unaware of. So when Fido greets you at the door and is sniffing you and giving you kisses, he is also finding out what your scent story is – or in other words, asking you how your day was.

For dogs, hearing is a great way for them to map out their world. Your dog can hear much more than you might think; even though he may not be “listening.” Dogs are capable of discerning different tonalities in our speech. What this means is that they know when we are angry, sad, upset, happy, etc. Amazingly, they can even tell the difference between a question and a statement through the way in which we raise and lower the endings of our sentences.

There is much more to the canine world than scent. Their sight is also very different from yours and mine. While a dog can see just fine, they tend to be able to focus much better on moving objects. This makes sense when you think of how breeders of hunting dogs have selected dogs that are able to pick up on small movements in the brush and the like. That being said, we cannot say that all breeds of dogs are the same, or even characterize all dogs within a certain breed.

Just like humans, they come in all sizes, shapes, temperaments and capabilities; some with extraordinary abilities and some without.



How does this information help us to better communicate with our dogs? Understanding how a dog perceives the world will better enable you to engage your dog and motivate him to perform the tasks you want him to. I always tell the clients in my training classes to have multiple kinds of treats in their treat pouches for classes or training times. This allows them to entice their dogs' smell and taste buds with multiple sensations, while also engaging their brains, as they will not know which treat is coming. In addition, utilizing hand signals can be much easier for dogs to understand initially when training, and certainly from distances. Lastly, utilizing the notion of pitch and tonality can help you to engage your dog to “listen” more attentively and pay attention when needed. Using a high-pitch repeated sound to grab your dog's attention is going to be much more affective than a low, monotone “come.”

Bottom line: the dog's world is much more complex than one might think. If you take a moment to step out of your own bipedal world and attempt to imagine what a world of scent might be like, you will come to realize that the human world we live in is truly much different than that of our beloved four-legged family members.

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