

Exploring Science with Our Pets: Part 2

Science and Pets Lessons from Dr. Séverine Ligout – Behaviorist at Purina



There is a lot we can learn from and about our pets, and there's no better time to encourage young pet lovers to engage scientific principles to better understand their furry friends than now. In doing so, they'll get a lesson in scientific research methods and will also observe their pets through a fresh set of eyes, increasing their understanding of how their pet sees and experiences the world.

Here are a few easy experiments to try at home:

1. Question to test: How does my cat/dog spend the day?

- Set a timer to alert you every hour in the day.
- When the timer goes off, quietly observe your pet and note the time and what your pet is doing (sleeping, eating, grooming, etc.).
- Repeat for 3-7 days. Be careful: you don't want your pet to "know" you're coming and change their behavior before you make your observation.



Interpreting results: Does your pet have a schedule? At what time of the day do they eat, sleep, groom, go to the bathroom?

Follow-up tests: Try doing this every 15 or 30 minutes to get more detailed information.

2. Question to test: Where does my cat/dog spend their day?

- Draw a map of your house or apartment.
- Set your smartphone so that every hour it alerts you.
- Note the location where your pet is (living room, kitchen, outside etc.)
- Repeat for 3-7 days. Be careful: you don't want your pet to "know" you're coming and changes their location before you note your observation.



Interpreting results: Does your pet have a favorite location?

Follow-up tests: Try doing this every 15 or 30 minutes to get more detailed information. Try and understand why you pet loves or avoids certain locations. Use this information to improve their environment (e.g. move their bed to a quiet area for dogs, move a cat tree near a window or heat source for cats).

3. Question to test: *Where does my cat/dog like to be scratched?*

- Spend 5 minutes with your pet.
- Let them come to you (best) or make sure they have an exit available if you go towards them. Avoid cornering your pet.
- During your time together, pet or scratch an area you think they like for 10-15 seconds and then stop. Wait and see if your pet “asks” for more.

Interpreting results: Are there areas that your pet especially likes being pet (e.g. behind the ears, on the chin)? Use your learnings to improve the time you spend together.

Follow-up tests: If you have more than one pet, do they both prefer the same thing?



4. Question to test: *Where does my dog do #2?*

- Draw a map of your yard.
- Each day note where you find their droppings.
- Pick them up and dispose as usual.
- Repeat for 3-7 days.

Interpreting results: Does your dog have a “bathroom area” or do they go wherever? Do they prefer going close to the house or at the end of the yard?

