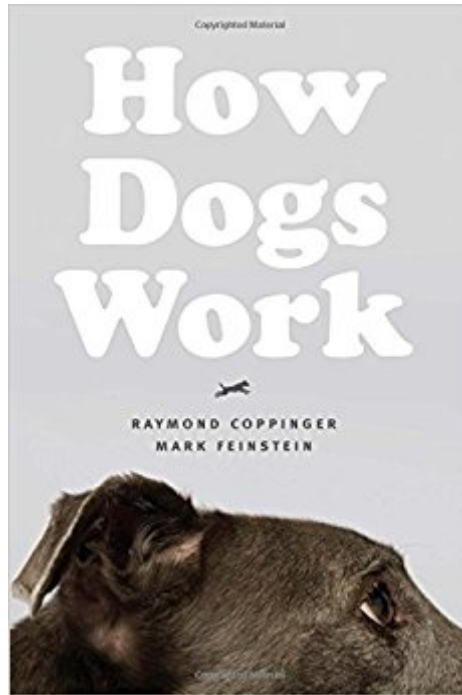


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# How Dogs Work



## Synopsis

How well do we really know dogs? People may enjoy thinking about them as "man's best friend," but what actually drives the things they do? What is going on in their fur-covered heads as they look at us with their big, expressive eyes? Raymond Coppinger and Mark Feinstein know something about these questions, and with *How Dogs Work*, they're ready to share; this is their guide to understanding your dog and its behavior. Approaching dogs as a biological species rather than just as pets, Coppinger and Feinstein accessibly synthesize decades of research and field experiments to explain the evolutionary foundations underlying dog behaviors. They examine the central importance of the shape of dogs: how their physical body (including the genes and the brain) affects behavior, how shape interacts with the environment as animals grow, and how all of this has developed over time. Shape, they tell us, is what makes a champion sled dog or a Border collie that can successfully herd sheep. Other chapters in *How Dogs Work* explore such mysteries as why dogs play; whether dogs have minds, and if so what kinds of things they might know; why dogs bark; how dogs feed and forage; and the influence of the early relationship between mother and pup. Going far beyond the cozy lap dog, Coppinger and Feinstein are equally fascinated by what we can learn from the adaptations of dogs, wolves, coyotes, jackals, dingoes, and even pumas in the wild, as well as the behavior of working animals like guarding and herding dogs. We cherish dogs as family members and deeply value our lengthy companionship with them. But, isn't it time we knew more about who Fido and Trixie really are? *How Dogs Work* will provide some keys to unlocking the origins of many of our dogs' most common, most puzzling, and most endearing behaviors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book might better be entitled "Why Working Dogs work." The primary subjects are herding, guarding and sled dogs, with the vast population of pet dogs earning barely a mention (and that mention comes across with a tone so snide it borders on fatuousness). What I wanted, I suppose, was a book on dog psychology: Their personalities, vocalizations, idiosyncrasies. Instead I found a book on dog physiology, with the authors raising serious questions about whether dogs have minds at all. Disappointing is the best word that leaps to mind. That said, *How dogs Work* is an intellectually engaging disquisition on dog behavior seen in purely scientific terms. More narrowly, it is an ethological view of (primarily) working dogs--a study of behavior as the unit of analysis in the tradition of Conrad Lorenz. Thus, with behavior as the dependent variable, the independent variables are genes, survival-oriented adaptations, and the subtle concept of emergence (a small instruction set that explains apparently complex behaviors). Feinstein and Coppinger (current and retired faculty at Hampshire College) are at pains to avoid any sort of anthropomorphism--attributing human characteristics to their study subjects--as indeed they must if their work is going to pass the sniff test of scientific method. Even with that (possibly over narrow) view, they develop a variety of fascinating insights and observations that certainly came as news to me. Their basic idea is this: A dog's physical shape is a primary determinant of its behavior and qualification for success at its assigned task (human or nature-assigned). Thus, for instance, sled dogs fall into fairly tight parameters of size that make them adequate to the task of running the Iditarod race.

When I brought this in from the mail, I looked at my Yorkiepoo and said, "I hope this isn't a hatchet job." In the event, under the heading "man's best friend", the authors note innumerable dog bites and other injuries every year. And they debunk the Dog Waits by Grave story by arguing the dog actually was there because the cemetery crew fed him for years. Three quarters of the world's billion dogs don't even live with people, though they do live on the periphery of our species as food scavengers. One way they are tied to us is that they don't provide their own food.\* Then we learn that whatever the genetics, dogs are not tame wolves. Males don't care for pups, don't live in a hierarchy and don't mate. You get the picture: not a book for sentimentalists. I read Konrad Lorenz almost hot off the press and have had and loved and studied dogs all my life. Many folks my age remember the great swings in animal behavior theory. In college I read behaviorist texts not as philosophical oddities but as science. Now, there is a new book every

month describing the emotional lives and attitudes of elephants, dolphins, apes and, of course, dogs. Although the authors hedge their language, on a scale of one to ten from behaviorist to anthropomorphist, the authors are at a 2. The don't categorically deny animal consciousness but they certainly minimize it. The book is true to the title. Not a general book on dog psychology (except by extension), it focuses on what we can learn about dogs by considering some working breeds. First there is a consideration of the characteristics of sled dogs. Interesting. A major point being made is that a dog - any animal- is not just a brain, but a whole body and body shape.

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