Teacher's Key

How Dogs Understand Us: Words, Tone of Voice, and Gestures (Level B1)

Vocabulary Matching

1 tone = **N**
2 gestures = **A**
3 vocabulary = **H**
4 gifted = **L**
5 commands = **G**
6 scan = **M**
7 flat = **I**
8 reward = **E**
9 reacted = **D**
10 ignore = **O**
11 strangers = **J**
12 familiar = **K**
13 debate = **B**
14 match = **C**
15 consistent = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 tone
2 gestures
3 vocabulary
4 gifted
5 command
6 scan
7 flat
8 reward
9 reacted
10 ignore
11 familiar
12 debate
13 match
14 consistent

True or False

1 **True.** The three ideas are words, tone of voice, and gestures.
2 **False.** She learned the names of 1,022 toys.
3 **True.** The reading says this in paragraph 2.
4 **False.** The strongest response came only when the words and the tone both sounded like praise.
5 **True.** This is similar to how human brains work.
6 **False.** Most of the puppies reacted strongly, and the adult dogs seemed to ignore the recordings.
7 **True.** The writer says the voices belonged to strangers.
8 **False.** They could learn to follow it with training.
9 **True.** Scientists still debate whether dogs are born with it or learn it.
10 **False.** The writer says to be consistent and use the same word every time.

Language Focus: First Conditional for Likely Results

Example answer: If you **praise** your dog in a happy voice, it **will enjoy** the praise more.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 Scientists test three ideas: that dogs understand your words, that they understand your tone of voice, and that they notice your gestures. The reading says the answer seems to be a mix.

2 Chaser learned the names of 1,022 toys after about three years of daily training. Most pet dogs are not like Chaser. They seem to be better at learning commands than the names of objects.

3 Gifted word learners are rare dogs that learn new toy names quickly. Scientists have found only a few dozen of them, in about nine countries.

4 The brains of the dogs handled the meaning of words and the tone of voice in different places. The reading says this is similar to how human brains work.

5 The reward system became very active only when the words and the tone both sounded like praise. It did not become as active for praise words in a flat voice, or for meaningless words in a happy voice.

6 Most of the puppies reacted strongly, and some barked and ran toward the speaker. The adult dogs seemed to ignore the recordings. The writer adds that the voices belonged to strangers, so adult dogs may respond differently to a familiar person.

7 A person points at one of two cups, and the dog looks for food in that cup. The tests show whether the dog follows the pointing hand.

8 They debate whether dogs are born with the skill of following a point or learn it by living with people.

9 Open answer. A strong answer mentions making words and tone match when you praise, using the same word every time, and pointing slowly and clearly. The writer is cautious: the advice uses words such as probably and many, and the reading says nobody can yet say how much a typical pet dog understands.

10 False. Chaser learned the names of 1,022 toys after about three years of daily training.

11 No. The reading says nobody can say yet how much a typical pet dog understands, because many studies used only small groups of dogs.

12 Best answer: to invite readers to test the ideas at home. The question links back to the opening scene and shows that the findings can be tried in daily life, while the reading has already said the evidence is limited. The writer does not claim that dogs ignore tone. Accept a reasoned answer.

Notes on the Evidence

- Brain-scan study: Andics, Gabor, Gacsi, Farago, Szabo, and Miklosi, 2016, Science (Neural mechanisms for lexical processing in dogs). Thirteen family dogs, mostly golden retrievers and border collies, were trained to lie still in an fMRI scanner. Praise words and neutral words were each said in a praising and a neutral intonation. The reading uses the word “flat” for the neutral intonation; the paper's term is neutral. The neutral words (for example “if” and “yet”) were chosen because the dogs were not expected to know them. Left-hemisphere activation followed word meaning, right-hemisphere regions followed intonation, and strong reward-system activity appeared only when praise words and praising intonation were combined. The reading's line “similar to how human brains work” follows the researchers' own comparison. Sources: BPS Research Digest (opened), Washington Post and AP reports (search results).
- Word learning: Pilley and Reid, 2011, Behavioural Processes. Chaser learned the names of 1,022 objects over about three years of intensive training. Exposure and test conditions were controlled; the study stopped because of time, not because she could not learn more. Gifted word learners: Fugazza and colleagues, 2021, Scientific Reports, and Dror and colleagues, 2023, Scientific Reports (Family Dog Project, Eotvos Lorand University). The 2023 paper identified 41 such dogs in nine countries after a five-year search. The statement that most pet dogs are better at commands than at object names follows the researchers' own summary that the vast majority of dogs struggle to learn object labels. Sources opened: BPS page only for this paragraph; the others appeared in search results.
- Baby talk: Ben-Aderet, Gallego-Abenza, Reby, and Mathevon, 2017, Proceedings of the Royal Society B. Recordings of women speaking to pictures of dogs were played to 10 puppies and 10 adult dogs at an animal shelter. Puppies reacted strongly, adult dogs did not differ in their reaction. The authors note that the speakers were unfamiliar; the suggestion that adult dogs may respond differently to a familiar person is a hypothesis in press coverage, not a tested result. The study did not test whether baby talk helps dogs learn words.
- Pointing: Gacsi and colleagues, 2009, Animal Cognition (Department of Ethology, Eotvos Lorand University). Dogs at four months followed a momentary distal point without intensive early socialization; hand-reared wolf pups did not, but with several months of formal training they reached the level of the dogs. A 2019 study in Current Biology (MacLean and colleagues) found that 8-week-old puppies followed pointing at above-chance levels, and that the ability had a genetic component. Other researchers argue that testing conditions and early experience matter more, so the question is open; the reading says “scientists still debate”. One small note: some wolf studies used barriers or unfamiliar people.
- Practical advice: the first tip (match words and tone) follows the Andics team's statement that praise works best when word meaning and intonation match. The second tip (use the same word every time) is general dog-training advice about consistency and was not tested in the studies cited. The third tip (point slowly and clearly) is a reasonable use of the pointing research and is also general advice. All three are hedged in the reading. No figure in the reading is tied to a date that may change. Hindi and Arabic translations are unchecked; the Arabic for scan is the least certain.