



## **RESCUE ASSESSMENTS**

Instructions & Forms for Service Dog Evaluations



## Rescue Assessments

### WE WORK WITH PUPPIES & ADULT DOGS

We accept puppies and dogs up to two years old and encourage our rescue partners to assess any dog that they think might be suitable for our service dog training program using the simple assessment tests described on the following pages. The needs of our clients are almost as varied as the dogs available. So, we encourage rescuers to assess any dogs they think might be temperamentally appropriate. However, most of our applicants request/require assistance that only medium sized to extra large dogs can provide, so we require them more often.

### A WORD ABOUT ENERGY LEVELS & CONFIDENCE

It can be difficult to accurately assess a dog's energy level in a shelter, as many of them are stressed and not getting the appropriate amount of exercise. It is also challenging because many shelters either do not provide a decent space for rescuers to conduct individual assessments or do not allow them. However, it is very important to keep in mind that high energy dogs are rarely appropriate for our needs. Most of our applicants lead low to medium energy lifestyles and do not have the time, space or ability to provide the considerable amount of exercise that high energy dogs need in order to be happy, contented dogs. It is important that a dog be alert and eager enough to learn, yet not energetic that they become disruptive. The best candidates have a clear-eyed, thoughtful gaze, a calm confidence and a strong desire to be around people. A good candidate will be interested in you, want to interact. They will look to you for cues often and be willing to follow your lead. Fearful, timid dogs are rarely appropriate. Not only is fear so often a precursor to aggression, but service dogs must be fearless enough to follow their partners anywhere. They must be able to trust their partners despite being surrounded by new noises, people, places and experiences. If possible, always assess the dog after a brief walk outside and, at the very least, away from the stressful commotion of the other dogs and shelter staff. Lastly, we know it's hard to walk away from dogs in need and that these can be tough decisions to make. It can be, and often is, heartbreaking. However, it is important to make reasoned, thoughtful decisions based on what the dogs you are evaluating demonstrate, not what you think they might be capable of. Similarly, evaluators should trust their judgement and their assessments, as opposed to the opinions of well-meaning but often inaccurate shelter staff and volunteers.



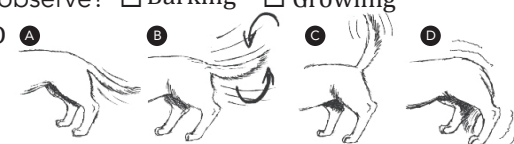
# Dog Assessments



Please record all assessments as videos (using a phone) and then email videos (or links) to: sarah@diggityservicedogs.com.

If this goes well, do the temperament assessments.

1. Watch the dog from a distance to see if he appears aloof or friendly to passersby. ☐ Dog appeared aloof ☐ Dog appeared friendly
2. Approach the dog sideways. Do not speak or smile, just be neutral. See if he approaches you. ☐ Approached evaluator ☐ Did not approach evaluator
3. Now turn and face the dog, kneel, and give him a big smile and a happy greeting to see what reaction this elicits. ☐ Approaches happily, tail wagging  
☐ Tail wagged but did not approach ☐ Dog remained aloof
4. Watch someone else walk the dog on-leash to see how much attention he pays to his human handler. ☐ Extremely excited ☐ Pulled constantly  
☐ Timid / scared ☐ Tries to avoid being leashed ☐ Happily allows leash to be put on and looks to handler to see where to go.
5. Find a quiet spot where you can sit in a chair with the dog off-leash (or on a long leash if the area is not safely enclosed). Does the dog come back to visit you fairly quickly? ☐ Looks to human quickly and often ☐ Does not look to handler ☐ Totally focused on handler, remains closeby and awaits interaction or tries to elicit interaction Comment:\_\_\_\_\_
6. As long as you feel totally safe, lightly run your hands all over his/her body. Is she/he okay with that? ☐ Yes ☐ No Will he let you handle his paws? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
Will he/she let you check his ears and inside his mouth. ☐ Yes ☐ No Comments:\_\_\_\_\_
7. When he is distracted, knock loudly on a wall. Does he bark? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, how long before he quiets down? ☐ 5-10 seconds ☐ 10-60 seconds ☐ Minutes
8. Try handing him a small treat. Does he grab it from you or take it gently? ☐ Yes ☐ No If he grabs the first treat forcefully, tell him to "be gentle" by holding more of the next treat in your hand, refusing to give it to him until he's using his mouth nicely. Did he/she take the next treat(s) more gently? ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. How does the dog interact with other dogs? ☐ Friendly ☐ Indifferent ☐ Cautious ☐ Aggressive What behaviors did you observe? ☐ Barking ☐ Growling  
☐ Piloerection (hair standing up) ☐ Mounting ☐ Play bow ☐ Submission roll Which image was the tail like? ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D
10. Does the dog exhibit a high prey drive when exposed to cats or other animals? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unable to test



Explain/describe:\_\_\_\_\_

11. If possible, introduce the dog to children. You want the dog to look at them as if saying, "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you!"  
The only dogs who are truly good with children are those who have grown up with children. Was the dog assessed with children? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Explain/describe:\_\_\_\_\_

Dog's Name:\_\_\_\_\_ Breed(s):\_\_\_\_\_ Age:\_\_\_\_\_

Did the dog perform well enough to conduct a temperament assessment too? ☐ Yes ☐ No Assessor's Name:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

# TEMPERAMENT ASSESSMENTS

After locating a dog that seems promising three important tests must be given to further evaluate the dog's fundamental nature. It is important to recognize that a dog that scores poorly may not mean the pup is totally devoid of potential, since any dog can have an off day due to illness or fatigue. For that reason puppies should be tested for four weeks in a row, from 8 weeks to 12 weeks old, to ensure each has a reasonable chance to show his true colors. Obviously, this is not usually possible in adult rescue situations, however, a dog should be evaluated at least twice, preferably on different days by different people that the dog does not know. If a dog is at risk of being euthenized and has scored perfectly or exceptionally, two evaluations at different times by different people on the same day may be acceptable.

## I. Noise Sensitivity Test

Working with an assistance dog afflicted with a malady known as "gun-shyness" can be very difficult. Working service dogs need to be able to function when they unexpectedly encounter loud noises, such as car horns, loud speakers, firecrackers, balloons popping, and doors slamming. Dog's that are highly sensitive to loud noises are usually born that way. Occasionally prolonged ear infections and other experiences can cause this later in life, however this is not the norm. As such, it is important to test prospective service dogs for noise sensitivity.

Drop an object that makes a loud clatter on an uncarpeted floor or pavement. A tin can full of nuts and bolts (which I prefer, because it is easy to keep with me, or in my car, and is less cumbersome than many alternatives), a pot lid or similar metallic object is perfect for this. The evaluator should make sure that they are at least four or five feet away from the dog, as we don't want the dog to think it was deliberately thrown at them or that they are in danger. If possible, drop it when the dog isn't looking at it.

**High Sensitivity:** The dog cringes in fear and won't stop trembling, pees on the floor or tries to bolt from the room in terror. (Such dogs are inappropriate for service dog work.)

**No Sensitivity:** If a dog shows no reaction to the noise whatsoever, test him again in a different environment. If the dog still seems totally oblivious to it, he/she may be deaf or too oblivious to its environment for a career as a working dog.

**Medium Sensitivity/Normal Sensitivity:** The dog startles, but recovers quickly. If the dog shows curiosity about the object, wants to sniff it, that is ideal. A fast recovery time is ideal in service dogs.

**Low Sensitivity:** Very rarely, you may come across 'nerves of steel' in a supremely confident dog. These unflinching dogs, often referred to as 'bomb-proof', are ideal for many service dog roles, especially dogs for children with Autism, as they can cope in tumultuous households around screaming children and the loud outbursts that are common among children with autism. With these dogs, there will be subtle indications he heard the sound but their tail keeps wagging and it is obvious loud noises don't bother them at all. Half the time the dog may not even turn around to take a look.

## 2. The Body Sensitivity Test

The way a dog responds to this test is a pretty good indicator of what will happen in public when somebody accidentally steps on his paw or the owner's mobility equipment bumps into the dog. This ability to quickly recover and the willingness to "forgive" the offender is essential in a dog who is being considered for a career in the assistance dog field. It is a trait that will protect toddlers who give his fur a painful yank. It will prevent the dog from becoming fearful of people who use mobility equipment like a wheelchair after one unpleasant experience.

### The Process

The evaluator may have the pup or adult in her lap or may prefer to sit next to the dog. The tester picks up the dog's paw and quickly gives the skin between the dog's toes a brief hard pinch. If a dog shows no sign of feeling the pinch, try a more forceful one.

**Low Sensitivity:** If the dog continues to serenely ignore it, the dog has low body sensitivity, something that can negatively impact the training process in several ways.

**Normal Sensitivity:** A normal and appropriate response is for the dog to withdraw his paw or perhaps let out one yelp or climb out of the tester's lap, indicating he noticed the pinch but almost immediately turns around and "forgives" the evaluator.

**High Sensitivity:** The dog overreacts to the pinch then, usually, flees from the tester with shrill cries of protest. The dog refuses to return and forgive the offender and will act suspicious of her.

## 3. The Fetch Test

Research has established there is a high correlation between dogs that score well on the Fetch Test and those dogs who grow up to be successful guide dogs. Although we are not training guide dogs, this is a good way to assess the dogs willingness to please people and interact with people and measures a dog's innate willingness to cooperate with a human partner. Almost any dog can be trained to retrieve on command using compulsion techniques. That is not the point. You are testing for a dog that is eager to please and wants to cooperate with and interact with, a human partner.

### The Process

Take a sock, a slipper or some other item that may appeal to a puppy or adult dog, briefly tease the dog with the item, toss it and observe the results. The test should be repeated three times and is most accurate when the tester is alone with the dog in a distraction free environment.

**Great:** The dog chases after it and picks it up, he shows promise and if he brings it back, he passes the test with flying colors. Coaxing and encouragement are allowable.

**Good:** The dog chases the item, but continually runs off it.

**Nothing:** Makes no effort at all to retrieve.



# Service Dog Rescue Assessment



## DOG DETAILS

Shelter: \_\_\_\_\_ Rescue Org: \_\_\_\_\_ Dog's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Rescue Fee: \_\_\_\_\_  
Breed(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: ☐ M ☐ F Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Size: ☐ S ☐ M ☐ L ☐ XL

### EVALUATION I.

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Environment: \_\_\_\_\_

Noise Sensitivity ☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low ☐ None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Body Sensitivity ☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low ☐ None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

The Fetch Test ☐ Great ☐ Good ☐ Nothing

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### EVALUATION II.

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Environment: \_\_\_\_\_

Noise Sensitivity ☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low ☐ None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Body Sensitivity ☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low ☐ None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

The Fetch Test ☐ Great ☐ Good ☐ Nothing

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### EVALUATION III.

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Environment: \_\_\_\_\_

Noise Sensitivity ☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low ☐ None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Body Sensitivity ☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low ☐ None

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

The Fetch Test ☐ Great ☐ Good ☐ Nothing

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### Additional Info

**HISTORY:** ☐ Found ☐ Owner Surrender ☐ Other Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**REPRODUCTIVE:** ☐ Unkown ☐ Spayed/Neutered ☐ Intact ☐ Has had puppies If so, when: \_\_\_\_\_

**HEALTH:** Heartworm: ☐ Negative ☐ Positive ☐ Unkown Vaccines: ☐ Up to Date ☐ Unknown ☐ Needs: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

Has the dog ever been aggressive? ☐ Yes ☐ No Explain: \_\_\_\_\_