

Cats versus Dogs

A talk about the animals that people keep as pets, and the strong preference that some owners show for either dogs or cats.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I read in a magazine article recently that scientists in the United States have just made a major discovery: animals have feelings. It's not just people who have emotions. Cats and dogs can also feel rejected, embarrassed, or excited. Or whatever.

Of course, any pet owner could have told you that their pet has feelings. For example, I am willing to swear that my cat is glad to see me when I come back home after being at the office all day. She quite clearly expects to be able to curl up on my stomach for an afternoon nap, and shows her disappointment when I don't have time for that. And if I go off and leave her with a neighbour over the weekend, she demonstrates her disapproval by sulking for days after I return.

Cats are perhaps not as demonstrative about their feelings as dogs are. Dogs show their enthusiasm in very obvious ways, jumping around and barking and generally behaving in an undignified fashion. Cats are more subtle.

In fact, although many pet owners like all animals, they usually have a clear preference for either dogs or cats. It seems that dogs appeal to one type of personality, and cats to another.

Dogs are easy-going, social animals, not terribly complicated. They seem to think of themselves as members of their human families, and naturally assume responsibility for things like guarding the house and watching children. Dogs seem to enjoy whatever their owners are doing, and make friends easily with humans. A dog is always ready to keep you company or join you in a game.

Cats demand more effort. If you want to make friends with a cat, you have to be patient. Many cat lovers say that it is like getting to know a person. Cats also seem to form attachments to particular individuals within a family. And they positively dislike children, who are too noisy and unpredictable for them. Most human activities are not attractive to a cat. They prefer people who sit still and don't move around too much.

In other words, a dog wants a long walk in the woods combined with an informal game of football. A cat will prefer a quiet evening at home, by a warm fire, listening to Mozart.

But both animals make good companions. They seem to sense when people are sad or disappointed, and need a comforting presence. At least in their ability to understand human emotions, animals seem to be more sensitive than many humans are.

Thank you.

(420 words}