

READING FELINE BODY POSTURES

Cats can reveal their emotions and their intentions through their body language. If you watch your cat carefully she can tell you what she is feeling and what she is likely to do next. Being able to read your cat's body language can help you identify when she is fearful of something or someone, when she is angry or aggressive, when she is trying to give in to you or to others, when he is unsure of things or distressed and when she is playful.

The drawings below show the basic body language of cats. These are not all the postures that may reveal your cat's emotions, but they are the basic ones. Sometimes cats may give mixed messages because they aren't sure how they feel in a situation or what they want to do next. Sometimes cats may change their body postures rapidly, because something in the environment has changed or their emotions have changed. Finally not all cats will show exactly the same postures or movements. For example, some cats don't show clear ear movements or tail movements. Some don't even have tails! So to read the body language of cats, you must look at all the elements of a posture to judge what your cat is feeling. No one element, such as tail position or tail wagging will always tell you what is going on.

When reading the body language of cats, look at their body position such as standing up stiffly or lying down. Watch for tail position, body shape, and hair erection.

Look at the facial features such as ear position, showing of teeth, dilation of eyes and position of eyes. Listen for vocalizations such as growls, hisses, screams or meows. Threats and aggression can be offensive such as in territorial aggression or it can be defensive such as in fear-motivated aggression.

Drawing 1 shows an offensive threatening cat.

Offensively threatening cats will usually show one or more of the following:

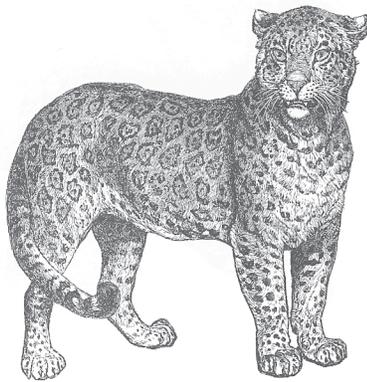
1. Standing stiffly, rear hips higher than front hips, tail down
2. Direct eye contact or staring
3. Ears out to side of head
4. Tail may be piloerected (fluffed up)
5. Growls or hisses

Look at all the
elements of a posture
to judge what your cat
is feeling.

Ask your pet professional for more information about cat behavior.

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Offensive cats try to make themselves look big and menacing.



Drawing 1.
Offensively threatening cat

Drawing 2 shows a mildly fearful cat.

Fearful cats will usually show:

1. Crouched body posture, or lying down
2. Tail tucked between the legs or around the body
3. Ears layed back
4. Looks away avoiding direct eye contact
5. Piloerection (hair fluffing)
6. Growls, hisses or screams

Fearful cats make themselves look small and not menacing.



Drawing 2.
Mildly fearful cat

Drawing 3 shows a defensively threatening cat. Note how it has both elements of offensive aggression and elements of fear.

Defensively threatening cats will usually show one or more of the following:

1. Standing up, back arched or lying down crouched
2. Tail straight up (Halloween cat) or down
3. Ears flat back against head
4. Pupils of eyes dilated
5. Piloerection (hair fluffing)

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Defensive cats show elements of threat and fear.

6. Mouth open showing teeth
7. Growls, hisses or screams



Drawing 3.
Defensively aggressive cat

Drawing 4 shows a playful cat. Note that most play in cats is similar to predatory behavior.

Playful cats will usually show one or more of the following:

1. Crouched down in a stalking posture
2. Running or climbing in short bursts
3. Ears up and forward
4. Tail out behind, flicking back and forth
5. Pouncing on small toys, moving objects or people or animals

Playful cats will show elements of many different behaviors.



Drawing 4.
Cat playfully stalking

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