



C.A.R.A.T.™

(Clothier Animal Response Assessment Tool)

"looking for the gem in every individual"

Developed by Suzanne Clothier in 2007, CARAT (Clothier Animal Response Assessment Tool) is a novel assessment system that categorizes behavior traits in multiple components that are intuitive and practical.

Existing temperament scoring systems lump together different traits into broad categories ("big buckets"), such as confidence/fear, dominance, distraction, aggression, excitability, attachment, separation anxiety, etc. These "big bucket" categories are relatively crude measurements.

With sufficient data, big bucket categories can and do offer valuable although generalized patterns, such as dogs of Breed X are 4 times more likely to be territorial aggressive than dogs of Breed Z. However, generalized patterns are a poor source of information about an individual animal.

CARAT takes a more detailed view of the individual dog as a unique combination of many factors working together to influence,

exacerbate, mitigate and enhance each other. In the profile created by the nuances and specifics of this complex interaction of multiple traits, an accurate picture is created of the individual, regardless of breed or age.

CARAT looks at these traits and their interactions: sociability (people & dogs), persistence, patience, biddability, social tolerance (people & dogs), awareness (VAKO - visual, kinesthetic, olfactory, auditory), reactivity (speed & effect, VAKO), arousal, resilience, energy, social use of space (people & dogs), exploratory, confidence (several categories), reliability, self modulation, and impulse control.

Behavior: Functional, Adaptive – or Not

CARAT is unique in its recognition that a response to any given stimulus can either **inhibit** or **activate** the animal, **attract** the animal or **create avoidant behavior**, and that the distinction between the two is critical in understanding the individual. For example, a dog who reacts quickly and avoidantly to a sudden noise is demonstrating a different response than a dog who reacts quickly and towards the same noise.

At all times, behavior is assessed according to how productive, functional, or adaptive it may be, with a full understanding that what may be productive, functional or adaptive in one context may not be in another context. For example, there would be great differences in the CARAT profiles for a successful guide dog, competitive French ring sport dog and a suitable companion for an elderly person with mobility issues.

The mid-range score is behavior that is considered highly functional and adaptive across a broad range of contexts. The further any one given score moves toward the

extremes of the range, the less adaptive that behavior is except in more narrowly defined contexts.

The Individual – Needs, Suitability & Selection

The CARAT profile defines what lifestyle, job or demands might be most suitable for this dog, and what situations or handlers or expectations might be unfair, distressing or unproductive for this individual animal. CARAT aids professionals in making better assessments of the dog as an individual, aiding in the creation of effective, humane training plans suited to that individual.

Additionally, CARAT can aid in the selection of dogs for a specific purpose, handler or environment. CARAT profiles also will prove helpful for breeders seeking a phenotypical assessment for breeding stock.

Since 2007, Guiding Eyes for the Blind has been using CARAT as their preferred assessment tool. GEB uses CARAT in conjunction with the puppy tests, IFT (in for training) tests, and broodstock evaluations developed by Suzanne Clothier. Longitudinal studies are underway.

Preliminary CARAT data has been presented in Barcelona at the 2008 EVSCE meeting by veterinary behaviorist Dr. Rudy de Meester of Belgium, and at the 2008 International Working Dog Breeder's Association meeting in San Antonio, TX by Jane Russenberger of Guiding Eyes. CARAT, RAT (Relationship Assessment Tool) and the novel tests appeared in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications & Research* (Vol. 3, Issue 4, 181-182, July 2008).

Scoring

In CARAT, the components are rated on a 9 point scale ranging from -4 to +4 with the center point of 0. Each point on the scale has an operational definition.

The scale is laid out on a left-to-right basis. We talk about dogs being "left shift" (-) or "right shift" (+) in terms of which way they are moving off the balanced, functional midpoint.

The **left shift (-)** is a tendency towards inhibition, passive, suppression and/or avoidant behavior.

The **right shift (+)** is a tendency toward activation, irritation, excitability and/or aggression.

The midpoint – **0** - is functional, highly adaptable to a multitude of situations, has greater tolerance to a wide range of influences and stimuli.

Adaptive behavior is flexible, and allows the individual to effectively meet demands of social responsibility, personal independence and environmental expectations. (*From William Heward's definition of adaptive behavior.*)

Patterns of behavior show us the strength or flexibility (or conversely, the fragility or rigidity) of any given characteristic. As behavior moves closer to either extreme, it becomes more specialized, less broadly functional. Scores on either extreme of +4 or -4 are unproductive for that trait, meaning that this behavior is not adaptive.

While no score is "good" or "bad," profiles or specific scores on specific traits may represent deficits in adaptive behavior. This may mean that the animal may require extensive support (management, environmental control, training) to ensure quality of life.

"Desirable" profiles are dependent upon the purpose or use of the dog. An ideal profile for a guide dog would be different from a Search and Rescue wilderness dog, or a mobility assistance dog. Work is underway to quantify which particular profiles or specific combinations of traits are predictive of success.

-4	0	+4
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Extreme left shift</u> inhibited, anxious, shut down, overwhelmed, suppressed, fearful, passive, avoidant, over-stimulated, subdued, non-productive, non-functional</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>The mid-point</u> functional, balanced, productive; would be adaptive, productive or functional behavior across many environments & situations</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Extreme right shift</u> active, irritated, aggressive, aroused, over-stimulated, over-excited, uninhibited, uncontrolled, non-productive, non-functional</p>

Between each of these points are 3 intermediate steps:

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

For some groups or purposes, a finer scale is necessary with half points between each –

-4 -3.5 -3 -2.5 -2 -1.5 -1 -.5 0 +.5 +1 +1.5 +2 +2.5 +3 +3.5 +4

This finer scale can just as effectively be used for any population, and may prove to be more valuable in specificity and predictability than the 9 point scale.

A dog may score to the right on one trait, and to the left on another trait. Some profiles are predominantly right or left across the board. Others show a variety. Rarely, we see dogs that score both left shift and right shift on the same trait depending on the context.

CARAT Training

For more information on learning CARAT, please visit Suzanne Clothier’s website.