

# The View From Planet Kerth: No more fighting like cats and dogs about it — the proof is in

[naplesnews.com/story/news/local/communities/collier-citizen/2017/12/11/view-planet-kerth-no-more-fighting-like-cats-and-dogs-proof/940402001/](http://naplesnews.com/story/news/local/communities/collier-citizen/2017/12/11/view-planet-kerth-no-more-fighting-like-cats-and-dogs-proof/940402001/)

Despite all the topics that divide us into warring tribes — tax reform, Russian high jinks, gun control — it's nice to know that two recent studies have settled one long-standing argument once and for all:

Dogs are better than cats.

Oh, neither of the studies stated their findings that way. Not exactly. But taken together, no other conclusion is possible.

Dogs vs. cats? Dogs win, paws down.

The first study focused on intelligence, asking the question: Which animal is smarter — a dog or a cat?

The answer comes from a team of scientists from six different universities in the U.S., Brazil, Denmark and South Africa, proving that dogs have twice as many neurons in their cerebral cortex than cats do. And because the cerebral cortex governs decision-making and problem-solving, and because neuron activity is what “thinking” is all about, the proof is barkingly clear.

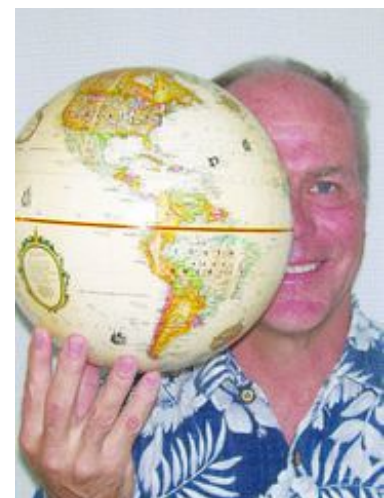
Dogs are twice as smart as cats are.

But seriously, did you really need a bunch of lab-coated neuron-counters to tell you that?

T.R. Kerth (Photo: Submitted)

I mean, who has ever had to call the fire department to come get the dog down from the tree? Cats have just enough neurons to get them up there, but not enough neurons to help them down — or even enough to figure out that it's a stupid idea to climb the tree in the first place. But dogs are smart enough to know that trees are meant for things with wings. For a four-legged beast, the only sensible interaction with a tree is to salute it with one leg raised.

And what about all those tasks we have asked our dogs to do for centuries stretching into millennia? In all that time, have you ever seen any cats herding sheep? Or cats retrieving pheasants? Seeing-eye cats? Cats sniffing out cancer? Police cats?



Laughable notions, right? Ask a cat to do any of those things and he'll give you that thousand-mile stare. The best trick a cat can perform is to take a dump in a litter box — or the kids' sandbox, if you turn your back on him. (A cat can also purr, both while breathing in or breathing out, which is pretty cool but probably not a sign of intelligence as much as of demonic possession.)

But dogs do all those helpful, useful service things because...well, because they can. And it's not just because they have the intelligence to figure it out, but also because they're glad to help.

Which brings us to the second study, one that goes way beyond simple intelligence. Because, after all, it wouldn't be fair to judge the value of cats and dogs on intelligence alone. We don't do it with our elected officials, so why should we do it with our pets?

According to neuroscientist Dr. Paul Zak, dogs perform all those service tasks not only because they are smart enough to do them, but also because it gives them pleasure to serve their human partners.

And why do they get more pleasure from serving humans than cats do?

Because your dog actually loves you. Your cat? Not so much.

"We have pretty good evidence that dogs actually love their humans," says Zak, because "when owners interact with their dogs, the human and their dog appear to release oxytocin."

The release of oxytocin in the bloodstream is a way to measure love in mammals. When we see our spouse or child, our oxytocin levels typically rise by 40-60 percent.

And when Zak took saliva samples from several dogs before and after interacting with humans, he found that the hormone increased in them by an average of 57.2 percent — a sure sign that they love us as much as they seem to with their joyful antics and wagging tail whenever we come around.

But with cats? The same experiment showed that a cat's oxytocin rose by only 12 percent — probably in anticipation of some Fancy Feast coming their way. Not enough joy juice even to change that detached, aloof expression on their faces.

Although more American families own dogs than cats (46.3 million families, versus 38.9 families), there are actually more cats than dogs in America because cat owners tend to own their kitties in bunches — probably in an attempt to offset that deficit in neurons and oxytocin.

So why are cats so popular in American families, now that science has categorically proven their inferiority to dogs?

Well, we've come this far. How about one more study?

According to a recent American Veterinary Medical Association survey of pet owners, American dog owners are better educated than American cat owners. We've all seen people who sort of look like their pets — is it possible that people also choose pets that match their level of intelligence?

Well, you won't hear me say that.

And you won't hear British folks say that, either, because a similar study at the University of Bristol in England found exactly the reverse relationship between level of education and choice of cats over dogs.

But then, what would you expect from a nation of folks who decided they were sick of sitting on a branch of the EU economic tree, but now can't figure out how to get down?

(Note to cat people: EU stands for European Union. Hang in there.)

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