

Making the Most Out of Movie Night With Your Dog

Do you and your dog enjoy TV time together? You're not alone if you do - 78% of pet owners watch TV with their dogs. But what movie or show would your dog pick if he controlled the remote? What does he see when he watches? Here's how to choose the shows he's most likely to enjoy.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In the U.S., 78% of pet owners say they watch TV with their dog "very often or always"
- Dogs, which have 20/75 vision compared to humans' 20/20, may need to sit closer to the screen to see images clearly
- Dogs can see color in combinations of blue, green and yellow only, so color TV appears differently to dogs than humans
- Because dogs have superior motion perception to humans, if you have an older TV, it may appear to flicker to your dog, even if the images are smooth to you
- If you want your dog to enjoy movie night as much as you, consider putting on something with plenty of fast-moving action, ideally in shades of blue, yellow and green — and cuddle up on the couch together

Is your dog your favorite companion to cuddle up on the couch with and binge watch your favorite TV show? You're not alone. In the U.S., 78% of pet owners say they watch TV with their dog "very often or always."¹

More than half — 57% — wait until their dog is in the room before watching a show. And 70% make sure their dog is cozy on the couch or at least surrounded by blankets while they watch. Many also move their dog's bed so they can see the TV better.² But does your dog actually "see" TV like you do, or are all of these efforts in vain?

Dogs See TV — and the World — Differently

Your dog can see the TV, including motion on its screen, and hear its sounds, but that's where the similarities end. Dogs, which have 20/75 vision compared to humans' 20/20, may need to sit closer to the screen to see images clearly.

Further, dogs only have two color receptors, or cones, in their eyes, which perceive wavelengths of light that correspond to blue, green and yellow; this means dogs can see color in combinations of blue and yellow only.³ If you have an older TV, it may appear to flicker to your dog, even if the images are smooth to you.

This is because dogs have superior motion perception to humans and can see flickers up to 75 hertz. For comparison, humans can only see flickering if the screen refresh rate is above 55 hertz.⁴ PetMD reported:⁵

"So, if we are watching an average TV show at 60 hertz, it will look smooth to us, but the image will appear to flicker for dogs. Fortunately, newer TVs are refreshed at a higher rate, and laptops and desktops have higher refresh rates, so not only do we enjoy a better picture, but so do our pups!"

What Do Dogs Like to Watch?

If your dog could control the remote, would he choose the same movie as you? Researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison are conducting a study to better understand how dogs interact with videos, in the hopes of uncovering more about dogs' vision.⁶ If they can uncover what dogs like to watch, they could use videos to hold dogs' attention long enough to gather more information about their vision.

Participants were asked to present four short videos of potentially interesting subjects, such as animals or objects, to their dogs, then rate how interested the dog was in each video. Dog owners were also asked how closely their dog tracked moving objects in the videos.

Much remains unknown about the way dogs see the world, since it's difficult to adapt human vision tests to canines. The team hopes to understand more about how dogs' vision changes as they age and how that corresponds to their environment, including interacting with screens.⁷

Dogs Are Probably Action Fans

While you may hone in on who or what is occurring around you, dogs, it seems, are most interested in the action itself.⁸ By training dogs to lie still, without using any restraint or sedation, researchers were able to scan dogs' brains and decode what they saw on videos using a machine learning tool.

There were videos of dogs sniffing, playing and eating, along with activity scenes showing cars on a road, a cat walking, people offering a ball and people eating. The dogs successfully viewed the videos, while researchers monitored the sessions and watched their eyes track the screens. Dogs were focused on action — not objects. Study author Gregory Berns, Emory professor of psychology explained:⁹

"We humans are very object oriented. There are 10 times as many nouns as there are verbs in the English language because we have a particular obsession with naming objects. Dogs appear to be less concerned with who or what they are seeing and more concerned with the action itself."

So if you want your dog to enjoy movie night as much as you, consider putting on something with plenty of fast-moving action, ideally in shades of blue, yellow and green.

Does Your Dog Think What's on TV Is Real?

Some dogs will bark at a dog barking on TV or seem to take notice if a squirrel runs by on screen. Research also shows that dogs recognize other dogs species when they see the on a computer screen.^{10,11} However, it's likely that they know what's on TV is different from the real-world outside. PetMD reported:¹²

"Dogs ... heavily rely on other senses, such as smell—which clearly isn't possible on a televised image. Based on the disconnect with dogs' most important sense (smell), it's likely that dogs do recognize that the image on the screen isn't real, but instead a representation of an animal or figure."

Further, just as some dogs are outgoing and others are timid, different dogs probably have different preferences when it comes to screens. Breeds like terriers, which have a high prey drive, may be tempted to run after a squeaky mouse that moves across the screen. But a bloodhound, which is bred to track scents, may be less interested in the odorless TV show you're watching in the background.¹³

As for whether or not your dog enjoys watching TV when you're not home, you'll need to observe his behaviors to find out. Some dogs may appreciate the sound of birds singing in a nature or wildlife program on low volume if they're **home alone**. Others, however, may become anxious if a TV is too loud or playing for too long. But regardless of what's on TV tonight, one thing's for certain — your dog will enjoy it more if he can watch it next to you.

Sources and References

^{1,2} [Rover, How streaming TV brings comfort to people and their pets](#)

³ [Britannica, Are Dogs Really Color-Blind?](#)

^{4,5,12} [PetMD October 27, 2021](#)

^{6,7} [University of Wisconsin-Madison March 24, 2022](#)

⁸ [Neuroscience September 13, 2022](#)

⁹ [Science Daily September 15, 2022](#)

¹⁰ [Science Daily February 14, 2013](#)

¹¹ [Animal Cognition volume 16, pages 637–651 \(2013\).](#)

¹³ [American Kennel Club July 25, 2023](#)
