

# Belgian Malinois

By Kerry Gardner

---

## Personality testing

The Belgian Malinois, affectionately referred to as a *Maligator* by those who work closely with the breed, is an active, strong and assertive shepherd dog with the jaws of an alligator. A Mal should be even-tempered and makes a great working dog when properly trained. According to the American Kennel Club (AKC), the breed standard calls for a well-balanced personality:

***“Correct temperament is essential to the working character of the Belgian Malinois. The breed is confident, exhibiting neither shyness nor aggressiveness in new situations. The dog may be reserved with strangers but is affectionate with his own people. He is naturally protective of his owner's person and property without being overly aggressive. The Belgian Malinois possesses a strong desire to work and is quick and responsive to commands from his owner. Faulty temperament is strongly penalized.”***

Personality or temperament testing has emerged as an important tool in today's society due to breed-specific legislation and negative attention placed on some breeds. Rescue organizations often use temperament testing to determine best placements of dogs deemed to have had past behavioral problems.

There are two widely used formats for personality testing. The first is a questionnaire asking the dog's owner or caretaker to rate their experience with the dog's behaviors on a scale of 1-10. While there are several versions of the questionnaire, they all generally measure four areas of a dog's disposition:

- Fearfulness
- Aggression
- Activity/Excitability
- Trainability

The other, is an observation-based exam where the handler walks the dog through a series of situations, like walking past a stranger while a third party (the tester) rates the dogs reactions. Once the dog is 18-months-old, he can be certified by the [American Temperament Test Society, Inc. \(ATTS\)](#) which strives for “...the betterment of all breeds of dogs and takes into consideration each breed's inherent tendencies.” The ATTS test has ten stations, each to mimic a potential

situation one could come across in a park while walking a dog. The encounters start off neutral and work up to situations where the dog should display its protective instincts. In the case of the Belgian Malinois, the dog should be alert and attentive throughout the meetings, never showing fear and only showing aggression when danger is imminent.

These qualities are what make the Belgian Malinois such a great fit with police or military work. The breed wants to be on duty most of the time. A Mal will not be happy spending extended periods of time in a kennel and, in fact, can become quite destructive when bored or frustrated.