

FUN FACTS: CATS AS SERVICE ANIMALS?

Directions: Read the article below and use close reading strategies as often as possible: highlight, underline, and take notes.

Service animals are specifically trained to provide assistance and perform certain tasks for individuals who may have a diverse array of needs. Service pets are recognized as an essential means of support because they help people with disabilities navigate potential limitations and participate in various aspects of daily life. You may have seen service animals at work. They are usually identifiable by a special vest or tag that tells others that the animal has a special purpose. When we think of service animals, dogs often come to mind. However, the idea of a cat being a service animal is worth considering. While it may be less common, cats can provide valuable support and assistance.

Cats are known for their independent nature, but they can form strong bonds with their owners and provide emotional support. For individuals with conditions such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), a cat can offer companionship and help alleviate symptoms. Their soothing presence and purring can provide a sense of calm and comfort.

In addition to emotional support, cats can also be trained to perform specific tasks as service animals. If you have a cat, you may be thinking, “No way! Not the cats I know,” but it’s true! They can learn! For instance, a cat can be trained to alert a person with hearing loss to sounds such as the doorbell or an alarm. Cats can also be trained to remind their owners to take medication or provide physical assistance by retrieving objects or opening doors.

One advantage of having a cat as a service animal is their size. Cats are generally smaller than dogs, making them a practical choice for individuals who have limited physical mobility or live in small spaces. Cats are also known for their cleanliness and require less space for their living and grooming needs compared to larger animals.

On the other hand, there are some challenges to consider when it comes to cats as service animals. Cats may not always be eager to follow commands or engage in training. Dogs, on the other hand, are more naturally inclined to obey and please their owners. This can make the training process more challenging with cats. It's also important to consider that not all cats are suited to be service animals. Cats chosen for service work need to have the right temperament (personality), be sociable, and have a willingness to be trained. Otherwise, the process of training the cat would be *quite* difficult.

Ultimately, the decision to have a cat as a service animal should be based on individual needs, preferences, and the compatibility between the person and the cat. What do you think?

CATS AS SERVICE ANIMALS? MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What kind of support can a cat provide to individuals with anxiety or depression?
 - a) They can retrieve objects.
 - b) They can open doors.
 - c) They can provide emotional comfort.
 - d) They can perform complex tasks.

2. What kind of tasks can a trained service cat perform?
 - a) Remind their owner to take medication.
 - b) Alert a person with hearing loss to sounds.
 - c) Retrieve items.
 - d) All of the above.

3. Cats are a practical option for people who:
 - a) live in small spaces
 - b) live in big houses
 - c) have big dogs
 - d) don't like cats

4. What qualities should a cat have to be considered as a service animal?
 - a) They should be independent.
 - b) They should have a playful nature.
 - c) They should have a willingness to be trained.
 - d) They should prefer solitude over human interaction.

5. How can service animals typically be identified?
 - a) They are always dogs.
 - b) They wear special vests or tags.
 - c) They are exclusively cats.
 - d) They have special shoes.

CATS AS SERVICE ANIMALS? MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWER KEY

Answer Key:

1:C

2:D

3:A

4:C

5:B

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing Prompt: Take the perspective of an individual who wants to make use of a service animal. Write a short essay, or detailed checklist, describing the characteristics, qualities, and abilities you would look for in your perfect service animal. How would this animal assist you in your daily life? What unique skills would it possess? How would it make you feel more independent and supported?

Fantastic Service Animal: Get creative and design your very own inclusive service animal! Draw a picture or create a collage of your imagined service animal. Consider its appearance, size, and special abilities tailored to assist people with different needs. You can even give it a magical or mystical quality. Give your service animal a name and write a short paragraph explaining its unique qualities and the tasks it can perform.

Silly Service Animal Training: Team up with a classmate to simulate service animal training. One of you can play the role of the service animal trainer, and the other can be the service animal. Choose a specific task, like retrieving an object, and work together to practice the training process. Swap roles to experience both perspectives. Reflect on the challenges and rewards of training, emphasizing patience, communication, and understanding in the process. To add fun to the experience, make sure to pose a few challenges to work through when you take on the role of the service animal being trained.

CONNECTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization composed of countries working together to address global issues. One important focus of the UN is sustainability, which means taking actions to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To promote sustainability, the UN developed "The 17 Goals," also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals will help us create a better world by the year 2030. These goals are essential for all people because they address the challenges our planet and people face.

Service Animals can be connected to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10: Reduce Inequalities

Inclusive service animals, like cats, support individuals with various needs. Your task is to research the importance of inclusive service animals and how they contribute to reducing inequalities for people who utilize them. Remember, service animals can help us when we're out in our communities, at work, at school, and at home.

Task: Conduct research about service animals, including dogs and less common choices like cats. Explore how these animals assist individuals in their daily lives, the tasks they can perform, and the benefits they provide. Present your findings on specific animals that have helped people with varying needs. You are encouraged to expand your horizons *beyond* cats and dogs. Consider horses, or even other types of animals, that have been known to provide aid to people. Identify how these animals can best help and which locations or settings they'd be best suited for. Do not forget to include information about *respecting* service animals. In other words, aim to educate your audience on how to interact or not interact with service animals.

SERVICE ANIMAL AWARENESS FOR THE WORKPLACE

SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHIC:

Create a social media graphic that promotes appropriate interaction with service animals in the workplace. Choose a specific workplace; remember, there are many industries and service animals could be useful just about anywhere. Identify the different “jobs” service animals sometimes have as they support workers in different roles and a list of “DO”s and “DON’T”s to help people understand the animal, its needs, and its role in aiding the person it is assisting.

Introduction Profile Template: Create a template or “profile” that introduces a service animal to people in a school or workplace. Include a space for the animal’s name, the animal’s job, and other safety information related to being around the animal.

Interview Questions: Prepare a series of questions to ask a person who utilizes a service animal. After establishing a relationship with that person, it’s often helpful to inquire about how others should or should not interact with them and their particular service animal. It is important to give voice to the person who utilizes the animal so that others can understand how to respond, interact, or support this person. After all, it is important to know how we can support one another, especially when we are in the same space. Finally, make a social media graphic that suggests three interview questions.