

Guidelines for Writing Breed Standards

**Excerpt from The American Kennel Club By-Laws, Article IV, Section 5:*

It shall be the duty and privilege of each parent member Specialty Club to define precisely the true type of the breed of pure-bred dogs which it was organized to promote and improve and its definition when approved by the Board of Directors of the American Kennel Club, shall and will be recognized by the American Kennel Club as the sole standard of excellence for which such breed of pure-bred dogs shall be bred and by which specimens of such breed must be judged in the awarding of prizes of merit. The standards of excellence of all breeds of pure-bred dogs now adopted by parent member Specialty Clubs and approved by the Board of Directors of The American Kennel Club shall not be changed in any respect until the wording of any proposed change or changes first has been submitted to the Board of Directors of The American Kennel Club and its approval of the same has been obtained.

Breed Standard Revision Procedures

A revision consists of any change, deletion, interpretation, or clarification to a standard. Once the Board of Directors has approved a standard there is a five year moratorium on revisions.

Parent Club

- A. Breed Standard Committee is formed to review and formulate revisions.
- B. Notify staff of the American Kennel Club that the club is in the process of reviewing the standard.
- C. Submit revisions to AKC staff for input while being developed. Staff will present final revisions to The Board of Directors for their comment and authority for the club to proceed to ballot the membership.
- D. Balloting of membership in accordance with Club's Constitution and By-Laws.

The ballot must also inform the membership of the five year moratorium.

- E. Submit results of balloting, copy of the ballot, cover letter, and standard to the AKC. If the proposed revisions do not receive the sufficient numbers of votes to be approved notify AKC Staff.
- F. Ballot results that support a revision to the standard will be scheduled for inclusion on the agenda of the AKC Board for approval. The submitted proposed standard will be published on the Secretary's Page.
- G. Upon approval by the Board of Directors, notification is sent to the Parent Club with reiteration of the five year moratorium.
- H. The approved standard is published on the Secretary's Page.

POINTS TO CONSIDER IN WRITING BREED STANDARDS

1. The purpose of a standard is to be a guide for breeders and judges. As such, it is important to keep in mind those features that make the breed unique, those qualities the breed must possess to do the job for which it was created. A standard should emphasize what is important in the breed. Conversely those qualities that are of little or no importance are mentioned only in passing or not at all.

2. The text of the standard must be as clear and concise as possible. Sentence structure should be simple and straightforward. When verbs are used they should to the extent possible indicate the present tense: “is” or “are” rather than “should be”.
3. *The Complete Dog Book Glossary* is the reference source for terminology. Every word used must have the same definition as in the glossary in the AKC’s **Complete Dog Book**. Because of the encyclopedic nature of these references, some words cited may not be acceptable for use in standards. For example, words like forechest, breastbone and prosternum all describe the same thing. A concerted effort is being made to use the same word, with the same definition, from standard to standard. The concern with terminology is to be certain that what needs to be communicated is actually being communicated. There is no desire to limit language or the special flavor standards communicate about their breeds.
4. Any fault to be cited should be included under the appropriate descriptive section of the standard. Care ought to be taken to list only faults that are of special concern to the breed. In general, there is no need to list faults which are obvious from the positive description of the dog. For instance, if the positive description reads, “topline straight and level”, it would be unnecessary to state that, “a roach or sway back is a fault.” Standards listing many of the more common faults can be misleading because any omission from the listing could be interpreted that this particular problem is not considered a fault.
5. *Disqualifying faults* should be listed in the appropriate sections in the body of the standard. (AKC summarizes all disqualifications in italics at the end of the standard in our standard booklets for judges and in *The Complete Dog Book*.) Thorough consideration should be given before a specific fault is made a disqualification. **A disqualification must be clearly stated, defined, or measurable with no room for interpretation.**

Those faults which AKC rules make disqualifications for all breeds are not necessary to list in a standard.

6. Disqualifying heights, like all disqualifications, should be put in a standard only when a club is completely satisfied that disqualifying a dog over or under the specific limit is the best way to deal with size.
7. In describing the bite, the standard should refer to the position of the teeth rather than of the jaws, since it is the teeth which judges will examine and on which they will make their decision.
8. The standard should specify whether tails may be, or should not be, docked; in the case of any newly recognized breeds, the club will be encouraged to include a description of the natural tail if a docked breed. The standard should specify if dewclaws may be, are generally, should be, or should not be, removed, distinguishing between dewclaws on the forelegs and those on the hind legs in each case.
9. For those breeds of which the ears are usually or sometimes cropped, whether the ears may be cropped; in the case of any newly recognized breed, the club will be encouraged to include a description of the natural ears. This is necessary so that the application of Chapter 14, Section 9 of the Rules Applying to Dog Shows to the particular breed will be clear. This section requires disqualification of any dog that has been changed in appearance by artificial means except as specified in the standard for its breed.
10. In the case of new breeds being accepted into Miscellaneous, the standard *must* conform with the **Guidelines for Writing Breed Standards in the** format below. There *must* be descriptions for all major headings and for the italicized *subheadings*. Some commonly used subheadings have been listed. These have been included for illustrative purposes only and do not have to be used. Other subheadings appropriate for the specific breed may be used in all sections.

11. Breeds recognized prior to 1989 may make a revision to the breed standard without reformatting.

STANDARD FORMAT

- I. *General Appearance.* This is the most important paragraph in the standard, in the sense that it should spell out what the breed's most important qualities are. The General Appearance section should describe the breed's purpose and emphasize those qualities that are critical to fulfilling its function. In a sense, everything in a standard should relate form to function. Remember, the General Appearance section is not the standard. It is the place to cite the breed's *most important* qualities. These features would then be fully described under their appropriate heading in the body of the standard.
- II. *Size, Proportion, Substance.* Height is described in inches measured from the ground to the highest point of the shoulder blades. In those breeds where weight is important it is given in pounds. Proportion is the ratio of height to length. Length is usually expressed as the distance from the point of the shoulder to the rearmost projection of the upper thigh (or point of the buttocks). Practically speaking, breeds are either square or rectangular. Some breeds are just "off" square, while others are extremely rectangular. Some indication of what is appropriate for the breed should be included, even if the indication is that a wide range is acceptable. Substance includes the amount of bone.
- III. *Head*
 - Expression*
 - Eyes* (include color and rim pigmentation)
 - Ears*
 - Skull*
 - Stop*
 - Muzzle*
 - Planes (Muzzle and Skull)
 - Nose* (include pigmentation)
 - Lips*
 - Flews*
 - Bite*
 - Teeth*
- IV. *Neck, Topline and Body*
 - Neck*
 - Topline*
 - Body*
 - Chest
 - Ribs
 - Underline
 - Tuck-up
 - Back
 - Loin
 - Croup
 - Tail*
- V. *Forequarters*
 - Angulation
 - Shoulders
 - Shoulder Blades
 - Point of Shoulder
 - Upper Arm
 - Elbow
 - Legs

Pasterns
Dewclaws
Feet
Toes
Pads
Nails

VI. *Hindquarters*

Angulation
Legs
Upper Thigh
Stifle
Second Thigh
Hock Joint
Hocks (Rear Pastern)
Dewclaws
Feet
Toes
Pads
Nails

VII. *Coat.* Include under this heading the description of the hair on all parts of the dog, and describe any trimming of the coat.

VIII. *Color.* Include under this heading the color and markings of the coat (and the skin under the coat if skin color description is to be included). In breeds where multiple colors or color combinations are acceptable, but not all colors are permitted, the *complete* list of all acceptable colors and color combinations *must be* included in the standard. In such cases, any color or color combination not mentioned are *unacceptable*, and judges are to pass judgment on this basis. Color of eyes, eye rims, mouth, lips, nose, nails, etc., are to be given under their respective headings.

IX. *Gait.* A complete, positive description of the breed's gait should be given. Care should be taken to adequately express the importance of the breed's overall ability to move, which is usually best evaluated from the side.

X. *Temperament.* Such temperament description as is appropriate for the breed would not, in any way, bear on the following examination requirements of any dog brought into the show ring. (All dogs in all breeds are expected to stand for examination by a judge, such examination to be as thorough as deemed necessary by the judge, including close inspection of the bite and thorough feeling for muscle tone, testicles and any other factors the judge desires to check. Breeds normally judged on the table are expected to stand for examination on the table. In addition, all dogs must gait for the judge's examination.)