

The Tail Tells All



One of my favorite things about living with cats is learning how they communicate and trying to understand what they are “saying” to me. Dogs are a bit more obvious about their interests and intentions. Cats make us work for it, which is so much more fun!

One way, almost all cats communicate, is through their tail. Emotions are expressed in a simple swoosh, or a tightly tucked, tail. It’s important to understand what their tail is signaling, so that you can better understand your own companion. It’s also helpful if you encounter an unfamiliar kitty. You’ll know when they are agreeable to interaction, and when its best to leave them alone.

There are eight common messages that cats express with their tails. Of course, these eight are not all encompassing! Your companion likely has their own, unique way of expressing themselves, which is deciphered by you over time. These eight simply offer a quick guide to the most likely message a cat is trying to communicate. Enjoy getting to know these “critters” a bit better...



If a cat’s tail is...	It’s expressing...
Swishing back and forth, rather quickly	Something has grabbed their attention! It may be expressing anger, or just ready to pounce on a toy or mouse. It’s safest to leave the kitty alone and give them time to relax.
Upright, with just a bit of movement back and forth	Happiness! If the tip of the tail is curled slightly they are a friendly kitty, showing that they are happy to see you.
Wrapped around another cat	Friendship! This is like putting your arm around a friend.
Tucked between the legs	Fear or pain. Something is surely making them scared or uncomfortable, and they are showing signs of submission.
Up but on an angle, moving back and forth	Excitement! Be warned, it could be good or bad excitement. They may simply be focused on something very exciting, or may be “freaking out” over something. Check out the ears to determine which. If the ears are back, they indicate fear...ears up, all is well.
Puffed up	Fear. They are clearly scared by something and trying to make themselves as big as possible.
Down at a 90-degree angle	Ready to attack. This is almost always a sign of aggression and should be taken seriously. Give this kitty some space!
Shaped like a question mark	Ready for play. A tail that looks like a question mark is asking you....“Would you like to play?” Consider taking a break from whatever you’re doing and have some fun. You’ll both enjoy the break!