

Reading Between the Lines

Our guides teach you what to ask. This card teaches you how to listen. It works with any question you ask, any kind of care you're evaluating, and any answer you hear back.

THE CORE IDEA

When you ask someone about how they care for your dog, *the shape of their answer tells you something*. A detailed answer usually means they've thought about it. A vague answer might just mean they haven't been asked before. Neither is a pass or fail. But learning to notice the difference helps you decide what feels right for your dog.

THE FRAMEWORK

Six ways to listen, no matter what you're asking

- 1 Is it a working system, or a plan that sounds good?**
Systems have specifics and a track record. Plans are ideas that haven't been tested. Listen for the difference between "we would do this" and "we have done this." Both can be honest, but the second is grounded in what's already happened.
- 2 Is there documentation, or just words?**
The strongest providers can show you what they're describing. A written plan, a logbook, photos, a checklist. Verbal descriptions can still be trustworthy, but something you can see is on firmer ground.
- 3 Can they name what they can't do?**
Strong providers know their limits and can say them out loud. "We're not right for dogs with significant medical needs." "We don't work with aggression cases." A provider who says yes to everything is either remarkably capable, or isn't listening closely enough.
- 4 Does the answer invite more, or close it off?**
A provider who welcomes your follow-up questions is engaged. A provider who gets defensive, dismissive, or impatient is telling you how they'll respond when something goes wrong. Notice the posture, not just the words.
- 5 Are they asking about your dog, too?**
The strongest providers get curious about your dog before committing to care for them. They want to know who's walking into their space. If they never ask, they're promising something they don't yet have enough information to deliver.
- 6 Does it match your gut?**
The most important prompt, and the easiest to skip. Sometimes a technically good answer still feels off. Sometimes an imperfect answer feels honest. Your gut is synthesizing things your conscious mind hasn't named yet. Listen to it.

Remember, this card isn't a scorecard.

It's a listening tool. The goal isn't to catch a provider in a vague answer. It's to help you notice what you're hearing so you can trust yourself when it's time to decide.

