

The Lhasa Standard: Vague or Concise? by Cassandra de la Rose

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"Omit needless words!" admonished an expert on written style. "Vigorous writing is concise," he said. "A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, and a paragraph, no unnecessary sentences for the same reason a machine should have no unnecessary parts." Sound advice, but there are degrees of necessity, depending on the writer and the targeted audience.

At just 227 words, the Lhasa Apso standard, first drafted in 1935 and revised in 1978, is one of the shortest of all AKC breed standards. Does this mean it is concise? Or does it lack the information necessary to convey the ideal image of the breed?

Consider the original authors. All were experienced dog people who understood structure and terminology. They described elements of the breed that made it unique, assuming the readers had a certain knowledge and understanding of the normal canine. In other words, they did not believe it necessary to describe characteristics that are common to most breeds.

While the standard might seem vague and unclear to novices unfamiliar with canine structure and movement, prospective judges should find it less difficult to decode. This is especially true if they have studied the history of the Lhasa Apso to learn how it functioned in its native Tibet.

Here, *form follows function* is not an ideal cliché, especially with a breed that has existed in a harsh environment for over a millennium. For example, since the standard does not address movement, we should expect normal canine movement. The Lhasa should not roll like the Pekingese or be stilted like the Chow Chow. The standard dictates a strong loin with well developed quarters and thighs. One should expect a solid backline and strong rear capable of carrying the Lhasa effortlessly uphill or over uneven ground. The average elevation of Tibet is 16,000 feet. Would a dog survive with inefficient movement, such as a high rear kick or flailing hocks that waste energy and oxygen? One foundation breeder believed the Lhasa should move as if it had independent suspension, with any one foot able to carry weight and balance. Indeed, many Lhasas are adept climbers and some have been known to walk across the top edges of exercise pens and fences.

To live successfully in a steep, rocky environment, a dog would need to be agile and sure-footed, with good lung capacity and endurance. Feet should be *round and cat-like, with good pads*. A front that pounds would not serve the dog well, so normal sloping shoulders with a well-angled upper arm proportionate to the length of the shoulder blade should be expected.

The Lhasa is well-ribbed up, according to the standard. Since a number of standards include this terminology, among them the Pug, Bulldog, and Tibetan Terrier, how does this translate to the Lhasa? Tie together two needs: surviving in a high-altitude and living in a steep, rocky environment. Both dictate a long rib cage with enough depth and spring for good heart and lung capacity, accompanied by moderate width of chest to allow flexibility from the elbow. Too narrow or too wide a chest and agility is compromised, especially with the required straight forelegs.

Concise writing demands more of the reader and assumes a level of basic knowledge. The Lhasa standard speaks volumes in just a few words.