

Experiment shows dogs are able to remember toy names for up to two years

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A trio of ethologists at Eötvös Loránd University, in Hungary, has found, via experimentation, that some dogs are able to remember toy names for up to two years. In their [study](#), published in the journal *Biology Letters*, Shany Dror, Ádám Miklósi and Claudia Fugazza taught toy names to several dogs and then hid the toys away for two years to learn more about the dogs' long-term memory.

Prior research has shown that [dogs](#) are capable of associating human words with a toy—when asked to retrieve "Squeaker," for example, a dog would ignore other toys in a group and fetch the one requested. Prior research has also shown that some breeds are better at making these associations, as are some individuals within breeds—such dogs are known as gifted word learner dogs.

The researchers involved in this new study wondered if such dogs retain these associations due to repeated use, or if they, like humans, are able to store associations in long-term [memory](#). To find out, they designed and carried out an experiment involving five dogs that had previously been trained to associate human words with toys and to fetch them upon request.

Each of the dogs was taught to associate names with 12 toys they had never seen before. After making sure that the dogs had learned the names thoroughly, the researchers stored all the toys for two years. They then brought the dogs out individually, showed each one the toys and then, after mixing the test toys with others that were familiar to the dogs in another room, asked them to retrieve the test toys by calling out the associated name. Each dog was tested twice for each toy.

The researchers found that overall, the dogs were accurate in retrieving the toy specified 44% of the time, while some had an accuracy rate of up to 60%. The researchers note that the results are far better than chance, proving that the dogs had remembered the [toys](#) and the names for two

years—a clear indication that they had stored them in long-term memory.

More information: Shany Dror et al, Dogs with a vocabulary of object labels retain them for at least 2 years, *Biology Letters* (2024). [DOI: 10.1098/rsbl.2024.0208](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2024.0208)

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