

Why do cats miaow?

1 LEAD-IN Look at the different noises people say dogs make in other languages. Which do you think sound most like the noise a dog makes?



WOOF WOOF
or BOW WOW
[English]

GUK GUK
[Indonesian]

HAM HAM
[Albanian]

WAN WAN
[Japanese]

BAU BAU
[Italian]

BUP BUP
[Catalan]

2 VOCABULARY Match the noises animals make (in English!) with the animals. Which noises are similar to those in your language?

| NOISES | ANIMALS |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 NEIGH | A owl |
| 2 MOO | B horse |
| 3 BAA | C cockerel (male chicken) |
| 4 MIAOW | D cat |
| 5 TOOWIT TOOWOO | E cow |
| 6 COCKADOODLE DOO | F sheep |

3a VIDEO Most languages agree on the sound a cat makes, but in fact, scientists say that cats do not miaow to each other, but only to humans. Why do you think that is? Discuss with a partner.

3b VIDEO Watch the whole video and check your ideas. Don't worry if you don't understand everything this time.



4 VIDEO Watch the first section of the video (to 1.00) again and answer the following questions.

- 1 Why does the first cat, Tigger, make a noise?
- 2 Why does the second cat, Rocky, make a noise?

5a Check the meaning of the words in the box.

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|--------|
| gradually | effective | listening | behaviour | suddenly | vigilant | movement | responding | unique |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|--------|

5b VIDEO Listen to the second section (to 2.00) and complete the summary using the words in the box. Not all the words are needed.

The miaow is something that young cats, or kittens, use to call their mothers. The sound is very ¹ _____ in getting their mothers to pay attention. However, as the kitten gets older, it ² _____ stops miaowing. We assume this is because the mother doesn't want to feed the kitten anymore, so she stops ³ _____ to the noise. Pet cats continue to miaow at their owners because most people are busy and, the cat thinks, not ⁴ _____ enough about noticing what the cat wants or needs. Amazingly, each cat learns independently to miaow so as to get a human's attention.

6 Watch the last section (to the end) and decide if the following statements are true or false.

- 1 All cats make the same noises when speaking to humans.
- 2 All the owners in the study said their cat answered them when they spoke to them.
- 3 Because people talk a lot, cats have learnt to communicate by 'talking' too.

7a GRAMMAR Look at the following sentences (a-g) and answer the questions below.

- a. *Kitten miaow **in order to** call their mothers over.*
- b. *Kittens miaow **to** call their mothers over.*
- c. *Kittens miaow **so as to** call their mothers over*
- d. *Kittens miaow **so that** their mothers will come over.*
- e. *Kittens miaow **in order that** their mothers will come over*
- f. *Kittens miaow **so as not to** be ignored.*
- g. *Kittens miaow **in order not to** be ignored.*

- 1 Which sentence is less formal than the others?
- 2 What is the difference between 'so as to' and 'so that', and 'in order to' and 'in order that'?
- 3 Which is correct, 'so as not to go' or 'so as to not go'?

7b Read the grammar box and check your answers.

We can use 'in order to' and 'so as to' as an infinitive of purpose (to say why). We often use them before stative verbs such as be, know or have, but can use them in front of any verb when the style is more formal.

It is better to use 'in order' and 'so as' before 'NOT to', rather than 'to'

~~Kittens miaow not to be ignored~~ Kittens miaow to be not ignored

'so that' and 'in order that' are conjunctions of purpose and they are followed by a clause, not just a verb.

~~Kittens miaow so that to call their mothers over.~~

'In order that' is more formal than 'so that'

8 Choose an animal and write down six things that animal typically does. Then write six sentences explaining the animal's behaviour, using 'in order to', 'so as (not) to', 'in order (not) to' and 'in order that'.

E.g. *birds build nests- birds build nests in order to protect their eggs.*

9 SPEAKING Look at the following saying about cats. Do you agree? Why/why not?

Dogs have owners, cats have servants



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Transcript

Presenter: It's early morning and Tigger spots a strange black cat on a nearby roof. And listen to this. [chittering noise] Chittering may simply be a sound of frustration, but no-one's really sure.

Rocky, our for a stroll in the afternoon, [cat noise] makes this noise when another cat blocks his way.

But the story of cat communication is a lot more surprising than this. There's one noise we've hardly heard. [miaow]. It rarely happens when the cats are out with each other.

To understand what's going on, we have to go back to the beginning and the youngest members of the study. Biologist Dr John Bradshaw can explain why these one week old kittens miaow.

Dr Bradshaw: The miaow starts off as a kitten vocalisation. It's something that kittens use in order to call their mothers over, and, as you can see, it's very effective in doing that. The mother is very attentive to those miaows. And then, as the kitten grows up, it gradually stops miaowing. Presumably just because the miaow stops working. The mother wants to wean the kitten and stops responding. With a pet cat, which is constantly miaowing at its owner, it's a way of getting the owner's attention, and that's because we are not very vigilant creatures. We spend a lot of our time with our noses buried in books or computer screens or TVs. And a cat, each cat learns independently we think, that using this piece of kitten behaviour is a good way of getting our attention. So, miaowing is a good way of getting us to look up and find out what they want from us.

Presenter: So cats have two different languages, one for each other and one for us. Scientists have found cats make a huge range of miaows, and they wondered if there was a universal cat/human language.

Speaker 1: There's a trill that Jasper does, isn't there. [his partner makes the sound] yes, that's it.

Speaker 2: They make that funny little noise, they go.. [makes noise]

Speaker 3 [makes meow noises]

Speaker 4 [meow]

Speaker 5 [makes cat noise]

Speaker 4: That doesn't sound anything like it..

Speaker 5 [laughs] I think it does!

Presenter: Scientists have discovered that every cat's miaows are unique. Each cat learns which noises work best in certain situations, developing a special language that only their owner will understand.

Speaker 6: When they want food it's a much more, prolonged, miaow.

Speaker 1: Miss Piggy's learned how to say 'milk' so she does a proper milk miaow. It's like [makes miaowing sound]

Presenter: And when our cats miaow, there's one thing that almost every owner in the study said they did....

Speaker 7 [to cat] Did you go hunting today? [cat miaows]

Presenter: ...talk back....

[people talking to cats, and cats answering]

Talking comes naturally to us and every kitten that spends time with people learns that to communicate with us they have to make a noise.

Key and Notes

2

1B 2E 3F 4D (can also be spelt meow, or sometimes miaou) 5A 6C

3b

Cats have learnt that using what is essentially a baby's cry is a good way of getting humans to pay attention to them and give them what they need.

4

1 He sees a strange black cat on a nearby roof

2 Another cat blocks his way

5a

gradually - slowly, over a long period of time

effective - producing a successful result

listening- paying attention to something you can hear

behaviour - the way that someone/something behaves

suddenly - quickly and unexpectedly

vigilant - quick to notice any problems

movement - act of moving the body or a part of the body

responding - to give an answer to someone

unique – the only one of its kind

5b

1 effective

2 gradually

3 responding

4 vigilant

6

1 All cats make the same noises when speaking to humans- FALSE (They develop a unique way of communicating with their owners)

2 All the owners in the study said their cat answered them when they spoke to them.- TRUE

3 Because people talk a lot, cats have learnt to communicate by 'talking' too.- TRUE

7a

1 Which sentence is less formal than the others?- b

2 What is the difference between 'so as to' and 'so that', and 'in order to' and 'in order that'? – so as to and in order to are infinitives of purpose, followed by an infinitive verb. So that and in order that are conjunctions, followed by a clause.

3 Which is correct, 'so as not to go' or 'so as to not go'?- 'so as not to go'



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