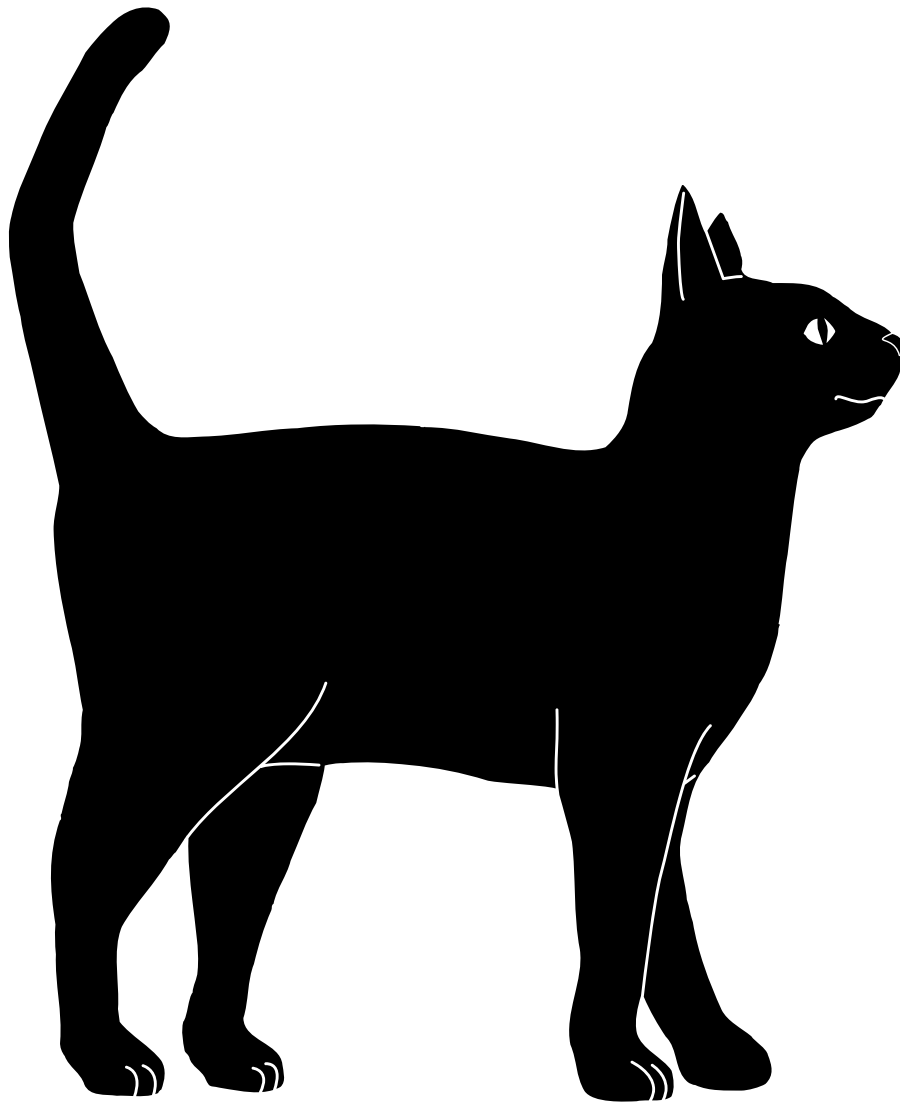




SOUTH DAKOTA  
**4-H CAT PROJECT**  
GUIDELINES



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## South Dakota 4-H Cat Project Guidelines

Review and Revision: Audrey Rider | State 4-H Events Field Specialist

Original Publication: 2009 – Marilyn Rasmussen, Ph.D. | 4-H/Youth Development Specialist

Denise Lingscheit | 4-H/Youth Development Educator | LaDonna McKnight | 4-H/Youth Development Educator

### WELCOME TO THE 4-H CAT PROJECT!

These guidelines will help you learn about your cat and how to exhibit or show your cat. Throughout the year, you have been learning many things about kittens and cats through your project work. For example, here's a question you might be able to answer: When were cats domesticated (when did they become tame enough to become pets)? Answer: Cats were domesticated in Egypt between 3,000 and 5,000 B.C.

There are many sources of information to help you investigate what you need to know to have a happy and healthy kitten or cat. Some of the ways to find information:

- your veterinarian
- your parents
- 4-H leader or volunteer who is knowledgeable about kittens and cats
- books from your local library or book store
- Internet sites, especially the cat breed associations

### CAT CURRICULUM AND OTHER RESOURCES

National 4-H curriculum can be found at [www.4-hcurriculum.org](http://www.4-hcurriculum.org). At the site are three youth activity guides and one helper's guide:

- Purr-fect Pals, Level One
- Climbing Up!, Level Two
- Leaping Forward, Level Three
- Cat Helper's Guide

Washington State University Extension:

- 4-H Cat Project – Units One and Two (EM4809 and EM4900)

Cat Breed Websites:

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| • The International Cat Association  | <a href="http://www.tica.org">www.tica.org</a>                       |
| • The Traditional Cat Association    | <a href="http://www.traditionalcats.com">www.traditionalcats.com</a> |
| • American Cat Fancier's Association | <a href="http://www.acfacat.com">www.acfacat.com</a>                 |
| • Cat Fanciers' Association          | <a href="http://www.cfa.org">www.cfa.org</a>                         |

# 1.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

To enjoy the cat project, you will need to give your cat lots of attention. If you spend time grooming and playing with your cat every day, he or she will be become accustomed to being handled. You will learn how to calm your cat so that it will be calm during the cat show, too.

The 4-H cat project accepts all healthy kittens and cats—household pets or purebred. Although 4-H cats do not have to be sterilized, sterilizing your cat is encouraged.

## 1.1 Equipment

There are some basic equipment needs to care for your cat:

- A carrier is helpful for transporting your cat to the veterinarian or anywhere you travel with your cat. A cat that is loose in a car could distract the driver and cause an accident.
- If your cat lives indoors, you will need a litter box. A litter box should be large enough so that the cat can turn around and still keep its back end in the box. The box should be deep enough so that the litter won't spill or be tossed out of the box. A good size for a litter box for an average cat is about 15-inches square.
- Your cat's food and water dishes should be heavy, so they can't be tipped over. If you have two or more cats, they can share a water bowl, but each should each have their own food dish.
- If your cat has claws, a scratching post is a good idea. You can use catnip to help encourage your cat to use the scratching post and not the furniture.
- You will need a collar, harness, and leash for your cat if you plan to either show your cat at Achievement Days or take your cat outdoors for other reasons.
- Grooming tools will help keep your cat's coat both in good condition and enjoyable to pet and play with. Shorthaired cats need a natural bristle brush, a fine-toothed flea comb, and a chamois or nylon rubbing cloth. Long-haired cats need a wide-toothed metal comb, a mat splitter, and a fine-toothed flea comb. To keep your cat's claws trimmed, you may use either a nail clippers made especially for cat claws or one made for human fingernails, but never a scissors.

## 2.0 EXHIBITING KITTENS AND CATS

### 2.1. South Dakota 4-H Exhibit Lots (Cats at Achievement Days and/or South Dakota State Fair)

- Showmanship
- Healthy Kitten – over 4 months and under 12 months of age
- Healthy Cat – over 12 months of age

### 2.2. Guidelines for Exhibiting

- Where to Show
  - 4-H members may show either a kitten or a cat at Achievement Days or South Dakota State Fair in the Healthy Kitten/Cat exhibit or in showmanship.
- Sanctioning.
  - Cat shows at county Achievement Days and at the South Dakota State Fair are not sanctioned by any national organization.
- Cat Breeds
  - Kittens and cats do not need to be purebred animals. They will not be judged for breed characteristics. Kittens and cats are judged for physical condition, cleanliness, presentation, temperament, and attractive or unusual appearance. Judges usually will not deduct points for odd body proportions; however, overweight, potbellied, or cats in poor health and grooming will receive deductions. Old scars or injuries will not necessarily be counted against the cat. The judge will look for evidence that the injury was properly treated.
- Carriers and Kennels
  - Exhibitors must provide their own pet carrier/portable kennel to transport and house their cats while on the fairgrounds.
- Health Certification
  - Each exhibitor must have a current health certificate for each kitten or cat. The state veterinarian's office requires all cats on exhibit to be accompanied by a health certificate that has been signed by a licensed accredited veterinarian within 30 days of entry to the South Dakota State Fair. The health certificate must indicate the dates of vaccination for rabies and feline distemper (FVRCP). All vaccines must be current. However, it is important for 4-H members to consult with their local veterinarian about complete health care for their cats, which includes additional vaccinations, such as for feline leukemia.
- Animal's Length of Stay at Event
  - Kittens/cats may only be brought to South Dakota State Fair or Achievement Days on the day of the show and remain until all judging is completed. Kittens/cats are taken home the same day; they are not housed at the fair.
- Entry Limits
  - Each exhibitor is limited to two entries per lot number. Showmanship is one entry.
- Where Animals are Judged.
  - Cats and kittens will be judged out of their kennels or cages.
  - Each 4-H member needs to provide a carpet square to place under his/her cat while showing. Carpet squares should be at least 12" x 15".
- Leashing/Harnessing of Animals
  - A leash or harness is required to control your kitten or cat. Use a small, clean lightweight leash or harness. Get your cat used to wearing the leash or harness in your home before taking your cat somewhere.
- Carpeting for Animals and Nail Trimming
  - At South Dakota State Fair, the 4-H member must provide a carpet square

for showing his or her cat. If a member practices with the cat on a piece of carpet, the cat will be comforted by a familiar surface and smell.

- The claws on all four paws should be trimmed.
- Care of Kittens and Cats
  - Kittens and cats must have a clean and full water dish.
  - Litter boxes are optional; however, be aware that cats may be in their carriers for several hours. It is advisable to feed cats several hours before the time of the show.
- Cat Personality
  - Temperament of the kitten or cat is important in the judging process. Points will be deducted for fearful, uncontrollable, or aggressive animals.
- Ribbons
  - Ribbon placing follows the Danish system of purple, blue, red, and white.
- Animal Possession Requirement.
  - Kittens/cats must be in the possession of the exhibitor by May 31 of the current year.
- Animal Safety
  - Picking up your cat.
  - Put one hand under the chest behind its forelegs. Grasp both hind legs and tail with your other hand.
  - Harnessing/leashing your cat.
    - When taking your cat outdoors or away from home, you should use a harness and leash. The harness should not be too tight, but it should also not be so loose that it will slip off. Use a small, light leash. Practice with the leash so that your cat becomes accustomed to wearing it.
  - Carrying your cat.
    - Always carry your cat in the safety carry (fig. 1). Grasp the cat's forelegs between your thumb and fingers, and have at least one finger between the

cat's legs. Support the cat's chest in the palm of your hand. Then, with your opposite hand grasping the nape of the cat's neck, you may tuck the cat's rump and rear legs either under your elbow and against your body or riding on your hip.



Figure 1. 4-H member, Bailey, and her cat Kali demonstrate the safety carry

### 2.3. Cat Showmanship

Showmanship is a 4-H Youth-in-Action activity. The purpose of showmanship is for 4-H members to develop skills and knowledge about the animal shown and then to present the animal and themselves publicly to a showmanship judge.

Showmanship provides 4-H members with a meaningful experience where they can practice and improve their handling and sportsmanship skills. Showmanship gives 4-H members the opportunity to present themselves and their cats to the best of their ability. It is important to remember that 4-H showmanship is not the same as professional showmanship in competitive events for purebred cats.

#### 2.3.1. Tips on Cat Showmanship

1. Please relax. Remember, everyone is here because they love their cats. They are not here to criticize if you forget something or if your cat gets scared. Everyone is here because they like cats and like watching them. In addition, your

cat will relax more if you are relaxed.

2. Remember to handle your cat gently but with firmness (not too rough or too tight). The entire time you are showing the cat, you can stroke and soothe the cat with your hand. The more you practice, the more your cat will become accustomed to being shown.
3. Remember that this is a new and scary experience for your cat. If your cat scratches, growls, tries to escape, or fidgets, he is just being a cat. The judge will only take points away if you lose your temper or get rough with your cat. Just stay calm and do the best you can. Smile! This is your kitty; show you are proud of it.

### 2.3.2. Procedures for Showmanship

#### Presenting your cat

1. Pick up your cat with one hand just behind its front legs and one hand just in front of its back legs. Lift the cat up, stretching it out slightly so that the judge can see how long the cat is.
2. Show the judge the cat's side, then turn and show the cat's head, then turn and show the cat's other side, then turn and show the cat's behind. (Practice this several times so that the cat becomes familiar with being picked up like this, and so you can make the turns in a smooth fashion. Practice with your cat at a steady pace. Make the practice sessions short and more frequent, rather than having long sessions where your cat may start to resist and squirm.)
3. Put the cat down on the table facing the judge and lift the front of the cat up by gripping just behind the front legs. Hold him up tall with his back legs still on the table so that the judge can look at the cat's tummy. Put the cat's front legs back down on the table.

#### Examining your cat

1. Try to keep your cat turned sideways to the judge as you examine the cat. Most cats will huddle down with their tummy on the table. You can gently "tuck" the cat so that she looks like a compact loaf of bread, her paws underneath her and her tail curled around her.

#### 2. Body parts.

a. The goal of this part of your presentation is to show the judge that you know the parts of a cat's body and what is typical of a healthy cat. One way to remember everything is to look at your cat—starting at the head, comment on each part as you work your way back to the cat's tail.

b. Start with the cat's head. Feel the skull, face, chin, and neck for any lumps or scratches or anything that should not be there. Talk to the judge as you do this. Now look at each of the cat's eyes and into each ear. Your cat's eyes should be clear without discharge, and its ears should be clean and free of ear mites, scratches, or discharge. You may say something like, "Now I am checking each eye; they look clear and bright. I am checking the ears for mites, infection, or scratches; my cat's ears look fine."

c. Continue to talk to the judge as you examine your cat. Tell the judge what you are looking for as you check each body part.

d. Lift the lips on the side of your cat's face to expose her teeth for the judge's inspection. Do not force the cat to open its mouth.

e. Next, examine the cat's body. Think of this as giving your cat a massage. As you do this, you are feeling for bones that are not right, for lumps, bumps, or cuts. Tell the judge what you are feeling as you do this. Start at the neck and work toward the back. Feel under the jaw and the neck, the shoulders, the body, the tummy, and each leg. Also look at all four paws.

f. Lift the tail and check the cat's backside. You are looking for anything wrong—e.g., blood or a dirty bottom—that could indicate diarrhea.

g. Comment on your cat's weight. If you can feel the bones easily, the cat is probably too skinny. If you feel lots of rolls of fat and loose skin, your cat could be overweight. A nice, firm body that doesn't feel bony is just right.

h. Brush the fur back on your cat so the judge

can see her skin. Comment on the color of the skin and if there is any dry or irritated skin.

i. Do the pinch test to make sure the cat is not dehydrated. If you pull or pinch a fold of skin up and it goes s-l-o-w-l-y back in place, the cat may be dehydrated.

j. Brush the fur back, then forward into place. Blow on the fur so it fans out from the skin. Comment on the fur. Is the fur soft? Is the cat shedding? Is its hair matted?

k. Put your cat back into the “bread loaf” position—the cat sideways to the judge, tucked up, legs underneath, and tail curled. Stand straight and tell the judge you are done examining your cat.

### 2.3.3. Your Appearance for 4-H Showmanship

- Look nice when you are showing your cat. Be sure that your hands are clean, as the judge will be watching your hands as you show the different body parts of your cat. Wearing colored nail polish is not acceptable.
- Your hair should be nicely combed and pulled back if it is long.
- Wear either the 4-H t-shirt or a white shirt or blouse with either short or long sleeves.
- Wear closed-toed shoes or boots. No sandals or flip-flops.

### 2.3.4. Responding to the Judge’s Questions

- Learn as much as you can about your cat. Things to know:
  - when your cat was born (the year and the time of year)
  - your cat’s gender (male or female) and if it has been spayed or neutered
  - what your cat eats
  - any special characteristics (examples are being a good mouser, being scared of loud noises, etc.)
- Study curriculum or other resources about kittens and cats (including the body parts diagram contained in this publication). Included in this publication is a study guide sheet for each age division (Beginner, Junior, and Senior).

### 2.3.5. Typical Showmanship Questions

#### Beginners

- How old is your cat?
- Is your cat spayed or neutered?
- What are some signs of a healthy cat? (or) How do you know when your cat is sick?
- How many bones does a cat have?
- How long does a mother cat carry the kittens before they are born?

#### Juniors

- What vaccinations does your cat need?
- What are mother and father cats called?
- How many calories does your cat or kitten need every day?
- How long will the average cat live?
- What are some characteristics of a “fixed” cat?
- What is special about a cat’s tongue?

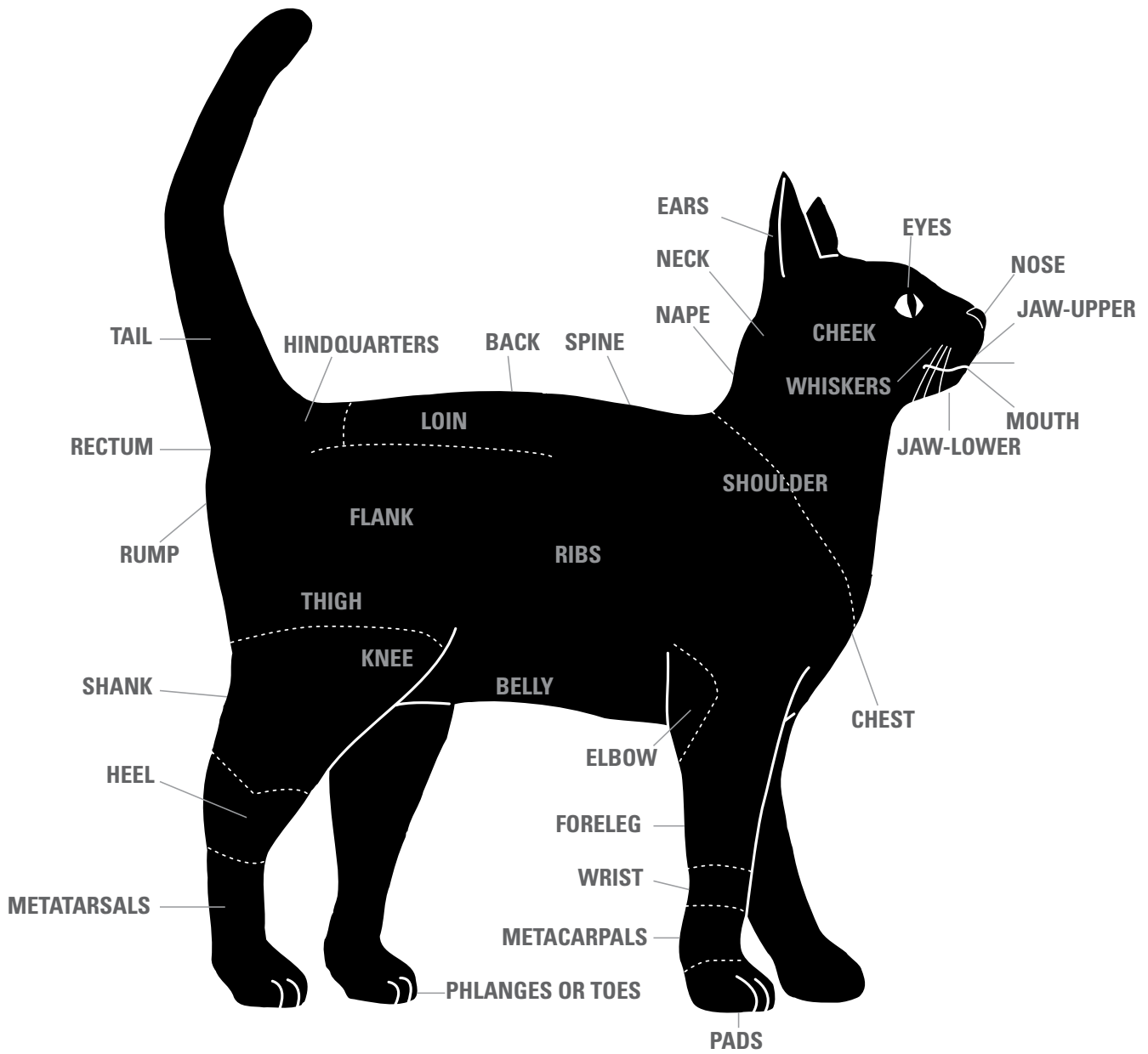
#### Seniors

- What are the symptoms of rabies? (Alternative diseases/maladies that may be asked about: panleukopenia, chlamydia, rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, feline leukemia.)
- What diseases/illnesses does “fixing” your cat either prevent or reduce the chances of?
- When and where were cats domesticated?
- What is the flehmen reaction?
- Why is protein (or fat or carbohydrates) important in a cat’s diet?
- What are some signs a female cat is in heat?
- Why are there often kittens of different colors in the same litter?
- What is the normal body temperature of a cat?



### 2.3.6. Parts of a Cat

It is important to know the names of the parts of a cat's body. This is helpful in telling your parents or veterinarian how your cat is feeling or behaving. Below is a diagram of a cat's body parts.



## 3.0 STUDY GUIDES

### 3.1. Study Guide for Beginners (Ages 8-10)

#### Health

- A cat needs current vaccinations every year, as recommended by your veterinarian.
- If you do not want to have kittens, a cat must be neutered or spayed.
  - A female cat is spayed (the uterus and ovaries are removed)
  - A male cat is neutered/castrated (the testicles are removed)
- A healthy cat has the following qualities and characteristics:
  - has bright, clean eyes
  - has a glossy coat
  - has a clean nose
  - has a good appetite
  - has a nice pink tongue and gums
  - is curious and playful
  - uses a litter box daily

#### Physical Characteristics

- A cat stands on the tips of its toes (like a ballerina).
- The whiskers are used to help sense things.
- Cats can live as long as 20 years with proper care and nutrition.
- Cats have 244 bones.
- Molting is when a cat sheds its coat in the spring and the fall—it is renewing its coat for the season change.

#### Nutrition

- Milk can cause diarrhea, so give only in very small amounts as a treat, not as a regular part of the diet.
- Use common sense for food amounts. If your cat is heavy, feed less. If your cat is too thin, feed more.
- Do not feed dog food to your cat (dog food does not contain enough fat).
- Occasional use of table scraps is OK, but do not use every day.
- Best food combination is a dry cat food with small amounts of canned cat food.

#### Reproduction

- A female cat carries kittens for about 2 months before they are born.
- Kittens open their eyes 9 or 10 days after birth.

### 3.2. Study Guide for Juniors (Ages 10-13)

#### Health

- A cat needs current vaccinations every year as recommended by your veterinarian. Ask your veterinarian about these vaccines:
  - rabies
  - panleukpenia (pan-luke-o-pea-nee-a)
  - chlamydia (cla-media)
  - rhinotracheitis (rhino-tra-key-mee-ya)
  - calicivirus (ca-lee-che-virus)
  - feline leukemia (feline lou-key-mee-ya)
- Signs that your cat may be sick:
  - It is hiding.
  - It is unresponsive, not playful, and/or not curious.
  - It has dull, mattery eyes
  - Its coat is dry and coarse or matted.
  - It has an increased or decreased appetite.
  - Its litter box habits have changed, or it is making frequent trips to the litter box.
  - Its gums and/or tongue are pale or whitish.
  - It is crying or howling.
  - It has diarrhea.
- A neutered or “fixed” cat is
  - less likely to wander,
  - less likely to get into fights,
  - healthier,
  - quieter (less yowling).

#### Physical Characteristics

- The average cat lives 12–15 human years.
- A cat ages differently from a human. There is no accurate way to calculate age however, an approximate way to figure the age of a cat (compared to you, a human) is to figure that a cat is about 15 human years old at the end of its first year, nine more years at the end of its second year. Every year thereafter it ages an

average of 4 years. For example:

For a 7-year-old cat	First year =	15 years
	Second year =	9 years
	<u>Next 5 years (5 x 4) =</u>	<u>20 years</u>
	Total	44 years

- Whiskers supplement the vision and hearing of a cat by helping sense the width of openings and changes in the environment.
- The teeth are designed for biting and tearing food, not for chewing.
- The tongue is specialized. It is made to hold prey, lick meat from bones, and can curl for lapping up liquids.
- A cat has very good hearing. It can hear sounds two octaves higher than humans.
- Cats have a good sense of smell. A cat's brain center for smell is large.

### Nutrition

- A cat needs about 1 pint of fresh water per day. They like it best when it is clean and cool in a glass or ceramic dish and in a separate place from the food.
- Most pet cats do not get enough exercise, so diet is very important to maintain the best weight.
- Kittens need about 400–500 calories per day.
- Adult cats need about 350 calories per day to maintain a good weight.
- It is important to read the labels on the cat food to make sure your cat is getting the right nutrients.

### Reproduction

- A cat has kittens in 63–69 days.
- A queen is a mother cat; she has a litter of kittens.
- A tom is a father cat.
- To identify the sex of a kitten, look under its tail:
  - The backside of a female will look like an "i" (a hole and a slit).
  - The backside of a male will look like a ":" (two holes).
- Fixed cats are healthier because the body concentrates on staying healthy instead of reproduction. Also, there is nearly a zero chance of developing certain health problems,

such as cancers of the reproductive system.

## 3.3. Study Guide for Seniors (Ages 14-18)

### Health

- Rabies is a viral disease of the nervous system; the disease is passed from mammal to mammal and it is always fatal within 7-10 days. Symptoms are a change in attitude, irritability, erratic behavior, excessive salivation, uncoordinated muscle movements, and weakness—which leads to paralysis. Rabies can be passed to humans.
  - The rabies vaccine should be administered annually.
- Panleukopenia, or cat distemper, is a viral infection of the digestive system. It is almost always fatal. Symptoms are diarrhea, vomiting, weight loss, fever, and depression.
- Chlamydia is a serious upper respiratory infection. Symptoms include infected eyes, sneezing, and nasal discharge.
- Calicivirus is a viral infection that leads to upper-respiratory diseases. Symptoms include sneezing, infected eyes, discharge from the mouth, coughing, fever, weight loss, and a runny nose.
- Rhinotracheitis is an acute infection of the respiratory tract and eyes, often leading to blindness. Symptoms include sneezing, infected eyes, fever, weight loss, and a runny nose.
- Feline leukemia is a contagious virus that shows itself as a wasting disease. Feline leukemia eventually kills the cat's resistance to antibiotics, infections, and tumors. An infected cat may have wounds that do not heal.
- Normal cat temperature is 101–102 degrees F.

### Physical characteristics

- Cats mark territory in the following ways:
  - Un-neutered males will back up and spray urine (called spraying).
  - By scratching things.
  - By rubbing their head and nose against something.
- Scratching is also used to sharpen the claws.
- Rubbing their head and nose against someone

is also sign of affection.

- Cat's eyes have a third eyelid called the nictating membrane—a pale, skin-like structure inside the inner corner of each eye whose purpose it is to remove dirt and debris by automatically sweeping across the eye when the eyelid is shut.
- The erect earflap of the ear is called the pinna. It catches sound waves and funnels them to the eardrums. Pinna are flexible, point forward, and can move sideways and back.
- The Jacobson's organ is a small pouch at the back of the roof of the mouth that is lined with receptor cells. It is used to detect smells.
- When a cat holds its mouth half open it is called flehmen response; the cat is identifying smells with its Jacobson's organ.
- A cat has a double set of vocal cords and can make 75–100 different sounds.
- Cats do not sweat; they cool down by radiating heat from the tongue, nose, and footpads.
- A cat's body should have good balance. Balance refers to the body conformation. It includes the body type, head type, bone structure, facial type, coat length and types, colors and patterns, and other physical features. Balance and proportion are of greater importance than any single physical feature of your cat.

## Nutrition

- Protein is required for proper growth, for regulating body systems, for heat, and for energy.
  - Kittens need 30–35% of their diet from protein-rich foods
  - Adult cats need 20–25% of their diet to be protein
- Carbohydrates are needed to provide energy.
  - About one-third (33%) of the diet should be carbohydrates.
  - Carbohydrates need to be cooked because uncooked starch is difficult for cats to digest and can cause diarrhea.
- Fats are a source of heat and energy, improve skin condition, tone the nervous system, and

are important for resisting disease.

- Kittens need 25–30% of their diet to be fats. (Fat are an excellent source of calories for kittens.)
- Adult cats need 20% of their diet to be fats.
- A low-fat diet for a healthy cat can lead to decreased resistance to disease and dry, scaly skin.

## Reproduction

- A newborn kitten weighs about one-fourth of a pound.
- The first substance a kitten drinks from its mother is called colostrum. Colostrums provide immunities against disease until the kitten can build its own resistances. The mother produces colostrums for 2–3 days and then begins producing regular milk.
- A queen will go through a heat cycle (when it is receptive to mating), which lasts 7–10 days. Symptoms of a cat in heat:
  - Calls or yowls loudly.
  - Rubs against everything.
  - Its vulva becomes enlarged and reddens.
- A queen can mate with several different toms during its heat. A kitten will look like its father, which can result in several different colored kittens in one litter.
- When a tom senses a queen is in heat, he will be increasingly belligerent and aggressive.
- A tomcat penis has small papillae (barbs), which ensures that the mating will be successful. The barbs cause the queen to release her eggs.
- Neutered males have a decreased risk of prostate problems and cancers and no risk of testicular cancer or other testicular problems.
- Spayed females have a decreased risk of breast cancer and no risk of ovarian and uterine cancers or other ovarian/uterine problems.
- Kittens can be fixed as young as 8 weeks old. The younger they are when fixed, the quicker they recover.