Joe Mock is a computer science major. At his alma mater, Indian Creek High School, he was an active participant in the school’s theatrical productions. At NIU, he mostly enjoys quieter activities, including reading and playing video games. He is particularly fond of this essay because it details the special experience of adopting his first dog on his own.

Joe wrote this research paper in Laura Bird's English 105 course.
Looking for the Perfect Fit

MLA Format

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When you look at a dog, what do you see: A faithful companion? A rambunctious puppy? Or maybe even a life-long friend? Choosing a dog can be a life-changing factor that will affect you and your family for the better. Deciding what type of dog is right for you is the most important step in selecting one for the first time. To find the right breed for you, there are some things that you need to take into account, such as the dog’s gender, age, need for physical maintenance, activity level, and size. These are a small sample of factors to consider when searching for a dog, but they can have a major impact on your choice.

Choosing between the genders may seem like a simple choice, but many first-time dog owners say that a female dog is a good choice because they are supposedly less trouble. However, Chris Walkowicz says this is “untrue—I’ve known males just as sweet as any female. They do not have heat cycles as females do, and if they are neutered, they don’t suffer hormonal surges at puberty” (32). In my own experience, I have found female dogs to be more troublesome than males. The last female dog I had was a Rottweiler. She was very friendly with the people she knew, but she was also wary and slightly aggressive toward strangers, especially the mail carrier. The male dog that I currently have is a Golden Retriever who is very calm and attentive. He loves to meet new people and welcomes almost anyone instantly. Just because you have heard that male dogs can be unruly does not mean that every breed is like that. You may be surprised by how well-behaved some males can be. Also it may be hard at times to find a female dog of a specific breed because “most breeders keep a number of females for future litters but house only a male or two. Thus, males are more often available to the pet-buying public” (32).

Another point to take into consideration when looking for a pet is its age at the time of its adoption. This can often be the deciding factor for searching families. For instance, as pointed out by Jenna Stregowski, “Puppies require the greatest amount of training and attention, especially over the first six months. Be prepared to dedicate much of your time to housebreaking and raising your new puppy.” Maybe you do not have the
open schedule to train a puppy in the few months following adoption. What are you supposed to do when you leave to go to work and come back to a house of torn shoes and chewed up furniture? Training a puppy can be tough work that requires a lot of patience. Thus, an adult dog can be a great choice. I adopted the female dog I mentioned earlier from an animal shelter when she was an adult. This was a great decision because she had already been trained by a police officer; she easily adjusted into the lifestyle of her new home and learned new commands efficiently. Sometimes, you may get lucky and find that the dog has been trained to a satisfying degree. However, just because the dog is an adult does not mean they have been trained properly, so you should still expect some degree of dedicated training initially.

While all dogs need basic grooming, certain types need more maintenance based on their coat type. You should consider how much time you are willing to invest in a dog’s maintenance before deciding on one that requires significant attention. If you pick a dog that has hair that keeps growing, then routine grooming is necessary. While brushing the hair yourself is a simple task, you could even go the extra mile to get some professional grooming to make that pup look beautiful (“Selecting a Dog”). Though you may suspect long-haired dogs to shed more often, most short-haired, smooth-coated dogs actually shed more, so be prepared to use that broom frequently. If you do have a big shedder on your hands, realize that some grooming tools can help to minimize the problem.

Other things to look out for are floppy ears. Dogs with floppy ears are more susceptible to ear infections and require frequent, thorough cleaning. It is also good to be aware of the breeds that tend to drool. Dogs included in this group are Mastiffs and Bloodhounds. I have seen many owners of this dog type actually carry around what they call a “slobber cloth” in order to wipe up the drool. With so many things to look out for, you may feel overwhelmed, but do not be; in hindsight, these are all just little things to worry about.

While some breeds are known to have more energy than others, breed does not always determine the dog’s activity level. Every dog needs exercise, so make sure you can provide it. For instance, “if you know you can not commit to more than one or two casual walks per day, then you will probably be better off with a lower energy dog, such as a Basset Hound. If you are looking for a dog that can be a jogging partner, agility competitor or ‘disc dog,’ consider a breed like the Border Collie” (Stregowski). If you find your dog is barking constantly, destroying your home, or digging up the yard, you should conclude that they are most likely in need of more activities. As Stregowski goes on to say, “Many behavior problems are the
result of excess energy.” Always remember that every dog requires some form of exercise and that this should never be overlooked.

The last factor to consider is the size of the dog. You might already know the size dog that you want. Perhaps you are looking for a massive breed to share the bed with, or maybe you want a small lap dog that you can carry places. If you have no idea, then choosing a medium-sized one could be a safe choice. Remember that large dogs need room to move for themselves and their tails. As Stregowski puts it, “they need ‘wagging space’ to avoid injury to the tail or damage to household objects.” Another thing to remember is expense; the bigger the dog, the more the food, supplies, and medical treatments it will need, and that increases the cost of dog ownership. On the other side of the spectrum are the “kick dogs,” as my uncle affectionately would call them. It can be easy to forget that some small dogs can be delicate and vulnerable. Being stepped on is a very realistic issue that can cause serious injury. Small dogs can also be more sensitive to cold temperatures, so be prepared to keep them warm in the winter. Although they can be tiny in comparison, smaller dogs also need just as much attention as larger dogs.

Choosing a dog to be your companion is a longtime commitment that should not be taken lightly. Being educated about what you are getting yourself into is always helpful, no matter what the issue. Now that you have read up on some common things to consider when looking for a dog, go and read some more. Talk with a friend who has a dog, or maybe even watch some Animal Planet. It does not matter how you do it, just learn as much as you can before you jump in headfirst.

Works Cited

