

A chiweenie with an overbite and 1.9m followers: how Tuna and Instagram's other top dogs rake in thousands per post

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What pet(s) do you own, or would like to own?
- What do you think makes certain animals popular pets?
- What animals do you think are especially cute and why?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the wordpool in the article. Then use the words to complete the definitions.

adorable	connected to	expert	freedom	social change
animal shelters	cuteness	fluffy	promote	unexpected
close-ups	empathetic	followers	resist	wrinkled

- soft, with lots of hair or fur, often used to describe animals _____
- related or linked with something or someone _____
- having small lines on the skin, often because of old age _____
- to try not to do or accept something _____
- photos or videos taken from very near the person or thing _____
- the ability to act or speak as you want _____
- able to understand how other people feel _____
- big differences in how a society works, often to make life better for people

- people who regularly watch or read what someone shares online _____
- making people feel love or affection _____
- the quality of being attractive in a sweet or pretty way _____
- surprising; not planned _____

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13. to advertise something to make people interested in it _____
14. places that care for and protect homeless or unwanted animals _____
15. a person who knows a lot about a subject _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. Our new puppy is so _____ that everyone wants to hold it.
2. Sara is a real animal lover and works at the local _____ at weekends.
3. Your gift of flowers was totally _____ – it was a real surprise, but I love them.
4. Anna's stress may be _____ to the fact she works 60 hours a week.
5. My rabbit is so _____ that I have to brush its fur every week.
6. When I spend too long in the bath my skin becomes very _____.
7. I try to _____ eating chocolate every day, but it's hard!
8. Most people want the _____ to be able to make their own choices.
9. A(n) _____ friend will always listen to your problems and try and understand them.
10. Some young people are fighting for _____ in their communities.
11. James has over two million _____ on social media.
12. Zac likes photography and took some amazing _____ of insects.
13. Fashion companies often use social media to _____ new products.
14. The speaker was a(n) _____ on climate change.
15. The _____ of the baby pandas at the zoo made them very popular with visitors.

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Pampered poms and Chappell Roan-loving pugs are taking over social media – but what makes a successful petfluencer and how much can they earn?

Ellie Violet Bramley
30 April, 2025

- 1 Tuna is a small dog called a chiweenie – a mix of a dachshund and a chihuahua. His tongue sticks out when he sleeps, and his neck looks a bit wrinkled. But despite this, Tuna has 1.9 million followers on Instagram. People love watching him dress up as different characters or just seeing close-ups of his funny face.
- 2 Tuna's online career took off in 2012. Since then, he has received thousands of comments from fans who find him adorable. One comment says, "He looks like someone's grandpa sleeping on the couch after eating too much."
- 3 Joshua Paul Dale, a writer who studies cuteness, says Tuna is an example of 'gap kawaii'. 'Kawaii' means cute in Japanese, and 'gap kawaii' is when something is cute because it also looks a bit strange or unusual. Tuna's face is not perfect, but that's exactly what makes people love him.
- 4 Tuna isn't the only popular dog online. There's Loki the wolfdog, who enjoys the outdoors; Jiff the pomeranian, who can walk on two legs and has world records; Doug the pug, a favourite of celebrities like Dolly Parton; and Maya the samoyed, who can move her ears to music.
- 5 Why are these dogs so interesting? According to Jen Golbeck, an expert in social media, they all have something special. "They look different from most dogs," she says, "but they are also very cute in unexpected ways."
- 6 This strong feeling of cuteness is the reason people follow these dogs. Joshua Dale says that when we see a cute dog online, it can make us feel happier. After that, we feel better, more relaxed and even more empathetic. Cute content, especially fluffy dogs, can make us feel less stressed.
- 7 Jiff is one of the fluffiest dogs online. He often wears costumes – a unicorn, a leprechaun, or just comfortable clothes. Maya looks like she's always smiling, which also makes people feel good. "Smiles are connected to cuteness," Dale says.
- 8 Loki the wolfdog is very different. He represents a wild and free lifestyle. Some people follow him because they want to escape from everyday stress or city life. Social media expert Samantha Cameron says Loki gives people a feeling of freedom, which many miss in modern life.
- 9 But there are also some important questions. Some people worry about dressing up animals or treating them like humans. Many of these dogs were rescued from animal shelters, which is positive. But others come from dog breeds that suffer from health problems.
- 10 Even with these concerns, it's hard to resist cute dogs. "They sneak in under the radar," says Dale. We don't think too hard – we just react with love and interest.
- 11 And there's money involved, too. Studies show that pet influencers often get more attention than human ones and people are more likely to buy the products they promote. These dogs can make thousands of pounds per post. For every 10,000 followers, a dogfluencer might earn around £200 a month.
- 12 Golbeck says dog content becomes more popular during difficult times. Oona Hewitt agrees, saying these dogs bring comfort and humour when life feels uncertain or lonely. In times of social change, dogfluencers can cheer people up.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False according to the information in the article. Correct the false statements.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Tuna is a mix of two different dog breeds: a dachshund and a chihuahua. | True / False |
| 2. Tuna has more than 2 million followers on Instagram. | True / False |
| 3. 'Gap kawaii' means something is cute because it is perfect in appearance. | True / False |
| 4. Jiff the pomeranian holds world records for his abilities. | True / False |
| 5. According to experts, cute dog content can make people feel less anxious. | True / False |
| 6. Maya the samoyed is known for being able to move her ears in time with music. | True / False |
| 7. For every 10,000 followers, a dogfluencer might earn approximately £200 per week. | True / False |
| 8. Experts suggest that dog content on social media becomes less popular during difficult times. | True / False |

4 Key language

a. Match the expressions from the text to their definitions.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. to stick out | a. to become popular or well-known quickly |
| 2. to dress up | b. to happen or cause to happen without people being aware of it |
| 3. to sneak in under the radar | c. to have a similar appearance to |
| 4. to look like | d. to make someone feel happy when they are feeling sad |
| 5. to cheer up | e. to put clothes on a child, toy or animal |
| 6. to take off | f. to push outwards and be easier to see than normal |

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b. Choose the correct expression from the previous activity to complete the sentences. Use the correct form.

1. I bought Isla some chocolate to help _____ her _____ after a bad day.
2. Most of the children _____ as superheroes for the school party.
3. I think Maya really _____ her mother.
4. There were several mistakes in the report, but they _____, and nobody noticed them for some months.
5. In my brother's latest school photo, his ears really _____!
6. Balvir's new YouTube channel really _____ after one of her videos was 'liked' by a celebrity.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you follow any social media accounts that have animals or pets? What do you like about them and how do they make you feel?
- Do you think seeing cute animals online can really reduce a person's stress or improve their mood? Why or why not?

6 In your own words

a. Research online to find information about the ethical treatment of animals and pets. Then write a discursive essay to answer the following question:

- Is it okay to turn your pet into an online influencer to make money? Why or why not?

b. Present your essays to your classmates and explain your opinions.