

Answers to Pause and Reflect Boxes in Chapter 16 Animal Communication and Language Con Slobodchikoff

Pause and Reflect 16.1

Answers will vary but one approach to this question is to realize that it is communication signals, rather than words, that are important in defining language. If you substitute *signals* for *words* in the Design Criteria for Animal Language, you will see that these criteria can be applied to a number of different types of signals, such as visual and olfactory signals, as well as acoustic ones. The challenge, however, is to decide how to define and describe what constitutes a meaningful signal.

Critics of the assertion that American Sign Language (ASL) is an actual language have said, until recently, that ASL lacks syntax and grammar, and cannot be considered a real language. However, research has shown that ASL has a grammar of its own, which can be different from English. For example, a single sign can convey the same meaning as an English sentence. In some ASL sentences, the syntax of hand movements doesn't change but facial expressions change the meaning of the hand movements.

Pause and Reflect 16.2

Body language lacks some of the Design criteria for animal language. For example, body language does not have displacement and productivity. Some signals used in body language are learned and satisfy the criterion of cultural transmission. However, other signals used in body language appear to be instinctive, with humans from different parts of the world exhibiting the same signals in the same contexts. Since body language is such an important medium for communication among humans, one possible way of looking at body language is to consider it a language that has some, but not all, of the criteria. Perhaps not all of the criteria are necessary for a communication system to be considered a language.