

THE  
FRENCH BULLDOG



BREED STANDARD  
ILLUSTRATED

Illustration of the Breed Standard  
for  
The French Bulldog



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## BRIEF HISTORY OF ORIGIN: THE FRENCH BULLDOG

The French Bulldog is a relatively small, compact dog of bulldog type that developed from the British bulldogs during the 1800's. When bull-baiting and other blood sports were banned in England in 1836, the bulldog would have met its demise except for a handful of fanciers determined to preserve its unique characteristics.

At that time, there were also people who bred small versions of the bulldog for pets and novelties. When the Industrial Revolution in England mechanized the lace-making industry, displaced workers from the Nottingham area relocated to France where factories were not yet mechanized. These lace makers took their miniature bulldogs with them.

The French fell in love with the comical little bulldogs. They became all the rage with fashionable ladies of the evening, the demimonde, and were immortalized by artists like Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec. Demand became so great for the "toy bul- lies" that virtually all specimens available were imported to the Continent, and the breeding of French Bulldogs began in earnest. Wealthy Americans visiting France also fell victim to Frenchie charm and returned to the U.S. with small bulldogs; they became instrumental in the development of the new breed.

Some of these early dogs were as small as 10 pounds, and both prick and rose ears were common. It is believed that small terriers and Pugs were crossed with bully types; while this may be true, reliable records do not exist. Although details are obscure, modifications were made on the Continent until the "French Bulldog" became a distinguishable breed.

Debates ensued over whether this new breed was English or French, which type of ear was correct, and other fine points. The result is today's French Bulldog—possessing the heavy bone, the broad chest and narrower hips, and the short face and upturned jaw of their English ancestors while being smaller, having the distinctive bat ear and livelier expression, and being more active, athletic, and agile.



Illus. 1: Bulldog, French Bulldog, Boston Terrier

*(Please note that the Bulldog and Boston Terrier are depicted here only for purposes of comparison with these more familiar breeds and are not intended to represent illustrations of their individual breed standards.)*

The following pages contain the Official Breed Standard for the French Bulldog (printed in **bold type**), as approved by the French Bulldog Club of America on June 10, 1991, along with illustrations and discussion.

## BREED STANDARD FOR THE FRENCH BULLDOG

**GENERAL APPEARANCE**—The French Bulldog has the appearance of an active, intelligent, muscular dog of heavy bone, smooth coat, compactly built, and of medium or small structure. Expression alert, curious, and interested. Any alterations other than removal of dewclaws is considered mutilation and is a *disqualification*.

“Compactly built” means a short bodied dog compared to dogs of most breeds of the same height. Its legs and body should show strong, muscular development.

The expression should never be dull or sour but rather intelligent and bright. This is a distinguishing feature of the French Bulldog.



Illus. 2: A correct French Bulldog

**PROPORTION AND SYMMETRY**—All points are well distributed and bear good relation one to the other; no feature being in such prominence from either excess or lack of quality that the animal appears poorly proportioned.

The “ideal” French Bulldog should have a compact body with roach back, a large squarely formed head, broad front, wide and well-rounded spring of ribs, tuck up of the loin, and hindquarters relatively narrow in relation to its forequarters. It has a substantial amount of bone for a dog of its size. All of these features must be bound together, so that all the points are in harmony. The eye should be so impressed by this harmony and balance that no one feature dwarfs the other points or is unduly accentuated.

**INFLUENCE OF SEX**—In comparing specimens of different sex, due allowance is to be made in favor of bitches which do not bear the characteristics of the breed to the same marked degree as do the dogs.

Typically, dogs display larger heads, broader chests, and more muscular necks and shoulders than bitches. These are correct masculine characteristics.

Likewise, bitches **should** be noticeably feminine, and they should not be penalized in any way for lacking masculine attributes.



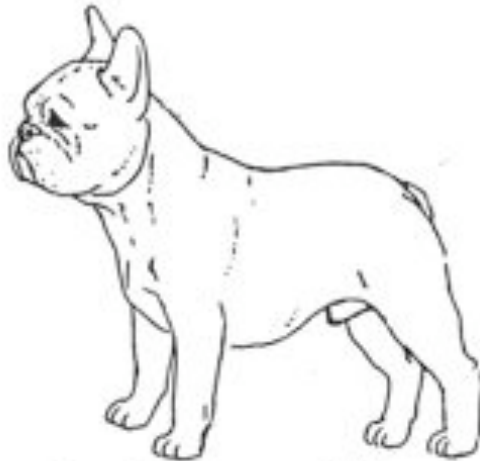
Illus. 3: Comparison of dog (left) and bitch (right)

**SIZE, PROPORTION, SUBSTANCE:**

**SIZE**—weight not to exceed 28 pounds; over 28 pounds is a disqualification.

**PROPORTION**—distance from withers to ground in good relation to distance from withers to onset of tail, so that animal appears compact, well balanced, and in good proportion.

**SUBSTANCE**—muscular, heavy bone.



Illus. 4: Correct, well-balanced



Illus. 5: Incorrect, lacks substance



Illus. 6: Incorrect, too "bully", overdone



**HEAD**—Head large and square. Eyes dark in color, wide apart, set low down in the skull, as far from the ears as possible, round in form, of moderate size, neither sunken nor bulging. In lighter colored dogs, lighter colored eyes are acceptable. No haw and no white of the eye showing when looking forward. Ears, known as the bat ear, broad at the base, elongated, with round top, set high on the head but not too close together, and carried erect with the orifice to the front. The leather of the ear fine and soft. Other than bat ears is a *disqualification*. The top of the skull flat between the ears; the forehead is not flat but slightly rounded. The muzzle broad, deep and well laid back; the muscles of the cheeks well developed. The stop well defined, causing a hollow groove between the eyes with heavy wrinkles forming a soft roll over the extremely short nose; nostrils broad with a well defined line between them. Nose black. Nose other than black is a *disqualification*, except in the case of the lighter colored dogs, where a lighter colored nose is acceptable but not desirable. Flews black, thick and broad, hanging over the lower jaw at the sides, meeting the underlip in front and covering the teeth, which are not seen when the mouth is closed. The underjaw is deep, square, broad, under shot and well turned up.

In describing the head as “large and square,” the Standard draws attention to what should be the initial impression conveyed when viewing the correct French Bulldog head. This type of head is in harmony with the short, heavy body.

The word “square” is not intended to be construed in a literal sense. By comparing the vertical measurement from the top of the skull to the extreme point of the lower jaw bone and the distance between the outer points of the cheek bones, it will be found that these points will come within the proportions of a square.



Illus. 7: Correct head

Between the ears, the skull should be flat or level (Illus. 7). The forehead, that portion of the skull above the eyes and extending to the space between the ears and across this entire part of the head, should be somewhat rounded. The actual shapes may be partially obscured by the loose skin that forms corrugated wrinkles upon the skull, forehead, and cheeks.

The stop lies in the frontal bone between the eyes; its center marks the beginning of the nose and forms a sharp, downward angle from the nose to the base of the stop. The stop forms a short, curved groove between the eyes. Sometimes the angle formed by the stop is hidden by wrinkles but can be felt by pressing back the folds of the wrinkle at this point.

The term “muzzle” as used in the Standard means all of the upper and lower jaw in front of the eyes and stop. When it is said that the muzzle should be well laid back (generally referred to as “lay-back”), it refers to the center portion of the muzzle from the nose and to the junction of the upper lip with the lip of the lower jaw. To be correct, the nose should be extremely short and well set back in the skull.

Beginning at the front, the nose should gradually slant outward to its juncture with the upper lip, which should continue the same general outward slant until it reaches the lower lip. This feature is a distinctive characteristic (Illus. 8).



Illus. 8: Correct lay-back



Illus. 9: Incorrect lay-back

The lower jaw of a dog with an incorrect lay-back does not curve upward enough to create the correct angle (Illus. 9).

The muscles of the cheeks of a French Bulldog should be well developed but not exaggerated to the point that it detracts from the square appearance of the head. The flews include all the loose skin covering the sides of the upper jaw extending at the sides below the under jaw and meeting the upper lip so as to completely cover the teeth when the mouth is closed. The flews should be thick and broad adding to the correct breadth of the foreface. That part covering the upper jaw and occupying the center portion of the side of the foreface (usually referred to as the "cushion") should be full and deep. It should properly fill out this portion of the head and accentuate the breadth of the foreface. A hollow in this part of the foreface constitutes a fault, because it gives a shallow or pinched appearance (Illus. 10).



Illus. 10: Incorrect, lack of fill

The nose of a French Bulldog, while short, should be relatively broad with large nares (nostrils) and a well-defined line between them. Large nares are essential to the health of all breeds with shortened nasal passages, so that a sufficient amount of air can enter the lungs with minimal effort.



Illus. 11: Left, correct nares—Right, incorrect (pinched) nares

It is not enough for a French Bulldog to have an undershot jaw—most do; the important thing is its curving sweep. The curve should begin at the hinge on each side of the head and extend in a downward circular sweep, reaching its greatest depth about midway between the hinge and the center front. Toward the center front, it should take a rather sharp upward curve, forming a juncture with the upper jaw to hide the teeth when the mouth is shut (Illus. 12). The curvature can best be determined by feeling the bone from the hinge to the center of the mouth. The most common faults in structure of the underjaw are: too straight, too short, too narrow, and lack of upturn at the center front (Illus. 13); another common fault is an underjaw too pointed at the end which narrows the foreface (Illus. 14).

Another malformation is the “wry” mouth where the front portion of the lower jaw is uneven or misshapen. This defect mars the symmetry of the foreface and is very undesirable.



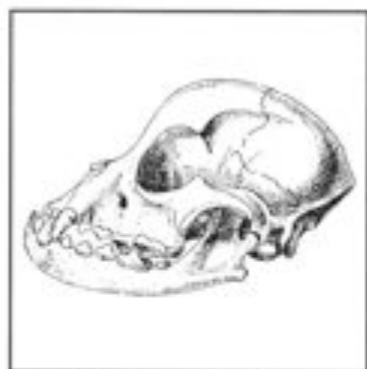
Illus. 12: Correct lower jaw upturn



Illus. 13: Incorrect, jaw too straight



Illus. 14: Incorrect, underjaw too narrow



Illus. 15: Correct bite

The personality of the French Bulldog is largely seen in their eyes. A round, dark eye with no white visible when looking straight ahead expresses the alert, wide awake, vivacious character of the Frenchie. A bulging or deeply set, and/or almond-shaped eye is not desirable. A lighter eye—not a light eye—is acceptable in lighter colored dogs.

Perhaps the most distinctive features of a French Bulldog are its ears. They are unlike those of any other purebred dog. This characteristic must be preserved—their shape, correct carriage, and placement. Carried erect and set high on the head but not too close together, they should be nearly parallel and rounded at the top (Illus 16).



Illus. 16: Correct ear shape and placement



Illus. 17: Incorrect ear set at sides of head



Illus. 18: Incorrect ears, too pointed.



**NECK, TOPLINE, BODY**—The neck is thick and well arched with loose skin at the throat. The back is a roach back with a slight fall close behind the shoulders; strong and short, broad at the shoulders and narrowing at the loins. The body is short and well rounded. The chest is broad, deep, and full; well ribbed with the belly tucked up. The tail is either straight or screwed (but not curly), short, hung low, thick root and fine tip; carried low in repose.

The top line of the neck should form a slight but graceful arch beginning at the junction of the neck and the skull and extending, but gradually decreasing, to about half way down the neck. It then forms a short curve to the withers.

The correct formation of the body is essential to the health, strength, and vitality of the dog as well as to its true type and character. To be in good proportion and balance with the large, square head, the body should be short and broad fronted. The chest should be deep and capacious with its forward ribs well rounded to enhance the desired broad fronted appearance and well let down between the heavily boned forelegs. The brisket should begin to taper up at the beginning of the abdominal cavity forming a convex curve up to the small, well tucked up waist following the top line of the body. This broad, deep formation is necessary to provide plenty of room for heart, lungs, and other internal organs. Narrow fronts, contracted chests, and flat ribs are all defects that adversely affect the health and stamina of the dog.

The back of the French Bulldog should be short for its height with each section—shoulders, chest, loin, and hips—closely and firmly united to convey the impression of strength. While broad at the shoulders, beyond the ribs the body should begin to narrow especially at the loin (Illus. 22). Close behind the shoulders there should be a slight downward curve to the back gradually rising to the top of the loins. From this point, the spine should curve downward until it reaches the tail set. This latter portion of the back, because of its likeness to the curve of a wheel, was originally termed “wheel back”; now it is more commonly known as “roach back.”



Illus. 19: Correct topline, tuck up, and tail set

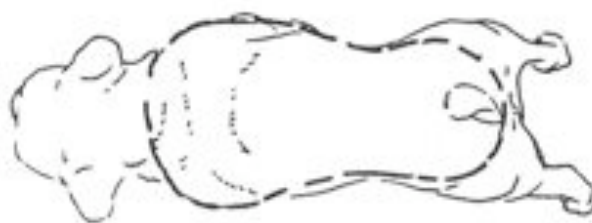


Illus. 20: Incorrect, topline too level, gay tail

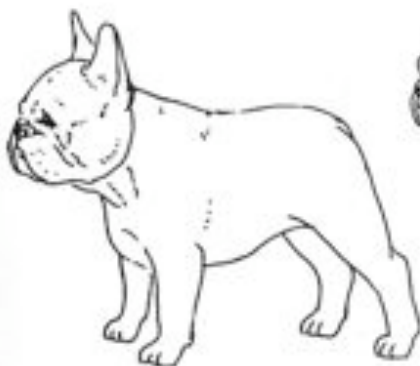


Illus. 21: Incorrect, camel back

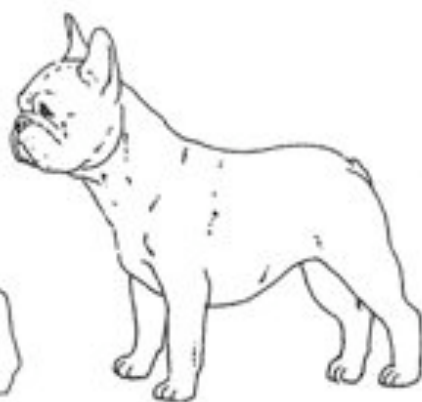
Illus. 22: Correct,  
pear shape when  
viewed from above



Illus. 23: Correct neck

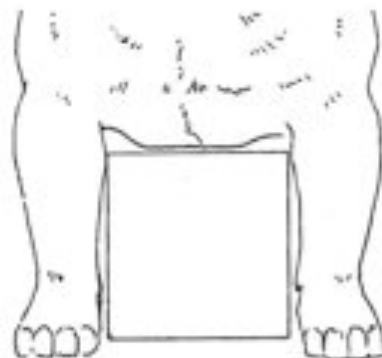


Illus. 24: Incorrect,  
neck too short



Illus. 25: Incorrect,  
neck too long

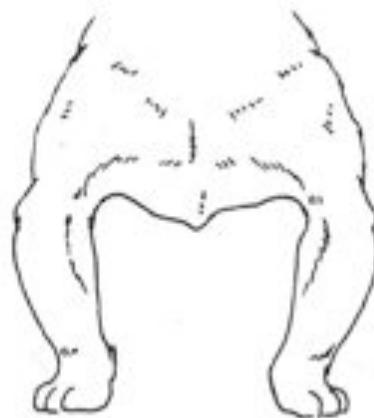
**FOREQUARTERS**—Forelegs are short, stout, straight, muscular, and set wide apart. Dew claws may be removed. Feet are moderate in size, compact, and firmly set. Toes compact, well split up, with high knuckles and short, stubby nails.



Illus. 26: Correct forequarters

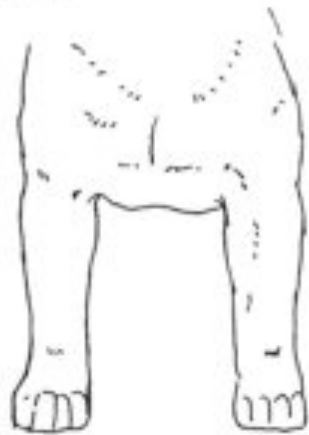
The French Bulldog should have good width of front. The space created between the front legs, the chest, and the ground should be nearly square (Illus. 26). To exhibit this characteristic, the forelegs must be widely placed, well formed, of proper length and musculature, with good formation of the shoulder and elbow. The pasterns are straight, and the feet are only slightly turned out.

Width may be produced by misplacement at the elbows which creates incorrect movement. This, combined with weak pasterns and feet turned outward, is often called a "fiddle front" (Illus. 27).



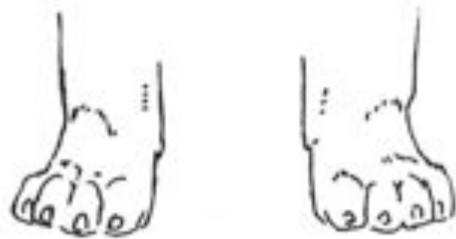
Illus. 27: Incorrect, "fiddle front"

A front that is too narrow is not in balance with other aspects of French Bulldog structure and does not allow for the breadth of chest desired.

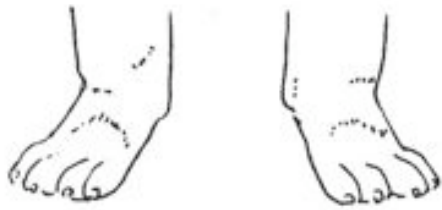


Illus. 28: Incorrect, front too narrow

A compact, muscular, heavily boned dog such as the French Bulldog should have sound, compact, well-padded feet to support its weight. The foot is of medium size, well split up, with high knuckles (Illus. 29). Weak pasterns and splayed toes are both unattractive and unsound (Illus. 30 & 31).



Illus. 29: Correct foot



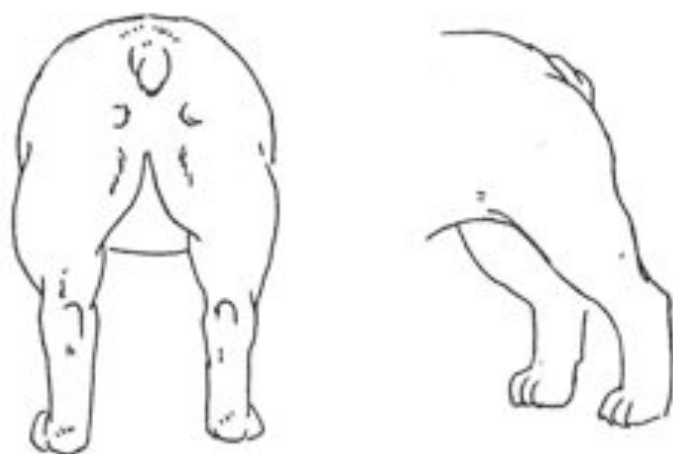
Illus. 30: Incorrect, weak pasterns



Illus. 31: Incorrect, splayed feet

**HINDQUARTERS**—Hind legs are strong, muscular, longer than the forelegs so as to elevate the loins above the shoulders. Hocks well let down. Feet are moderate in size, compact, and firmly set. Toes compact, well split-up, with high knuckles and short, stubby nails; hind feet slightly longer than forefeet.

Strong, muscular hindquarters are necessary to provide the drive necessary for good movement. This movement is an aspect of conformation which is often given little consideration in French Bulldogs, however to be the active, athletic dog it should be, a Frenchie must exhibit sound structure throughout. A French Bulldog should have legs that, when seen from the rear, drop straight from the hips to the ground with the stifle and feet turned slightly outward. From the side view, it should exhibit moderate angulation (Illus. 32). A dog with this conformation stands firmly and moves gracefully as desired.



Illus. 32: Correct hindquarters

Perhaps the most common defect of the hindquarters in French Bulldogs is the too straight stifle (Illus. 35). Hocks of this conformation are usually weak or double jointed, inclined to bend backwards, and create a stilted gait in the rear. Dogs with back feet rotated inward (Illus. 33) often exhibit a gait with back feet crossing each other when moving which is undesirable.



Illus. 33: Incorrect,  
feet rotated inward



Illus. 34: Incorrect,  
"cow-hocked"



Illus. 35: Incorrect,  
straight hock



**COAT**—Coat is moderately fine, brilliant, short, and smooth. Skin is soft and loose, especially at the head and shoulders, forming wrinkles.

**COLOR**—Acceptable colors—all brindle, fawn, white, brindle and white, and any color except those which constitute disqualification.

All colors are acceptable with the exception of solid black, mouse, liver, black and tan, black and white, and white with black which are *disqualifications*. Black means black without a trace of brindle.

Many French Bulldogs may appear to be black, but it is likely there will be at least a few lighter colored hairs when examined more closely. This is common in this breed, and dogs so marked qualify as brindle.

**GAIT**—Correct gait is double tracking with reach and drive; the action is unrestrained, free and vigorous.



Illus. 36: Correct stance



Illus. 37: Correct movement



Illus. 38: Correct, good reach and drive

Because the French Bulldog has a broader front than rear (Illus. 38), the hind feet will track inside the steps of the front. It should move gracefully and powerfully.

**TEMPERAMENT**—Well behaved, adaptable, and comfortable companions with an affectionate nature and even disposition; generally active, alert, and playful, but not unduly boisterous.

The French Bulldog's bright, intelligent, lively personality makes it a wonderful companion and these traits should be apparent in its expression and demeanor.

#### **DISQUALIFICATIONS:**

- Any alteration other than removal of dew claws
- Over 28 pounds in weight
- Other than bat ears
- Nose other than black, except in the case of lighter dogs where a lighter colored nose is acceptable but not desirable
- Solid black, mouse, liver, black and tan, black and white, white with black; black means black without a trace of brindle