

## How to Introduce Cats

As we all know, cats are intensely territorial beings. Bringing a new cat home can trigger the territorial panic switch in your existing cat. Never just put them in a room together in hopes they'll work it out. Does it work sometimes? Sure, but they will most likely not magically work out how to be friends.

Here are steps that will give you and your cats the best chance for smooth integration.

### Step One – Prepare resident cat, Create area for new cat and Feeding

Before you bring your new cat home, there are some fundamental steps to accomplish that will give you a significant leg up on the process:

**A. No free-feeding** – Make sure you have switched your existing cat over to a routine of meal feeding, rather than free feeding. This will set the stage for both your existing cat and your newcomer to get fed, around the same time, x-number of times per day.

**B. Separate Areas** – Decide where you're going to make the new cats area, so they feel like this space is essentially all their own. This could be the master or a spare bedroom, an office, or even the bathroom when there is no other option. As long as the scent of you is strong, it will help the cat establish a sense of home. In addition, give the new cat soft items that absorb a cat's scent, and basically say "I live here," and allow for rubbing, scratching, or lying in. Beds, blankets, carpets, cardboard scratchers, and scratching posts are all excellent.

Once your new cat demonstrates a notable comfort level in their area, it's time to allow each cat to explore the other's territory without ever laying eyes on each other. This is also an opportunity for key scents—like cat trees, litter boxes, etc.—to take on a shared scent. This is crucial to the "getting to know you" process with cats, so much of their communication is based on scent.

#### Suggestions how to "swap" spaces:

- Carry the newcomer out of their space, put them in the bathroom, and shut the door.
- Allow the resident cat to walk into the newcomer's area, then shut that door.
- Allow the newcomer to explore the rest of the home.

**C. Feeding** – This is all about creating a positive association between the new cat and the resident cat. Very simply, mealtimes will consist of bowls set up on either side of a closed door. These bowls should start out far enough apart so the cats will walk up, eat, and walk away without incident, but close enough that they sense there's another cat on the other side of the door. From there, we gradually move the bowls closer.

### Step Two – Visual Access

With both cats now acutely aware of the other's scent, it's time to let them actually see each other. It's a mistake, though, to assume that they will be just as cordial once the visual element is introduced. Take the feeding back all the way to where they can see one another and eat with little or no disruption. And then, do the move-bowls-closer-to-the-door process all over again, but this time, add the element of increased visual access.

**A.** First, you have a choice to choose a barrier – Do you simply crack the door, or set up a pet gate or screen door? A pet gate works better than a baby gate because pet gates are high and have a walk-through door in them, choose something they can visually see one another but not cross to each other. And be sure to supervise the feeding.

**B.** Once you've decided on your method, drape a blanket over that gate or use clothespins to hang it from the screen (or, perhaps less effectively, a cracked door). This gives you a much greater sense of control over the degree of visual access because you can move the blanket gradually. For many cats, this added layer of security makes all the difference in getting comfortable with their new friend.

### Step Three – Bring Them Together

**A.** The idea here is to get both cats in a room together and keep things as harmonious as possible for an increased amount of time. Remember, the worst thing you can do for any kind of in-person/no barriers introduction, is to bring both cats into a shared space without giving them something to do. In that ill-advised scenario, the other cat becomes their “something to do,” resulting in a “stare down” that turns into a “throw down.”

**B.** Now from time to time you’ll have to end this session early and that’s ok. When introducing cats during this time, it’s all about reading the room for any warning signs and being ready to act quickly. So it’s important for you to have a plan in case conflict unfolds and, again, it’s ok if it does.

Here’s a checklist to help you feel prepared in case anything happens.

- Fights usually start with the chase. Chasing very often ends in a room, in a closet, or under a bed or a piece of furniture you never thought was big enough for one cat, let alone two. Control the chaos by controlling the space, block anything they can get under [beds or couches] and seal off any open doors.
- Body language - watch for signs of fear or aggression such as crouching, hissing, low growl, standing sideways, and tail and hair on back standing up.
- Be ready to block the sight between them - have something solid enough that you can place it between them, and they can’t bust through it and is high enough that you don’t have to bend down to place it between the two cats.
- In the event of a serious breakdown - when despite your best efforts, a fight breaks out, a blanket can be a good friend. Just toss it over one of them, scoop them up, and remove them from the room.

**C.** The goal is pretty simple: You’re bringing one cat into a room where there’s another cat who is already engaged in a high-value, fully engrossing activity. Your challenge is to keep them preoccupied for as long as possible through treats, positive reinforcement, play, and love without that stare down/throw down happening.

A great suggestion is having a partner to assist you in the process:

- **Start with One Cat:** Begin by playing with only one cat in the room first. Make sure they’re engaged and keep them occupied... either with treats or a toy.
- **Bring in the Other Cat:** Casually have your partner bring the other cat into the room and immediately engage them. In a perfect world, you would lead the cat into the space with whatever is their favorite food or toy.
- **Keep Going:** It’s very important to maintain a rhythm of play once in the room. This is where your partner’s help is invaluable, because they can work with one cat while you do the same with yours.
- **End the Session:** The session will end in one of two ways: either the cats will end it or the humans will. It goes without saying that you would prefer the latter every time.

**D.** Your Final Goal: Once you are secure without having to end the session prematurely, and it’s a ritual that has become a part of the everyday cycle, you are pretty much home free. From there, you can break down the door/gate barrier for mealtime and end the session by feeding the cats on the side of the room that they occupy.