

*In Your Cat Won't Do That!, author and former professional cat-sitter Stephen Taylor offers guidance on best practices for leaving your cat with a sitter, as well as words of wisdom on a number of standard cat care topics.*

## **Your Cat Won't Do That! Observations and Advice for Cat Companions from a Longtime Cat-Sitter**

By Stephen Taylor

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# **YOUR CAT WON'T DO THAT!**

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Advice for Cat  
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Longtime Cat-Sitter

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**STEPHEN  
TAYLOR**

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# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: YOUR CAT WON'T DO THAT! .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Expectations vs. Reality .....	8
Independent Normal Behaviors .....	9
On the Lookout for Anything Unusual .....	11
<b>CHAPTER 2: NOT BY BREAD—OR TUNA—ALONE: FEEDING THE CAT ...</b>	<b>15</b>
Making the Bond.....	16
Active vs. Passive .....	17
Fantastic Plastic .....	21
The Can or The Bag? .....	22
<b>CHAPTER 3: LET'S TALK LITTER.....</b>	<b>27</b>
The Litter Box .....	28
A Scoop for Every Box .....	30
The Litter .....	35
The Glasses Test.....	40

<b>CHAPTER 4: IF YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR HEALTH...</b>	<b>43</b>
Sitter vs. Vet.....	43
Basic Cat Care.....	46
Veterinary Fundamentals.....	51
The Ultimate Decision.....	52
<b>CHAPTER 5: IN OR OUT?</b>	<b>55</b>
One Sitter's Opinion .....	55
The Not-So-Great Outdoors .....	56
The Airlock Principle.....	58
The Sitter's Dilemma.....	60
Good Outdoor Cat, Bad Outdoor Cat .....	61
Worth a Thousand Meows .....	64
Hello, You Must Be Going.....	70
No Changing Beds in Mid-Nap .....	71
<b>CHAPTER 6: ADDING TO YOUR CLOWDER.....</b>	<b>75</b>
Careful Cat Adopting .....	75
More Cats Does Not Always Mean More Feline Fun .....	81
Old Cats and New Housemates.....	83

*Your Cat Won't Do That!*

The Kitten Issue .....	89
A Special Plea for Some Special Cats.....	95
<b>FINAL THOUGHTS.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>101</b>

## Introduction

It happened every time I took on a new cat-sitting client<sup>1</sup>. In addition to hearing all the usual generalizations about watching someone's cat—where the food was kept, where the litter box was located, how long Kitty and I would be sharing quarters with each other—I inevitably heard a list of particulars describing what the cat was expected to do while I was there:

“Tigger will come in and sit on your lap whenever you're watching TV.”

“Don't leave any clothes lying around on the floor—Garfield will pee on them.”

“Be careful going in and out—Felix will follow you out if you're not careful.”

“Tom loves playing with your shoelaces.”

“Scratchy likes to cuddle up on the bed by your head when you go to sleep at night.”

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: I think of the cats I sat with as my clients just as much as I did the people who hired me. When I mention a “client” or “clients” in this book, sometimes I'm talking about the human companion, sometimes I'm talking about the cat, sometimes both.

*Stephen Taylor*

Throughout my decade of professional cat-sitting, in many homes housing numerous cats, I heard these and similar claims, some several times over. The cat companions who passed along these nuggets of information—really, misinformation—meant well. And, in a very few cases, those observations turned out to be true.

But most of the time these tips turned out to be wrong—so much so that I developed a general rule for all such advice from cat companions: whatever



*Exhibit A: a Cat who Won't Do That!*



*Your Cat Won't Do That!*

you tell me to expect Kitty to do while you're gone...

*Your Cat Won't Do That!*

What's up with that?

This brief book is my attempt to bridge the gap between what cat companions tell the cat-sitter about their feline friends, and what they *should* be saying about them.

In addition to covering that main topic, I will also offer helpful hints about how you should approach having a sitter take care of your cat. This includes advice on feeding; on the litter box (both the box itself and what goes in it); a sitter's thoughts on the 'indoor vs. outdoor' conundrum; the particulars of multi-cat households; and words on other items of interest.

Cats by their nature are very particular about their living arrangements. Every time a cat's trusted humans go away and leave her<sup>2</sup> under a

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this book, whenever I refer to a client cat, I will generally use 'she' or 'her,' unless I'm talking about a specific male cat. This is mainly because the majority of my cat clients have been female; it should not be read as a preference for female cats. Conversely, I will usually refer to 'your sitter' as 'he' or 'him' using myself as the model.

stranger's care, it can be a stressful and frustrating experience for the cat—and, for that matter, for the stranger, too.

Does it really matter if you tell your cat-sitter that Kitty will curl up next to him on the couch while he's watching TV, and instead she curls up on the back of the couch behind the sitter? Probably not.

Does it matter if you tell the sitter that Kitty likes to lay down in the office in the afternoon to catch the sun's rays, and instead she doesn't leave the bedroom for two days? Yes, that does matter. Almost certainly, it matters a great deal.

What's the difference? That's what this book is all about.

We'll start with what your cat will do when the sitter is with her, and what she won't do—and all the ways in which that difference can be very, very important.

**An important note:** As I say, I was a longtime cat-sitter, having spent a decade (2009-2018) taking care of a small stable of regular clients. I also served many years as a volunteer “cat

*Your Cat Won't Do That!*

care partner” at a local animal shelter, where I spent countless hours socializing with hundreds of cats. And, for over thirty years, my family has had several much-loved feline members. That means I’ve spent a lot of time around cats, and I’ve learned a lot about taking care of them. But—and I need to emphasize this—*I’m not a veterinarian*. Anything I say in this book that sounds like cat health advice should be taken as an amateur’s opinion. Always be sure to follow up with your cat’s vet on any question this book raises regarding your own cat’s health. Even if your cat “won’t do that”—or anything else you tell her to do—please take every precaution to keep your Kitty healthy.

Now that we have that detail out of the way, let’s move on to what your cat will and won’t do—and why your sitter needs to know all about that!

## Chapter 1: Your Cat Won't Do That!

You've made your vacation plans. You've booked the flight, the hotel, and the rental car. You've planned your itinerary down to the most minute details. Everything is taken care of. You've even found a reliable cat-sitter, one who comes highly recommended by your good friend. You meet the sitter and go over all the details. You tell him about every habit your furry friend has. Hopefully, you've covered everything your sitter will need to know to make sure your cat has as good a time while you're gone as you will.<sup>3</sup>

As likely as not, however, your report on your cat's habits will be of little use to your cat-sitter. Generally speaking, whatever you've told him about how he can expect Kitty to behave, your cat won't do that!

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<sup>3</sup> You should always give your sitter a list of vital information regarding your cat, especially on a first visit. Providing a kitty checklist—or even a “book” on your cat—always makes everything go smoother for everyone involved.

## **Expectations vs. Reality**

Your instinct to tell your cat-sitter what your cat does is not wrong; information about your cat's behavior will be vital for your cat-sitter. After all, a sitter's primary focus is always one simple matter: Is the cat I'm watching OK?

By OK, I mean: Is the cat safe? Healthy? Happy? Those are your cat-sitter's goals.

How is all that determined? Largely by behavior. The major gauges of a cat's well-being are all behavior related: eating (or not); using the litter box regularly (or not); and what she is doing with the rest of her time. Since cats may be the world's most inscrutable animals, such telltale behavioral signals are the only reliable way to judge whether or not a cat is healthy and happy.

Because your sitter will have little or no experience with your particular cat's normal behavior—especially on a first visit—he will only have what you tell him to serve as a guide to what is normal for your cat. Thus, it's important for your sitter to know just what are your cat's normal behaviors.

## *Your Cat Won't Do That!*

That's where the problem arises. What, in fact, are your cat's "normal" behaviors? All of those tics and traits that you mentioned to the sitter before you left are going to be her normal behaviors... when you're at home. But those behaviors—particularly the ones that directly involve you—are not really all that useful for your sitter. After all, you're not going to be there—that's why you hired a cat-sitter!

When you are not at home, your cat is unlikely to follow most—or perhaps even *any*—of those habits that specifically relate to you. So all of those little things that your cat does that directly involve you, while they may be fun and enjoyable to relate, are not exactly useful information for your sitter.

### **Independent Normal Behaviors**

This raises the obvious question: If your sitter doesn't need to know how your cat behaves when you're at home, then what can you tell the sitter about your cat's normal behavior?

This may seem like an unsolvable conundrum. You may ask, "How can I tell you what my cat does

when I'm not around? I'm not around to see it!" However, the answer is, if you think about it, actually easy and obvious: tell the sitter the kinds of things your cat does when you are around but that don't involve you. In other words, what are your cat's normal behaviors that are *independent* of you? Those are the important baseline behaviors that establish what your kitty does when all is well and she is feeling good.

A good way to figure out what those behaviors are is to keep in mind what you discover your cat doing when you come home from being out for a while. Where is she? What part of the house is she in? Is she sleeping? Has she left signs of playing while you were gone? Such signs can include scattered toys, misplaced (or even broken) objects, maybe a roll of toilet paper that's torn and unwound.

Those kinds of behaviors may seem insignificant, or may even be small or large annoyances, but if such actions are something your cat does regularly—without any evidence of some underlying problem—they can be important signals that, according to your cat, all is well.

## **On the Lookout for Anything Unusual**

Remember, the way to tell if something is wrong with your cat is if she is acting out of the ordinary. Your sitter will always be on the lookout for the primary indicators of your cat's health and well-being: eating habits and litter box usage. Any persistent deviation in those habits will send up a red flag about your cat.

Beyond those basics, however, a more thorough knowledge of your cat's particular behaviors can be invaluable. If Kitty has a habit of pulling the towels off the racks in the bathroom, and your vet has found nothing wrong with her health-wise, then that's a good thing for your cat-sitter to know. If the cat keeps it up, even when some unfamiliar human is occupying her space, then that probably shows that your cat has come to terms with this temporary change in the scheme and concluded that it's acceptable.

Conversely, if you have never observed your cat to spend any time in that back bedroom, be sure to mention that to your sitter as well. That way, if the sitter finds Kitty curled up on the bed in there, especially if she's not doing anything else for long



*Stephen Taylor*

periods of time, that's a pretty good sign that something is wrong.

Having a baseline knowledge of your cat's normal, independent behaviors can be crucial when it comes to a sitter's chief duty: making sure your cat remains healthy while you're away. If Kitty starts deviating from her usual independent behaviors, that can be an important signal that something significant is wrong with your cat—a problem that goes beyond basic peevishness over



*If a nap in the laundry basket is normal, then your cat is saying,  
“It’s all good here!”*

## *Your Cat Won't Do That!*

the fact that you had the poor taste to leave your beloved cat with this weird stranger.

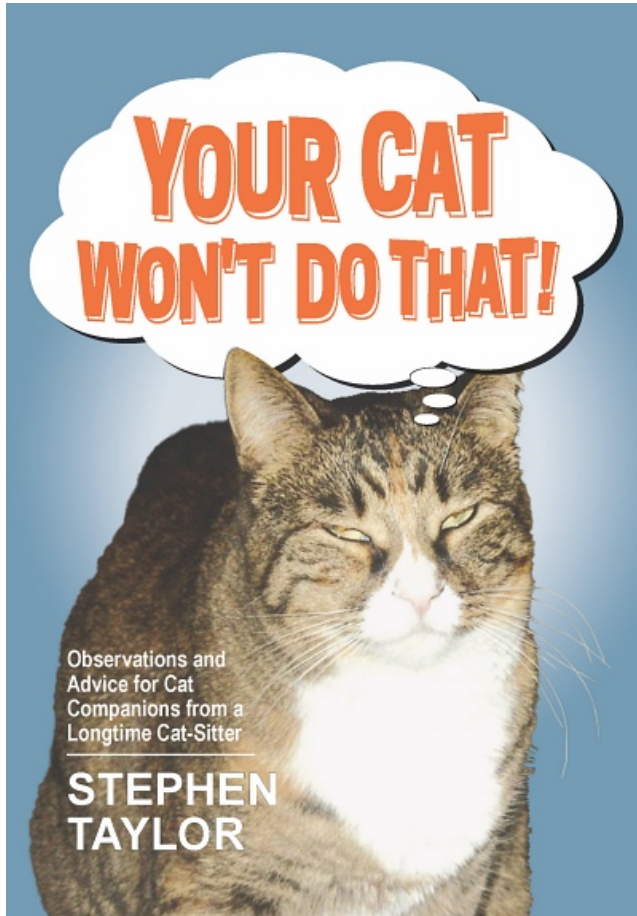
If the deviation is a one-off act—a one-time protest against the change in the routine—your sitter can probably relax and assume that your cat is, if not happy, then healthy at the very least. But if such abnormal behaviors persist, that may indicate that a vet visit is in order. Your sitter's ability to make that judgment can be the difference between a good or a very bad outcome to your trip, for everyone involved.

In sum, when you're giving your cat-sitter—particularly a new sitter, though even an old friend can use refresher now and then—a lowdown on your cat's behaviors, try to focus on the things Kitty does that don't directly involve any members of the regular household. A cat who follows a routine of basic, independent behaviors is a cat who is healthy and happy—exactly the way your sitter wants her to remain.

Of course, the most fundamental cat behavior involves eating. In the next chapter, we'll go over a few feeding-related matters—things that can

*Stephen Taylor*

ensure that your cat gets along well with her new friend, the cat-sitter.



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