



For more info

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Barking

Dogs bark. Barking is one of the things that dogs do. There are many types of barking and reasons for barking. Some are appreciated by people, others definitely are not.

Dogs bark:

- when they are excited
- when they want to play
- in reaction to a stimulus, such as a sight or sound around them
- when they are distressed or isolated
- when they are alarmed at a possible intruder
- as a means of demanding attention or some other response (“let me in”, “let me out”, “feed me”)

There are many different tones of barking. Territorial barking tends to be deep, while excited barking is high pitched. Some dog owners claim to be able to tell what their dog wants by the tone of the bark.

Some breeds and some individual dogs are described as **“reactive”**. This means they are more excitable and more easily aroused to react to things. A reactive dog can easily become a **nuisance barker**. One of the common causes of problem barking is keeping your dog outside, especially having your dog sleep outside at night. There are more sights and sounds to stimulate your dog to bark, and less opportunity for you to give your dog feedback about whether or not to bark.

Barking, nuisance

Basically, dogs bark, but people have the problem. If your dog is barking when you are not home, chances are you do not realise it until a neighbour complains. By that time, they may have become so desperate that they are very hostile, complain to the Council or write angry letters to you, even anonymous ones. Try to avoid this situation. Talk to your neighbours. Ask them if they have noticed your dog barking. Ask them to let you know if there is any increase in barking.

Problem barking takes various forms:

- Barking when you are out – investigate the cause; give your dog more things to do at home such as food dispensing toys and toys that move and keep him occupied, can help
- Barking at night – have your dog sleep inside
- Barking to demand something – don't give it to her
- Barking to come in – let him in only when he is quiet
- Barking at the front door – teach your dog to sit on a mat by the door, and sit to say hello to visitors – if your dog is reactive or unfriendly towards people, get help.
- Barking at objects – usually distraction and re-direction onto a permitted toy is a good approach
- Barking in the car – interestingly, this usually resolves itself when the dog owner establishes a subtle form of leadership by social means, rather than by directly dealing with the behavior in the car
- Barking at people – this should ring alarm bells – it is usually caused by fear, but you seriously need to get help
- Barking at other dogs – this can be excitement, frustration fear or various combinations – teaching calmness and introducing your dog to other dogs carefully is the approach, but you may need help
- Fence-running, and barking at whatever goes past – use a short, sharp hand clap as an interrupter – but you have to teach it first, with a low level of distraction, then build up – then interrupt early, and divert your dog into doing something else.

These are just extremely brief tips. Each one could take a whole article by itself.

Barking on cue

A dog can be taught to bark on command, signal or cue. This is usually referred to as “speaking” and the cue “speak” is used. A common hand signal consists of holding up one hand and “flashing” the fingers then returning to a closed fist position. Some people like to teach the dog to respond to a more subtle body language cue, so that if you are walking in the park and you see an unsavoury character approaching, you can ask your dog to bark without having to go “now Fluffy, speak, speak, speak!” while waving your arms around. If the unsavoury character says “does your dog bite?” you can say “only if I ask him to ... but really he's a woos” and on hearing that word, your dog will start to bark. If you are doing it as a party trick, you can say, “Fluffy, I said woos, not woof!” I will leave it to you to figure out an unobtrusive cue to stop barking.