

BARKING, BARKING, BARKING



Defining Problem Barking:

Problem barking is generally defined as barking constantly for a period of half an hour or more, or more specifically, any prolonged period of barking that irritates your neighbors.

Most barking occurs while the owner is away, leaving the owner (you) with a false idea that his/her doesn't bark at all. Dogs that tend to bark when their owners are gone often start up after the owner is far enough to be unable to hear, and stop minutes before the owner arrives at home.

Why Dogs Bark for Prolonged Periods of Time:

The most common reasons for dogs to bark for prolonged periods of time are boredom and loneliness. Dogs also bark during play, for attention (aside from loneliness, more a "hey look at me!" type of barking), to communicate, and to alert if a stranger or scary object is nearby. If it's a dog, it's more than likely that it will bark.

Determining the Cause:

What's causing the barking needs to be determined before taking steps to eliminate nuisance barking. Ask your neighbors if you leave your house for an extended period of time to see if your dog is a barker. If you're home most of the day, or if your neighbors have heard nothing, then don't worry about it. If the possibility still bothers you, use a tape recorder left in your home to record your dog's activities while you're out.

Barking in the Yard, All the Time:

Outside dogs that bark are barking for attention. It's that simple. Dogs are pack animals, and need to be with their "pack" most, if not all, of the time. It can be argued that some dogs were designed to be outside all the time by the nature of their coat, but that argument doesn't wash with me. My heavy-coated Husky-mix still wants to be where we are. Or rather, wants us to be where he is. He does like it outside, and will spend hours running around in the snow, but we have to be there too.

If your outside dog is barking a lot, go out and get him, play with him, shower him with attention for most of the day, take him for a long walk, or just bring him inside with you. I think you'll find this works much better than any other method I'll mention later on. He is barking because he wants YOU. Loneliness is the easiest thing to cure in this case, and quite possibly the most rewarding for you as well, and I don't mean by keeping your dog quiet.

Boredom Barking:

"I'm so sad and looonely ... "

This is the most common, and it almost always happens when you (the owner) have left the house for whatever reason. This isn't an easy thing to correct. The first step, of course, is to actually discover the problem.

Be Pro-Active:

Don't wait for your neighbors to complain, go and ask them if they hear your dog while you are gone, or try to catch him barking, either on tape, or going home earlier on in the day.

If He Does Bark:

Now comes the fun part. What will work, and how will you know when it does? You may need to ask your neighbors for help.

Things to Try:

1. Crating your dog while you are gone
2. Leave the radio or TV on to give your dog a sense of company and normalcy.
3. Give your dog something to occupy him while you are gone. A Buster Cube, or a stuffed Kong toy works well as a time-consuming, entertaining toy.
4. A companion. Two dogs will keep each other company and entertained when alone, although one has to consider the additional commitment when having two dogs rather than one.
5. Doggie Daycare

Alert Barking:

Many people encourage the alert barking, myself included, for various reasons. For myself, if my dogs don't bark when somebody is knocking on the door, I don't hear them knock. They also alert me when the phone rings.

If you want your dog to alert you to the presence of somebody at the door, in the yard, or anything else unusual, but want him to stop after one or two barks, you can teach the "enough" command. As odd as this sounds, you do this by teaching him to "speak" on command first.

Teaching "Speak" and "Enough":

Capitalize on your dog's willingness to let you know that somebody is at the door. You know he barks, he knows that you know what it means. Now build on that. If your dog is anything like my three, they are gullible enough to believe that a knock on any wood, from anywhere in the house, is a knock of impending strangers.

Sit yourself down, and issue the command : "Speak". As you say it, knock on any hard object. Hopefully it elicits the desired "woof!" from your dog, and he dashes off to investigate.

Now, bring him back. Ideally he shouldn't be dashing off, but this is what dogs do. Repeat. "Speak", knock on wood, "Woof!". Set up your association, command (Speak), reaction (Woof), praise and treat. Repeat

Before you start off on this possibly impractical of doing it, how easily led are your dogs? Perhaps you already have them set to "Woof!" on command without realizing it?

Do any of these situations sound familiar to you?

1. "Who's there?" - "Woof"
2. "Helloooo" - "Woof"
3. "What do you think you are doing?" - "Woof"

If you are nodding your head, saying yes, that's what my dog responds to, then you're all set.

"Enough"

Now he'll speak when you want him to, it's all a matter of using his associating word or phrase.

To get him stop barking on command, it's safest to use an all-purpose word for all kinds of barking, which is why "enough" seems to fit best.

Give him the speak-to-me phrase, whichever it may be, to get him barking. As soon as there's a break in the barking, say it loud and clear: "ENOUGH". And treat him mightily as soon as he looks at you.

You need to be careful to time your command in the second he stops barking, as soon as he is quiet for a second. There might not be more than a second to spare, but grab his attention, holler the command, and treat him fast. Practice this a LOT.

