

Quieting a Barking Dog

Dogs vocalize for almost as many reasons as humans do. Your dog may bark to ask you or another dog to play; to get your attention; to relieve boredom or stress; to express excitement; to (not very politely) request something he wants; or to warn off a perceived threat. You can generally tell fairly easily from context and behavior which of these reasons your dog has for barking.

If your neighbors complain that the dog barks all day while you're away, your dog is probably barking as a source of recreation. If she barks around dinnertime or when you have something desirable, she's probably making a loud request.

If your dog is barking at other people or dogs, watch his body language. Is he lifting his front legs off the ground or bowing so that his shoulders and head are low and his rear is up? Or are his front legs stiff and rigid? Is her tongue hanging out or licking at the person or other dog? Or is her tongue drawn back and not visible from the front?

If your dog's front legs are stiff and his tongue is drawn back, he is probably not happy about the presence of that person or dog. Hold the highest-value item you have in front of your dog's nose and lure him away from the situation. See our section on [Socialization](#) for help in making your dog more comfortable around dogs or people. If his tongue is hanging out and he is bending his front elbows by lifting them up or bowing, he is making playful, appeasing gestures and you just want to turn the volume down a bit.

Recreational Barking

If your dog barks a lot when you're not at home, or when you're not paying attention to her, she is probably barking for recreation. There are several easy steps you can take to give her other, more enjoyable activities, and cut down quickly on the barking.

1. If you keep your dog outside when you're away or when you're not playing with him, the first step should be to bring him inside. Things are much more stimulating outside and so there's more going on that will activate your dog's barking. Moreover, it's much more disturbing to your neighbors. Set up a quiet room indoors and put a radio on quietly so that you eliminate or cover up many of the noises that are stimulating your dog to bark. See our section on [Housetraining](#) if you're afraid your dog will have accidents or chew inappropriate items if he's left alone inside. Also be sure to:

2. Provide appropriate entertainment. Dogs need to have activities just as much as we do – but they can't read the newspaper or watch television. They need doggy things to do, and it's easy to provide them! The quickest and easiest way is to stuff several hollow chew toys with your dog's daily food ration. That way, not only do breakfast and dinnertime become fun game time, but also your dog develops a strong preference for chewing on those toys when she's bored or stressed. See Open Paw's handout on how to [Learn How to Stuff a Chew Toy](#).

Barking from Excitement or Demand

Sometimes a dog's barking is his equivalent of a little kid's whining – they do it for attention or because they want something. Sometimes your dog may bark out of sheer excitement, either because people or dogs are visiting, or because he's about to get something else that he wants.

The most simple way to gradually phase out this kind of barking is to ignore your dog when she does it, and not pay attention to her or give her the desired food item or toy (if she's allowed to have it) until she shushes.

This can be difficult sometimes, especially at first, because (1) the barking is just plain irritating – that's why it has probably worked in the past to get your dog attention or other desired objects, and (2) if barking has worked in the past for your dog, she's not going to give up right away. At first, she'll probably escalate the barking. Since it's always worked before, she won't be convinced right away that it suddenly doesn't work; she'll think that she just needs to try harder, with more barking! Only after a while and some repetition will she give up on that method.

Be sure that you do also pay attention to her and reward her when he's quietly sitting or lying down. You want him to learn simultaneously that (1) barking does not work to get what he wants, and (2) quietly standing, sitting, or lying down does work to get what he wants.

Actively Shush Training

Another very important thing you can do is to actively train the dogs to shush. First, put the barking on command, so that you can initially work with on this at easier times, such as when she doesn't particularly want to bark. To do this, ask the dog to "speak" and then make a noise (knocking on a piece of wood is usually an effective noise) that will set her off barking. Ask her to shush and waggle a very good treat under her nose. Once she settles down and shushes, praise her and give her the treat. Repeat until she begins to bark immediately upon hearing the request to speak.

After she is barking reliably upon request, ask the dog to bark when she is fairly calm and praise her for doing so; then ask her to "shush" and waggle a treat in front of her nose. When she stops to sniff, offer the treat and praise the dog. Soon you will not need to present the treat to get her to shush, she will learn that the word "shush" is a precursor to a food reward if she is quiet.

Repeat this sequence many times – no matter how long it took him to shush the first time, it will get shorter and shorter with repetition! Once your dog gets very good at shushing when he doesn't particularly want to bark, it becomes much easier for him to shush upon request when he is actively barking at something. Gradually increase the difficulty level (distraction and intensity) until you are able to "shush" your dog at anytime, even when the mail carrier comes to the door!

Really? Ask my dog to bark?

We ask dogs to bark at first (and even actively engage in getting them to bark by ringing a doorbell, knocking on wood, etc.) so that they learn to bark upon request. Once a dog will bark upon request, you can ask him to bark when there are few "bark-inducing" stimuli around, and thus he doesn't feel very much like barking. Consequently, it is easier for him to shush when you request it, and easier to repeat the sequence ("speak," "shush" with waggling treat, dog actually quiets down) until the dog will reliably shush upon request in a relatively calm setting. Once this foundation is set, it will be easier for him to learn to shush when there are exciting stimuli in the area.