

BARKING – 3 BARK RULE

By Posted by D Garrod

Barking has many reasons. Barking IS communication. So for humans we need to ask ourselves, how much barking is too much, AND why is my dog barking? For me, I have a 3 bark rule, so my dogs learn to alert bark only. Below is my process. Determine why your dog is barking. Is it "attention seeking, meaning are they trying to get you to notice them?" Or is it "communication", are they trying to communicate with you or others - the dog down the street, for instance. Are they barking because they are afraid, stressed, or anxious, OR are they overly concerned about sights and sounds, termed distractions or sudden environmental changes (SEC). Each has a different fix.

First, here is my 3 Bark Rule article/blog.

I created the three-bark rule to showcase how easy it is to diminish and even eliminate non-alert barking without using aversive methods. It establishes it is ok to alert bark. It shows the dog you respect his communication and it ends barking with a simple, pleasant cue.

To train the three-bark rule, you start at the end, meaning you backchain the sequence of cues. This is familiar terminology for clicker trainers. If you are not familiar with clicker training head to <http://www.clickertraining.com/> and join the Clicker Solutions Yahoo Groups list to start a lifetime of learning for you and your canine companion.

The entire sequence is "Thank you, 2, 3, Done Cue". You can count out the 2, 3 in your head or simply, say it verbally. Your done cue can be anything – "done", "quiet", "shhhhh", "cookies" etc. I use "done" because I can use it in other training sequences with success. And the thank you portion of the chain signifies you've seen what they are barking "at", confirm it, and indicates you'll take care of it from here. It shows a respect for the bark as a communication tool; not an annoying habit humans hate. Soon your neighbors won't even know you have dogs. Many times my neighbors have said to me "I didn't know you had dogs" or "I didn't know you had two dogs" or "I didn't know you had big dogs, they are so quiet."

Start training your "Done" cue first. Every time your dog is simply being quiet, say your done cue and click and treat. If you see your dog sitting quietly at the window looking out, this is an ideal time to practice the done cue. The key to the done cue, however, is that it also means, "turn away from what you are barking at and return to me". So you also run backwards when you say your word or make it so your dog has to turn away and return to (come to) you for a reward. You can click and treat, meaning you click for the ACTION of turning away from and treat for the POSITION of returning to you to receive their reward. WAIT 3 to 10 seconds before delivering the reward so it is very clear that the done cue does NOT mean you are rewarding "barking". YOU are rewarding QUIET. Your voice must always be happy and always rewarding.

When you are confident you have a great quiet cue established – a pattern of hearing the cue and turning away from whatever the dog is doing, then and only then start the sequence with the barking. "Thank you 2, 3" is one cue. Here's how it will go:

You hear your dog bark.

You get up and go over to where your dog is – and put your hand on their shoulder as you say "thank you". (Later you can eliminate getting up and going, but in the learning stages this part is critical to the communication sequence.)

Resource taken from <http://tlcdogtraining-dgarrod.blogspot.com.au/2009/04/barking-3-bark-rule.html>

Continue with 2, 3 (in your head or aloud) and get ready to cheerfully say – your “done” cue. As you do, run backwards or walk to the kitchen or other room where the reward is easily accessible. If you have trained this cue well, your dog will stop barking and turn away to return to you for their reward – make sure you lavish the reward on (after 3 to 10 seconds of silence) and keep it very upbeat and happy. You can click and treat if you time it properly – Click for ACTION which equals turning away from and Treat for POSITION which equals returning to you for reward and reinforcement of quiet behavior.

After that, prevention and management is in order, so block the dog’s view of whatever is stimulating the barking and get them busy with an activity – prevention and management. You do this so your done cue has value and meaning and that it significantly ends the barking behavior.

Troubleshooting:

What if my dog doesn’t stop barking when I say my done cue?

First ask yourself if you “said it correctly” in a pleasant delivery – not with emotion or aversion – yelling DONE! Is not correct and you are only adding drama and actually barking along with your dog. If you did everything correctly, then you possibly didn’t quite train the done cue long enough to mean silence. Go back to step one and start over.

There has to be a consequence for barking past done and if all is in place, it simply means no reward, and a blocking of view coupled with a relax time for dog – crate, room etc. This will bring the dog down from the adrenaline rush of barking, which caused them to bark after the cue. This must be done without comment, talking or aversion and is simply a time out. Time for you to figure out what piece you might have skipped over, why the barking didn’t end, what you were doing wrong. Then you can regroup and try again later, after you do some practice sessions.

It will take positive reward-based repetitions and proper timing of the clicker to get it just right. The click comes ONLY when the dog hears the word, turns away and trots happily over to you to receive their reward. YOU are NOT CLICKING the bark. Click as the dog is trotting over to you, count 3 to 10 seconds out – depends on the dog – and deliver the reinforcement for good behavior. The more you reward good behavior – NOT barking – the more the good behavior you want will continue. Soon your dog will be counting out his or her own barks. More importantly, they will know their communication is being taken seriously and you value what they are telling you, which increases and establishes a better team relationship.

Other ways to diminish barking:

Teach your dog to speak and then use a done cue. Reward the quiet after 3 to 10 seconds.

Put your dog’s bark on cue, and then never cue it. This is a technique established by Karen Pryor and can be found at <http://www.karenpryor.com/> or <http://www.clickertraining.com/>.

Prevention and management techniques – such as, blocking distracting views, sounds and rewarding for quiet compliance. Not allowing fence running and not leaving your dog unsupervised or bored. Not yelling at at your dog.

So in summary, let’s take a look at why dogs bark in the first place.

- To get you to notice them.
- To communicate to you and others.
- Fear, stress or anxiety.
- Frustration. Can lead to your dog barking at YOU.
- Responding to sights/sounds. (other dogs, people, mailman, garbage truck)

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- Boredom – lack of supervision or human interaction, or when dog is home alone without proper activity preparation.

Once you realize dogs don't bark just to irritate the human species, then you can understand what to do to make barking communication manageable and even enjoyable. Then you can prevent what you don't want by doing the following:

- Keep a log so you can identify what triggers your dog to bark. Then you can be one step ahead in preventing and managing this pattern.
- Reduce exposure to sights/sounds that trigger barking.
- Create more exercise time for you and your dog.
- Make sure they are satiated – proper feeding, play, interactive time, training time, and mental stimulation.
- Keep your dog busy doing something else. If they are working on a delicious Kong, or bone or toy, it is counterproductive to barking. The dog must decide however, what that activity is and then their human must satisfy that need.
- Teach what you DO want. Reward the good behavior. Three-bark rule.
- Actively reinforce quiet or hesitation with your done cue.
- Work with a sound desensitization tape. You can get these with all sorts of everyday sounds, to include show background noises if you have a show dog. This gives you opportunities to practice at various levels of volume, starting with low volume.

Make sure you are following through with your dog's learning consistently in "real life" situations. As these occur, are you doing what you are practicing? Be consistent, persistent, patient and most of all committed to showing your dog what behavior you DO want.

I particularly like to use the three-bark rule and especially the cue "Done" said in a happy conversational tone, because this cue then becomes the end of other activities – done interacting with dogs or people, or done playing or a host of other activities – sniffing, etc. But it must always mean turn away from what you are doing, and return to me. What a great way for you and your dog to begin a lifetime of proper reward-based training techniques that builds your relationship and communication.