

Barking Bowser: Finding the Off Switch

Dogs bark when they are happy, greeting, playing, warning, bored, or just singing along with the other neighborhood dogs. It's a perfectly normal dog behavior just as talking is a perfectly normal people behavior. When we raise our children, we teach them when it is appropriate to talk and when it is not. It's crucial that we do the same thing for the dogs that share our lives. It's nice to be warned of a possible threat with a couple of barks from our dogs, but where is that off switch? The following steps will help you find both the on and off switch for barking so you can control the amount of barking your dog does.

Turning on the bark: Believe it or not the first step is actually to teach the dog to bark—on command.

1. Finding the “on” switch for barking is usually not difficult as most people knows what makes their dog bark. A doorbell or a loud knock on the door (or both) usually works.
2. Get someone to ring the doorbell (or whatever) and say “Speak” simultaneously.
3. When the dark barks, praise and reward the dog saying “Good Speak.”
4. Repeat a few times.

Turning off the bark: Now the dog needs to learn a quiet command to turn off the barking.

1. Instruct the dog to “Speak” or use the trigger that will start the dog barking.
2. Hold a piece of food in front of the dog's nose and let the dog sniff it.
3. Say “Quiet” as the dog sniffs the food. The dog cannot sniff and bark at the same time. Put your finger to your lips to give a hand signal to the command as well. This way later if you are on the phone, you won't need to yell “Quiet” into the listener's ear!
4. Say “Good Quiet” as you let the dog take the food.
5. Repeat the above steps several times over several days or weeks.

Using the commands in real life: Once the dog has an on/off switch for barking, set up situations that are typically a problem (i.e. people or dogs passing the house, a park with dogs or children, a place where people ride bicycles).

1. Start by teaching your dog while on a leash for better control.
2. Wait for the dog to begin barking.
3. After three barks, say “Thank you” just once and then follow it with a pleasant but commanding “Quiet.” If the dog continues to bark uncontrollably, yell “QUIET” and clap your hands loudly. (If you cannot or do not have a loud voice, use a can filled with some pennies or a squirt bottle to startle your dog into a quiet.) Watch your dog's reaction. If the dog startles and does not recover quickly, then you may have a fearful dog and need to back off from being too loud.
4. *If the dog startles and stops barking*, instantly go back to a sweet voice, tell your dog “Good quiet” and give the dog praise and a treat.
5. *If the dog is quiet on his/her own*, be sure to praise the dog. After all, this is the behavior you want.
6. *If the dog continues to bark*, call the dog to you giving a slight tug on the leash if needed and showing the dog a treat. As the dog walks to you following the treat, praise the dog for being quiet. Ask the dog to sit and give the treat. A squeaky toy may also entice a dog who is not interested in food.
7. For a very rambunctious dog, you will have to be very patient with the process. Start with minor things that make the dog bark and build to the more enticing items as the dog learns.

For dogs that bark while you are gone, consider the following:

1. Never leave the dog outside while you are gone. Too many things can stimulate barking.
2. Be sure to leave your dog confined in an area of the house that will not allow the dog access to see outside. Leave plenty of stimulating toys for your dog to play with—a Kong or a buster cube. Hide toys like stuffed Kongs around the house for your dog to seek and find.
3. Be sure not to leave your dog alone for too many hours a day. Find a pet sitter if necessary. A bored dog is a barking dog.