

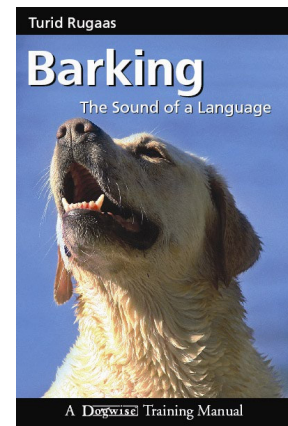
An excerpt from:

Barking. The Sound of a Language

Chapter 1—Barking as Communication

By Turid Rugaas, Dogwise Publishing. 800-776-2665, www.dogwise.com

Permission to reproduce excerpt with attribution granted by Publisher.



Barking and the use of body language are important means by which dogs communicate. Vocal sounds and body language are used by all sorts of animals and people to express a wide variety of needs and emotions. Communication is necessary to be able to live together in a relationship with minimal conflicts and to be able to understand each other well. The key to understanding how to interact with a barking dog is learning how to interpret what a dog is trying to communicate.

This concept applies to humans as well as to dogs. In books and articles about family therapy it is often stated that most of the problems families struggle with arise due to a lack of ability to communicate—to talk with each other. They talk past each other, and accuse each other of “not listening to what I say.” “You never listen to me” is a common accusation, often yelled at the top of the voice, and the yelling becomes louder and louder the more people do not feel they are being listened to.

It is exactly the same with dogs. When we think a dog is not listening, we yell louder and more angrily. Dogs also get frustrated about “not being heard.” They start “yelling” also—especially when no matter how much they bark they fail to make us understand what they are trying to communicate.

It is important for us to teach ourselves to “listen” to what our dogs try to tell us. Ideally we can recognize their attempts to communicate—the calming signals, the small signs of stress—so we can solve problems before there is a real conflict. We need to pick up on the communication as early as possible. Or, if conflict has occurred, and we already feel we have a problem, to start “listening” more intently to what the dog is actually telling us. It is only then we can find the right means to solve the problem in a good way.

We must learn to listen to what the dog is telling us.

So How Do Dogs Try To Communicate?

Dogs have many different ways of expressing themselves beyond barking. Most (but not all) dogs communicate in a similar manner and these expressions can usually be easily recognized by other dogs. Some forms of communication are easy for people to understand, but some unique expressions are harder for people to comprehend without taking the time to learn

about them. Dogs communicate in many ways including:

- Distance creating signals used to keep someone away or increase the distance from another individual. Examples are showing teeth, lunging forward, snapping, biting, growling, and barking.
- Calming signals used to express politeness, solve conflicts, or to show friendliness.
- Body language that express fear or defense. Examples are tail between the legs, crouching, backing up or taking flight, and of course the stress symptoms like peeing, scratching, and shaking.
- Signs of joy. Examples are a wagging tail, licking, jumping, wiggling the whole body, and showing a happy face.

And then there are all the sounds that dog make including:

- Barking
- Whining
- Growling
- Howling

All of these are a natural part of what we can call the language of dogs. They are intended to communicate something to the world around them, and to express the feelings the dog has at the moment. Gaining a better understanding of what a dog is trying to communicate and why he may be trying to communicate when he barks will be the focus of the remainder of this book.

Dog trainer and behaviorist **Turid Rugaas** has been studying canine social language for more than 30 years. Her best-selling book and DVD *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals* has changed the way we think about dogs and brought a greater appreciation for just how intelligent dogs are. She is also author of *My Dog Pulls: What Do I Do?* When not lecturing, Turid lives in a small town in Norway.