

Bark · Body · Context

A compare-the-examples worksheet — read your dog's bark against their body language, the situation, and their usual baseline.

The same bark can mean two different things. The body and the scene break the tie — and your dog's usual baseline is the ruler you measure against. This worksheet pairs with the five worked examples in the Dognition article “What Your Dog's Bark Is Telling You.” For each example, write what your dog actually did in a similar moment, then compare it with their normal.

Read this first. This worksheet records observations, not conclusions. No app, device, or AI bark classifier can tell you what your individual dog is feeling — the published research analyzed recordings of German Shepherds sorted into controlled categories and describes group patterns, not a reading of any one animal. If what you write down worries you, bring this sheet to your veterinarian. Only they can diagnose.

Step 1 — Your dog's usual baseline

Fill this in on a calm, ordinary day before you need it. You can't spot a change unless you know what normal looks like.

My dog's name:

Date baseline noted:

How my dog usually sounds (play bark, door bark, “talking”):

How my dog's body usually looks when relaxed (tail, ears, posture):

How my dog usually greets me / visitors:

What a normal day looks like (sleep, appetite, stairs, play):

Step 2 — Work through the five examples below

Wait for a real moment that resembles an example, then write what you heard and saw in the right-hand column — facts, not labels (“ears back, tail tucked,” not “angry”). Finish with the baseline row: is this your dog being themselves, or is something different?

1 · The doorbell burst

Bark	One sharp burst, then three or four fast, mid-to-low barks aimed at the door.	What I heard:
Body language	Head up, weight forward on the toes, ears pricked, tail high and moving fast, body stiff.	What I saw:
Context	The doorbell, a knock, or a car door outside — nothing has actually entered the house.	What was happening:
Vs. baseline	Reads as an alert bark: reporting a change at the boundary.	Same as usual? ☐ Yes ☐ No — how it differed:

2 · The bark that starts the second you leave

Bark	Begins within a minute of the door closing; repetitive, sometimes rising into howling.	What I heard:
Body language	Pacing in a pattern, drooling, scratching at the door, eyes wide, tail down, refusing a favorite food puzzle.	What I saw:
Context	You have gone; a camera shows it started while you were still putting your shoes on.	What was happening:
Vs. baseline	That cluster points to distress, not mischief — film it and talk to your veterinarian.	Same as usual? ☐ Yes ☐ No — how it differed:

3 · The high, spaced-out bark from the couch

Bark	Short, higher-pitched barks with gaps, each followed by a glance at your face.	What I heard:
Body language	Loose and wiggly, tail sweeping wide, mouth open, maybe a play bow, front paws bouncing.	What I saw:
Context	You are sitting still; the leash or a toy is in view, or dinner is late.	What was happening:
Vs. baseline	Reads as a request, not a warning — the pause-and-look is the giveaway.	Same as usual? ☐ Yes ☐ No — how it differed:

4 · The bark when you touch a hip or take the stairs

Bark	A sudden yelp or low growl-bark, seemingly out of nowhere.	What I heard:
Body language	Stiffening, flinching, lip licking, whale eye, tucked tail, unwilling to jump or climb stairs they used to take.	What I saw:
Context	Nothing frightening happened — the bark came with movement or contact.	What was happening:
Vs. baseline	Read as a possible pain signal, not disobedience — book a veterinary visit.	Same as usual? ☐ Yes ☐ No — how it differed:

5 · The 3 a.m. bark from an older dog

Bark	Monotonous, low, seemingly purposeless — the same sound, repeated.	What I heard:
Body language	Wandering, standing in an odd spot, staring at a wall, hesitant on stairs, sometimes not answering to their name.	What I saw:
Context	It happens at night, in a dog who has never been a night barker.	What was happening:
Vs. baseline	Worth a conversation with your veterinarian rather than a training trick.	Same as usual? ☐ Yes ☐ No — how it differed:

Bringing it together. If several of your right-hand columns say “different from usual” — especially examples 2, 4 or 5 — book a veterinary visit and bring this sheet plus your Bark Log. Dates, times and what changed are the most useful things you can hand over. If everything matches baseline, you've just documented your dog's normal — which is exactly what makes future changes easy to spot.

Sources: Kaunas University of Technology bark-classification research (Prof. Rytis Maskeliūnas), via Newsweek, Sep 30, 2026 · Hare & Woods, *The Genius of Dogs*, Dutton, 2013 · Pairs with the Dognition Bark Log (dognition.com/bark-log) and the guide “How to Train a Dog to Stop Barking.”