

The premise of this protocol is that we accept the fact that our dog is going to react to things like a knock on the front door, random sounds, the neighbor on the other side of the fence who suddenly drops the trash bin lid, etc. In my experience it is unrealistic to expect that we can extinguish this natural response because we cannot ultimately control every potential distraction in the environment. The important thing is that we can effectively interrupt our dog and, after the dog gets rewarded, the distraction has passed and everyone can move on.

**Note 1:** Rewarding the wrong behavior: If you find your dog’s reactivity accelerates in an effort to get rewarded – and yes, they are that smart – we need to channel that desire to “work” into something else.

**Note 2:** Known triggers we *can* control. If we want to limit our dog’s reactions to uncontrollable environmental triggers, we must also do our best to remove known triggers. So, for example, if your dog sits on the couch staring out the window and barks at everything that walks by, you should close the shades if you do not want to be interrupted every time someone walks by.

**Note 3:** We don’t say “thank you” for everything. There are times when this protocol is warranted, and times when we need to simply ignore the dog and ask for an alternative behavior (e.g. “Touch”). Our goal is to be fair and realistic, so you’ll want to work with me on those instances.

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## **Step 1**

Condition the words “thank you” to mean treat. To teach your dog that the words “thank you” mean they’re going to get a reward, simply stand/sit near them (they don’t have to sit or perform any behavior) and say “thank you” in a happy voice and give a tasty treat. Alternate feeding it to them with tossing it on the floor. Do this quickly in succession about 25 times. “Thank you!” + treat – rapidly. (The same way in obedience training you’re conditioning the word “yes” to mean they’re getting ‘paid’).

## **Step 2**

Then, when the dog has simply looked away, or walked away (NOT when it’s barking at a distraction but simply removed its attention from you) say “thank you!” and if they look at you expecting a treat, then you’ll know you’ve successfully conditioned the words “thank you”: they know what it means. When your dog responds this way 9 out of 10 times, move to next step. If he’s not getting it yet, go back to step 1 until he understands that the words “thank you” mean he’s going to get rewarded.

## **Step 3**

Walk away from the dog and wait until the dog’s attention is elsewhere (again, NOT when it’s in full-blown reactive mode), say “thank you!” and reward the dog if it comes running to get a treat. If it doesn’t, go back to step 2. If it does, 9 out of 10 times, move to step 4.

## **Step 4**

Create a distraction for the dog, like have a family member be petting the dog in another room (again, NOT a full-blown distraction...are you getting that we need to work up to that? ;-)) and say “thank you!” and reward the dog when it comes running to get a treat. If it doesn’t, go back to step 3. If it does, 9 out of 10 times, move to step 5.

### **Step 5**

Have a family member create a distraction that normally would result in a fairly big reaction, like knocking on a window (not the front door, yet). When dog is distracted, say “thank you” and reward the dog when it comes running to get a treat. If it doesn’t, go back to step 4. If it does, 9 out of 10 times, move to step 6.

### **Step 6**

Repeat step 5 but with a full-blown distraction, like having a family member knock on the front door. When dog runs to the front door and barks, say “thank you” and reward the dog when it comes running to get a treat. If it doesn’t, go back to step 5. If it does, 9 out of 10 times, you are ready to put the “Thank You” Protocol in action with noises, distractions, whatever your dog reacts to in the house. You must reward the dog’s coming to you a lot in the beginning. Over time, you can intermittently reward them; reward every other time, then every two times, then every 3 times over a 30-day period.

Plan on implementing this protocol over a 1- 2 week period, practicing in 5-minute sessions a couple times a day.