Proposal: Barking Deduction Guidelines

What is the Problem?

The current barking deduction rule is causing inconsistency across competitions due to the subjective nature of the wording. Exhibitors have reported that what one judge considers excessive barking may be viewed as acceptable by another. This can lead to competitors receiving significantly different scores for similar levels of barking, creating confusion and concerns regarding fairness. Without clear guidance, handlers may feel uncertain about what behaviour is permitted and judges may struggle to apply deductions consistently.

What is the Current Rule?

"3.34.1 - Excessive barking or noise. Each judge should make a deduction for this if it is excessive e.g. if in the opinion of the judge it intrudes and spoils the performance."

The current rule allows judges to make deductions for excessive noise or barking. While the intention of the rule is understandable, the term "excessive" is not clearly defined. As a result, judges must rely on their own interpretation when deciding whether barking warrants a deduction and, if so, how severe that deduction should be. This lack of objective criteria increases the likelihood of variation between judges, regions, and competitions.

What Would We Recommend Changing?

We recommend introducing clearer guidance that defines what constitutes excessive barking and provides a standard framework for deductions. This could include examples such as continuous barking throughout an exercise, or repeated barking that disrupts the performance. Consideration could also be given to a tiered deduction system, where occasional isolated barks are treated differently from persistent barking. Providing examples within the regulations or judge guidance documents would help improve consistency while still allowing judges to use their discretion where appropriate.

Points for the ATs to Consider

The ATs could consider whether barking should be assessed based solely on frequency, or whether the context and impact of the barking should also be taken into account. For example, should a single bark during a moment of excitement be treated differently from repeated barking throughout a round? The ATs may also wish to consider whether additional judge training or guidance would be beneficial. Any changes should aim to balance consistency in judging with the need to retain some flexibility for individual circumstances.

Supporting Data

Community feedback indicates that barking deductions are an area where greater clarity would be welcomed. Within the Liaison Council survey, barking was one of the most commonly identified rule areas requiring review. Of the 67 respondents who provided comments on rules and regulations, 5 (7.5%) specifically raised concerns regarding barking deductions and their application. Comments highlighted concerns about inconsistency between judges, with respondents noting that "barking marks seem wildly inconsistent across judges of the same routine" and that the current rule refers to "excessive barking" without clearly defining what constitutes excessive. Some respondents also questioned whether one or two barks should result in deductions when the wording suggests deductions should only apply to excessive barking. This feedback supports the need for clearer guidance to improve consistency, transparency, and fairness in judging.