

Operant Conditioning Examples

Learning

Name _____

Date _____

PART I: ANALYZING SITUATIONS

Read the following examples of operant conditioning and answer the questions that follow.

EXAMPLE 1

Gunther likes to campout in the backyard. He camped-out on every Friday during the month of June. The last time he camped out, some older kids snuck up to his tent while he was sleeping and threw a bucket of cold water on him. Gunther has not camped-out for three weeks.

1. What behavior was changed?
2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened?
3. What was the consequence?
4. Was the consequence added or subtracted?
5. This is (circle one): a. positive reinforcement b. negative reinforcement
 c. positive punishment d. negative punishment

EXAMPLE 2

Every time Gladys raises her hand in class she is called on. She raised her hand three times during the first class, three times in the second and four times during the last class.

1. What behavior was changed?
2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened?
3. What was the consequence?
4. Was the consequence added or subtracted?
5. This is (circle one): a. positive reinforcement b. negative reinforcement
 c. positive punishment d. negative punishment

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EXAMPLE 3

Chester is being reinforced using a token economy. When he follows a direction/command he earns a point. At the end of each day, he can use his points to "buy" free time, TV privileges, etc. When he misbehaves or doesn't follow a command, he loses points. Chester used to call his mom names. Since he has been on the point system, his name calling has been reduced to almost zero.

1. What behavior was changed?
2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened?
3. What was the consequence?
4. Was the consequence added or subtracted?
5. This is (circle one):
a. positive reinforcement b. negative reinforcement
c. positive punishment d. negative punishment

EXAMPLE 4

Sheldon does not go to the dentist every six months for a checkup. Instead, he waits until a tooth really hurts, then goes to the dentist. After two emergency trips to the dentist, Sheldon now goes every six months.

1. What behavior was changed?
2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened?
3. What was the consequence?
4. Was the consequence added or subtracted?
5. This is (circle one):
a. positive reinforcement b. negative reinforcement
c. positive punishment d. negative punishment

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PART 2: IS IT, OR ISN'T IT?

Decide if each of the following items are examples of positive reinforcement. Focus on the highlighted target behavior to determine if it was positively reinforced. Provide a reason for your answer.

1. Harvey sometimes **emails jokes to his co-workers**. This made his boss, Ralph, unhappy because this would slow down office productivity. In order to deal with this problem, Ralph visited Harvey's office and made an angry speech detailing why sending jokes to people at the office has undesirable effects on work efficiency. As a result of the Ralph's speeches, Harvey emails jokes to his co-workers more often than he had previously.
2. Gertrude was learning to read by **saying the sounds associated with each letter of the alphabet when her mother pointed to the printed letter**. When Gertrude said the correct sound when presented with the appropriate printed letter, her mother praised Gertrude. Gertrude enjoyed praise a great deal.
3. In a high school classroom the students were working on sewing projects, but often the level of disruptive noise in the classroom rose so high that the students' work on their projects was impaired. In order to solve this problem, a device was installed that measured the overall noise level in the room. If the students made **little noise or a moderate amount of noise**, radio music would come on. As a result of this procedure, the students made little noise or a moderate amount of noise much more often than they had before, when no radio music was produced by low noise levels.
4. Mookie was having difficulty learning to read so his parents enrolled him in an intensive reading program. The program included a feature designed to motivate Mookie to read. On any day when Mookie **successfully completed a daily reading assignment** his parents removed a cuckoo clock from Mookie's bedroom. As a result of this method, Mookie successfully completed more daily reading assignments than he had before the motivator was used.
5. Mrs. Adler knew her class liked to go on field trips, so every day at the end of the day she put a mark on a board. When the board has accumulated 30 marks, the children could go on a field trip. Mrs. Adler found that as a result of this procedure, the children in her class made more **correct responses on daily quizzes** that she administered and she was pleased with the results.

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6. Three heroin addicts were in a drug treatment program in which they took methadone, a drug that allows addicts to cease taking heroin without encountering unpleasant heroin withdrawal symptoms. As a part of the program, several desirable target behaviors were defined including **passing drug-use tests, arriving on time to the treatment center, and gaining body weight**. When a desirable target behavior occurred, the addict threw some dice. If a winning number came up on the dice, the addict would receive points that could be traded for things such as methadone home-delivery, tickets to events, bus tickets, desirable foods, and free lunches. If the winning number did not come up on the die, the addict received nothing. This procedure strengthened the target behaviors of the three addicts.

7. Flip had just bought a new car. One feature it had was a computer with a voice that told Flip to buckle his seat belt when Mark started the car. As a result of the computer voice, Flip **buckles his seat belt** much more often than he did before.

8. Hortense wasn't doing well in her sixth grade math class. Her teacher told her parents that Hortense handed in less than 50% of her homework assignments. Her parents told Hortense that for any day on which she did not hand in her homework she would be sent to bed right after dinner. As a result of this procedure, Hortense **handed in her assignments 95%** of the time.

9. The teacher in a classroom began telling the students to "sit down" when they engaged in **out-of-seat behavior**. As a result of this procedure, the children engaged in out-of-seat behavior more often than before. Previously, the children were not told to "sit down" when they were out of their seats.

10. Three three-year-old children attended nursery school for three hours per day. It was noticed that the children's favorite activities were running around the room and screaming, but sitting quietly and looking at the blackboard seldom occurred. A procedure was implemented in which, when the children were observed to be sitting quietly and paying attention to the blackboard, they were permitted to run and scream. They immediately did so. When the children were not sitting quietly and paying attention to the blackboard, there were not permitted to run and scream. As a result of this technique, the children **sat quietly and paid attention to the blackboard** much more often than they had before.