

Conditioning, reinforcement and observational learning

Supported GRE teaching and original transfer practice

Identify the evidence

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Distinguish classical from operant conditioning by what is learned

Use the overview measurement lesson VI for research inference.

Concepts 1 (1)

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Classical conditioning pairs a neutral stimulus with an unconditioned stimulus until the neutral stimulus (now conditioned) evokes a conditioned response: bell then food gives bell-evoked salivation. Key phenomena: acquisition, extinction when the CS appears without the US, spontaneous recovery after a pause, generalisation to similar stimuli and discrimination between them. The CS predicts the US; timing and contingency matter. Operant conditioning changes voluntary behaviour by its consequences. Reinforcement **INCREASES** behaviour: positive adds something wanted, negative removes something aversive.

Concepts 1 (2)

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Punishment DECREASES behaviour: positive adds something aversive, negative removes something wanted. Negative reinforcement is not punishment: both escape and avoidance strengthen the behaviour that ends or prevents the aversive event.

Concepts 2

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Reinforcement schedules shape response patterns. Fixed-ratio schedules give high rates with a post-reinforcement pause; variable-ratio schedules give the highest, steadiest rates and resist extinction (gambling). Fixed-interval schedules give scalloped responding that rises near the interval end; variable-interval schedules give steady moderate rates. Ratio schedules count responses; interval schedules count time.

Observational learning needs attention to the model, retention of what was seen, the ability to reproduce it, and motivation; vicarious reinforcement (seeing the model rewarded) raises imitation. Bandura's Bobo doll studies showed children imitate filmed aggression. Modelling extends learning beyond direct experience.

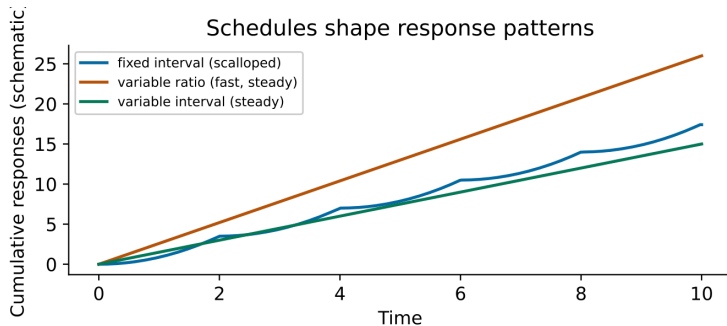
Reason through the worked case

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Access to a game is removed after interruptions, and interruptions decline. An alarm stops after homework begins, and starting increases. Classify both.

Removing access and decreasing interruptions is negative punishment. Removing the alarm and increasing starting is negative reinforcement. The same word removing occurs in both; the direction of change in the named behaviour separates them. These are descriptions of fictional contingencies, not recommended classroom interventions.

Read the reviewed representation



Original schematic for Conditioning, reinforcement and observational learning.
Illustrative relationships and numbers are not research results.

Attempt an unfamiliar case

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Rewards follow every fifth response in one task and the first response after varying time intervals in another. Identify the schedules and the condition that earns each reward.

Pause and write the explanation before continuing.

Check the transfer argument

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Every fifth response is fixed ratio: the count of responses determines reinforcement. The first response after varying intervals is variable interval: time makes reinforcement available, but a response is still required. A response count with variable requirements would instead be variable ratio. A typical response curve is not an absolute law for every task.

Accept a different explanation when its evidence and limits are justified.

Limit the conclusion

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Calling negative reinforcement punishment, or treating any unpredictable reward as variable-ratio; interval schedules pay the first response AFTER the interval.

Original classroom cases are not official questions or personal clinical advice.

Check yourself

Independent retrieval

An unpleasant sound stops after a response, which becomes more frequent. Identify the contingency without using everyday reward language.

Write your reasoning before comparing it with the methods and limits taught in this lesson.