

## Analyzing Examples of Operant Conditioning

There are five basic processes in operant conditioning: positive and negative reinforcement strengthen behavior; punishment, response cost, and extinction weaken behavior.

1. **Positive Reinforcement**--the term reinforcement always indicates a process that strengthens a behavior; the word positive has two cues associated with it. First, a positive or pleasant stimulus is used in the process, and second, the reinforcer is added (i.e., "positive" as in + sign for addition). **In positive reinforcement, a positive reinforcer is added after a response and increases the frequency of the response.**
2. **Negative Reinforcement**-- the term reinforcement always indicates a process that strengthens a behavior; the word negative has two cues associated with it. First, a negative or aversive stimulus is used in the process, and second, the reinforcer is subtracted (i.e., "negative" as in a "-" sign for subtraction). **In negative reinforcement, after the response the negative reinforcer is removed which increases the frequency of the response.** (Note: There are two types of negative reinforcement: escape and avoidance. In general, the learner must first learn to escape before he or she learns to avoid.)
3. **Negative Punishment**--if positive reinforcement strengthens a response by adding a positive stimulus, then **response cost has to weaken a behavior by subtracting a positive stimulus.** After the response the positive reinforcer is removed which weakens the frequency of the response.
4. **Positive Punishment**--if negative reinforcement strengthens a behavior by subtracting a negative stimulus, than **punishment has to weaken a behavior by adding a negative stimulus.** After a response a negative or aversive stimulus is added which weakens the frequency of the response.
5. **Extinction**--No longer reinforcing a previously reinforced response (using either positive or negative reinforcement) results in the weakening of the frequency of the response.

**Rules in analyzing examples.** The following questions can help in determining whether operant conditioning has occurred.

- a. What behavior in the example was increased or decreased?
- b. Was the behavior increased (if yes, the process has to be either positive or negative reinforcement), or decreased (if the behavior was decreased the process is either response cost or punishment).
- c. What was the consequence / stimulus that followed the behavior in the example?
- d. Was the consequence / stimulus added or removed? If added the process was either positive reinforcement or punishment. If it was subtracted, the process was either negative reinforcement or response cost.

a. Billy 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. Billy has not camped-out for three weeks.

1. What behavior was changed? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened? \_\_\_\_\_ (what can you eliminate)
3. What was the consequence? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Was the consequence added or subtracted? \_\_\_\_\_

The process was \_\_\_\_\_

b. Every time Madge raises her hand in class she is called on. She raised her hand 3 times during the first class, 3 times in the second and 4 times during the last class.

1. What behavior was changed? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened? \_\_\_\_\_ (what can you eliminate)

3. What was the consequence? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Was the consequence added or subtracted? \_\_\_\_\_

**The process was** \_\_\_\_\_

c. Gregory 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 "buy" freetime, t.v. privileges, etc. with his points. When he misbehaves or doesn't follow a command, he loses points. Andrew 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? \_\_\_\_\_ (what can you eliminate)

3. What was the consequence? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Was the consequence added or subtracted? \_\_\_\_\_

**The process was** \_\_\_\_\_

d. John does not go to the dentist every 6-months for a checkup. Instead, he waited until a tooth really hurts, then goes to the dentist. After two emergency trips to the dentist, John now goes every 6-months.

1. What behavior was changed? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Was the behavior strengthened or weakened? \_\_\_\_\_ (what can you eliminate)

3. What was the consequence? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Was the consequence added or subtracted? \_\_\_\_\_

**The process was** \_\_\_\_\_