

Schedules of Reinforcement

Reinforcement: any stimulus that makes a behavior more likely to occur.

In terms of delivering reinforcement one may:

1. Vary the frequency of the reward strictly according to time intervals. These are called interval schedules - the number of responses which occur, after the first correct response in an interval, are irrelevant.
2. Vary the frequency of the reward according to the rate of response. These are called ratio schedules - time is irrelevant.

Within these two types of schedules a reward is given on either a regular basis, called a fixed schedule or on an intermittent (random/patternless) manner called a variable schedule.

To determine the schedule of reinforcement being used, ask yourself: Is time the major factor that causes a favorable outcome (reinforcement) or is it repetition of responses? If time or the needed repetition of responses is constant or patterned, it is fixed if the time or repetition of responses is random or intermittent, it's variable. For each example, decide which reinforcement schedule is being used - fixed interval (FI), fixed ratio (FR), variable interval (VI), or variable ratio (VR) on the line at the left of each example.

1. _____ Paid \$10 for every 20 puzzles solved
2. _____ Studying for a class that has surprise quizzes
3. _____ Slot machines
4. _____ Trolling (using a net) for fish on a lake
5. _____ Speed traps on the highway
6. _____ Selling a product door to door
7. _____ Getting clothes out of the dryer once the buzzer goes off
8. _____ Going up a staircase to reach a landing with a nice view
9. _____ Doing 20 pushups in order to stay fit
10. _____ Playing bingo
11. _____ Getting a paycheck at the end of two weeks

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12. _____ Random drug testing
13. _____ A strike in bowling
14. _____ Calling your mechanic to see if your car is fixed yet
15. _____ A frequent flyer program where one gets a free flight after a specific number of miles
16. _____ A child screams and cries in a store to get what he wants – every so often it works
17. _____ A child who likes to hear the theme music from Jeopardy every night at 7 p.m.
18. _____ Trying to find a parking spot in New York City with a meter that works
19. _____ A wife is watching boxing with her husband – she receives a kiss at the end of every three minute round
20. _____ Waiting for a sunny day to go to the beach
21. _____ Looking under rocks for worms
22. _____ A surfer waiting for the perfect wave to ride in
23. Which type of reinforcement schedule seems to be the most consistent in reinforcing behavior? Explain and support your answer.