RBT® CHEAT SHEET · BEHAVIOR ACQUISITION AND BEHAVIOR REDUCTION · C.1, D.2

Schedules of reinforcement

Two questions name any schedule. Here is what earns the reinforcer on each one, and how to tell them apart on the exam.

Two questions name the schedule C.1

	Fixed: the same every time	Variable: changes around an average
Ratio: counts responses	**FR** **After a set number of responses** FR 3: every 3rd response. Darnell earns a break after every 10 kits he assembles (FR 10).	**VR** **After a number of responses that varies** VR 3: every 3rd response on average. Aisha's praise moves from every greeting to about every third (VR 3).
Interval: time, then a response	**FI** **First response after a set time** FI 5 min: Jada's first stocked shelf after each 5-minute timer earns a point. Shelves before the timer earn nothing.	**VI** **First response after a time that varies** VI 2 min: attention for the first on-task response after unpredictable intervals averaging 2 minutes.

What the data tend to look like B.9 (BCBA)

Schedule	Typical pattern
FR	High rate with a pause after each reinforcer, then a quick return (break and run). Larger ratios, longer pauses.
VR	High, steady rate with little or no pause.
FI	A pause after reinforcement, then faster responding as the interval ends (a scallop).
VI	Steady, low to moderate rate with few pauses.

Patterns come mostly from laboratory research. Real session data are messier.

Deliver it well C.1

- **Timing:** right away, ideally within a second or two.
- **Contingency:** only after the target behavior. Free access breaks it.
- **Magnitude:** the planned amount. Many plans give more for independent than for prompted responses.
- **Motivation:** deprivation makes a reinforcer stronger; satiation makes it weaker.

Continuous vs. intermittent

- **Continuous (CRF):** every correct response is reinforced. New skills usually start here.
- **Intermittent:** only some responses are. It keeps a learned skill going and makes it more resistant to extinction.
- Your supervisor thins the schedule, usually in small steps (FR 2, then FR 3, then FR 5).
- Raising a ratio too fast can cause ratio strain: long pauses, avoidance, quitting.

No response needed: time-based D.2

- **Fixed time (FT):** the reinforcer comes when a set time passes, whatever the learner is doing.
- **Variable time (VT):** after times that vary around an average.
- Noncontingent reinforcement (NCR) uses FT or VT schedules to lower the motivation for problem behavior.
- FI needs a response after the time passes. FT needs none.

Exam traps

Ratio or interval? Ratio schedules count responses. Interval schedules wait for time to pass, then reinforce the next response; earlier responses earn nothing.

FR and errors: if the plan counts correct responses, an error is simply not counted, and the count does not start over.

Variable means an average, not random: VR 5 might be 2, then 8, then 5 responses.

FI or FT? "The first response after 5 minutes" is FI. "Every 5 minutes, whatever the learner is doing" is fixed time, as in NCR.

NCR or DRO? If the reinforcer depends on the problem behavior not happening, it is DRO. A clock alone is NCR.

Schedule changes are not yours. Thinning comes from your supervisor. Record what you see and tell them if a reinforcer seems to stop working.

Read the free lesson

C.1 Deliver positive and negative reinforcement well: timing, contingency, schedules, and magnitude

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