

Capitalizing on Existing Stimulus Control:

Rules & Goals

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*Stimulus Control*

- the control of a stimulus over a behavior due to having been reinforced in the presence of that stimulus.

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- Good or effective stimulus control refers to a strong correlation between the occurrence of a particular stimulus and the occurrence of a particular response; i.e. the stimulus occurs and the behavior is likely to follow.

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## *Rule*

- A verbal or written statement of the contingency of reinforcement, i.e. the relationship between the antecedents, behavior and consequences. It states under which conditions a behavior will “pay off.”

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## *Rules*

- An effectively-stated rule identifies all three components of the contingency of reinforcement:
  1. antecedents,
  2. behavior and
  3. consequences.

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## *Partial rules*

- Do not identify all three components. They state one or more and imply the other(s).
- Saying to the driver of a car, “You are in a school zone.”
- It states the antecedent and implies the behavior (driving fast) and the consequence (you’ll get a ticket, hit a child, etc.)

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## Rules

- Thus, effectively following rules allows us to maximize reinforcement and avoid punishment.
- Rules can be stated in the form of *advice, commands or threats*.

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## Rules

- Thus, effectively following rules allows us to maximize reinforcement and avoid punishment.
1. Rules can be stated in the form of *advice,*
  2. *commands or*
  3. *threats.*

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## ***Situations Where Rules Are Particularly Helpful:***

- When rapid behavior change is desirable – using rules can produce more rapid results than shaping, chaining, trial-and-error with reinforcement or extinction alone.
- When consequences that you might provide for a behavior are too delayed to directly reinforce that behavior.

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***Situations Where Rules Are Particularly Helpful:***

- When you would like to maintain a behavior for which natural reinforcers are immediate, but highly intermittent.
- When a specific behavior will lead to immediate and severe punishment.

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***Why follow rules that identify very delayed consequences?***

- Although the reinforcer itself might be delayed, other people might provide immediate consequences for following the rule (e.g. praise).
- An individual might be making reinforcing statements to themselves after following a rule.

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***Why follow rules that identify very delayed consequences?***

- The statement of a rule functions as an *establishing operation* to increase the reinforcement strength or effectiveness of the consequence. In other words, rehearsing the rule causes some anxiety about what will happen if the rule is not followed. Following the rule alleviates the anxiety and maintains the rule by escape conditioning.

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**Rules are more likely to be followed if they:**

- Describe the behaviors specifically
- Make clear statements about the most *probable* consequences
- Describe *sizable* consequences
- Clearly state deadlines

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**Rules are more likely to be followed if they:**

- Rules are often effective if they describe *deadlines* for *specific behavior* that will lead to *sizable* and *probable* outcomes, even if those outcomes are delayed.
- Rules are often *ineffective* if they describe behavior vaguely, do not identify a deadline for the behavior, and lead to small or improbable consequences.

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**Summary for Using Rules Effectively:**

1. The rules should be within the understanding of the person to whom they are applied.

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**Summary for Using Rules Effectively:**

2. Rules should clearly identify:
- The circumstances in which the behavior should occur
  - The specific behavior
  - The deadline for performing the behavior
  - The specific consequences for complying with the rule
  - The specific consequences for not complying with the rule.

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**Summary for Using Rules Effectively:**

3. The rule should describe probable and sizable outcomes.
4. Complex rules should be broken into easy-to-follow steps.
5. Rules should be delivered in a pleasant and courteous manner.
6. Fading should be used as necessary to fade out rules if you want other stimuli to take control of the behavior.

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**Goals:**

- A description of a level of performance toward which an individual or group should work

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**Goals are:**

- Motivational
- Commit one to effort and dedication
- Give one a sense of purpose
- Rules of a sort

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**Circumstances in which goals are used as compared to rules are different:**

- Rules capitalize on stimulus control to bring about *instant* behavior change.
- *Goal setting* is used to influence individuals to work towards some objective *over time*.

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**Goals are more effective when:**

- They are specific and stated in a manner which makes it easy to assess progress towards the goal
- They specify mastery criteria for learning of a specific skill
- They identify the circumstances under which the desirable behavior should occur

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**Goals are more effective when:**

- They are realistic and challenging rather than just statements to “do your best”
- They are public rather than private

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**Goals are more effective when:**

- They include deadlines
- Feedback about progress toward the goal is provided
- Individuals are committed to the goals

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**Summary: Guidelines for Goal-Setting**

1. Set goals that are specific, realistic and challenging.
2. Be clear about the specific consequences that might occur for meeting the goal or not meeting the goal.
3. Break longer-term goals into several shorter-term goals.

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**Summary: Guidelines for Goal-Setting**

- 4. If the goal is complex, devise an action plan to meet it.
- 5. Set deadlines for goal attainment.
- 6. Ensure that individuals involved are committed to the goals.

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**Summary: Guidelines for Goal-Setting**

- 7. Encourage the client to share the goal with a friendly supporter.
- 8. Design a system for monitoring progress toward the goal.
- 9. Provide positive feedback as progress toward the goal is achieved.

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