

Transferring Behavior to  
New Settings and  
Making It Last:  
**Generality of Behavior  
Change**

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**Generality**

- When the trained behavior transfers from the training situation to the natural environment.
- When training leads to the development of new behavior that has *not* been specifically trained.
- When the trained behavior is maintained in the natural environment over time.

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**Stimulus Generalization:**

- When behavior becomes more probable in the presence of one stimulus or situation as a result of having been reinforced in the presence of another (often similar) stimulus or situation.

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*Stimulus generalization can be due to:*

1. *Physical Similarity* - Learning to respond to a new stimulus because that new stimulus is physically similar to an S<sup>D</sup> that was present in stimulus discrimination training, e.g. learning to refer to all tall, four-legged animals with manes as "horses."



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*Stimulus generalization can be due to:*

2. *Conceptual Learning* – Learning to respond to a new stimulus because the learner has learned that the new stimulus has a characteristic in common with the original S<sup>D</sup> even though the original S<sup>D</sup> and the new stimulus may have differing characteristics

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*Stimulus generalization can be due to:*

2. *Conceptual Learning*  
 –e.g. learning to emit a response to all members of a *stimulus class* or *concept*, all things that are red, all people that are strangers, etc.



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*Stimulus generalization can be due to:*

- 3. *Equivalence Classes* - Learning to respond to very different stimuli because they are *functionally equivalent*, e.g. learning that "three," "3," "III," "tres," "trois," etc. all mean the same thing.



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*Response generalization:*

- When a behavior becomes more probable in the presence of a stimulus or situation as a result of another *behavior* being reinforced in the presence of that stimulus or situation.

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*Response generalization can be due to:*

- 1. *Physical similarity* – the more physically similar the responses are, the more response generalization will occur between them, e.g. if you learn a good forehand in racquetball, most likely it will generalize to a good forehand in tennis



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*Response generalization can be due to:*

- 2. *Conceptual similarity – response conceptual learning:* learning to show response generalization within classes of responses with a common characteristic, e.g. learning to form English plurals by adding “s.” You can see response conceptual learning in children when they say things such as “foots.” Obviously, no one has taught them this, because it is an exception.



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*Response generalization can be due to:*

- 3. *Equivalence classes – learning to show response generalization when the responses are functionally equivalent, although in themselves are quite different, e.g. refraining from lying, returning someone else’s belongings, and not copying are three different behaviors, but all functionally equivalent examples of “being honest.”*



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*Behavioral momentum*

- As a result of some members of a response equivalent class being emitted and reinforced, the probability of other members of that class occurring momentarily increases.
- E.g. To obtain a child’s compliance, first give him some instructions he is likely to follow, and reinforce him for doing so, then give the instructions, which under normal circumstances, he would be less likely to follow.

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*Programming for generality:*

- For effectiveness, behavior change should show:
- 1.) *stimulus generalization* from the training situation to the natural environment and
- 2.) *response generalization* to some new behaviors.
- Therapeutic behavior change must also be 3.) *maintained* in the natural environment.

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*To program effective stimulus generalization:*

1. *Distinguish first between the training situation and the target situation (the situation you normally want the behavior to occur).*
2. *Make the final stages of the training situation similar to the target situation in as many ways as possible. This can be best done by training in the target situation itself.*

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*To program effective stimulus generalization:*

3. *Vary the training situations by conducting the training sessions with relatively little control over the stimuli presented in the presence of which correct responses are reinforced. The greater variety of stimuli present during the training sessions, the greater likelihood one or more of these stimuli will also be in the target situation.*

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*To program effective stimulus generalization:*

- 4. Program common stimuli deliberately by developing the behavior to specific stimuli that are present in both the training and the target situations. A useful way to do this is to bring the desired behavior under the control of the instructions or rules that the learner can rehearse in new situations.*

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*To program effective stimulus generalization:*

- 4. Train sufficient exemplars, i.e. train with various conditions, in different places, with different trainers, etc.*

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*To program effective response generalization:*

- 1. Training sufficient response exemplars – with appropriate prompting and reinforcement, do drills during which several different responses of a similar nature will be trained (e.g. author example of teaching developmentally disabled youngster to name singular objects when presented with one object and plurals when presented with two).*

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*To program effective response generalization:*

- 2. Vary the acceptable responses during training, e.g. to develop creativity, researchers deliberately reinforced any of a preschooler's construction with blocks which was different from a previous construction.*

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*To program effective behavior maintenance:*

- 1. Make use of a behavioral trap.  
A behavioral trap refers to when reinforcers in the natural environment maintain a behavior that was initially developed by programmed reinforcers. To do this, the designed of the behavior change project must identify contingencies in the natural environment and then tailor the target behavior so that it will be trapped / maintained by those contingencies.*

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*To program effective behavior maintenance:*

- 1. Make use of a behavioral trap.  
e.g. once you learn to talk, there are enough natural reinforcers for talking in the natural environment to maintain it; once you get a shy child to play with other children, the social interactions will likely maintain it.*

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*To program effective behavior maintenance:*

- 2. Change the behavior of people in the natural environment so that those who have regular contact with the learner in the natural environment will reinforce and maintain the target behavior. This often involves the behavior modifier to do training / fading with parents so that they can learn behavior modification.*

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*To program effective behavior maintenance:*

- 3. Use intermittent schedules of reinforcement in the target situation.*
- 4. When possible and practical, teach self-management, self-control and self-modification to the learner.*

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*Pitfalls and Cautions of Generality:*

- Generalizing a desirable behavior to a situation in which it might be inappropriate, e.g. Developmentally disabled kids failing to learn that it's okay to hug and greet loved ones but not strangers.*

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*Pitfalls and Cautions of Generality:*

- *Generalizing an undesirable behavior from the situation in which it was developed to a new situation for which it is also undesirable.*

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*Pitfalls and Cautions of Generality:*

- *Lack of stimulus generalization, e.g. "cramming" for exams and then being unable to apply it to situations outside of the specific verbal chains studied.*

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*Summary for Programming Generality of Behavioral Change:*

- *Choose target behaviors that are useful to the individual and which are likely to be reinforced in the natural environment.*
- *Teach the target behavior in a situation that is as similar as possible as the environment in which you want the behavior to naturally occur.*

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**Summary for Programming  
Generality of Behavioral Change:**

- *Vary the training conditions to maximally sample relevant stimulus dimensions for transfer to other situations and to reinforce various forms of the desired behavior.*
- *Establish the target behavior in as many situations as feasible, beginning with the easiest and progressing to the most difficult.*

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**Summary for Programming  
Generality of Behavioral Change:**

- *Use rules that might facilitate transfer to novel environment or otherwise program common stimuli into the program that will facilitate the transfer.*
- *Vary the acceptable responses in the training settings.*
- *Gradually reduce the frequency of reinforcement in the training situation until it is less than that occurring in the natural environment.*

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**Summary for Programming  
Generality of Behavioral Change:**

- *When changing to a new situation, increase the frequency of reinforcement in that situation.*
- *Make sure there is sufficient reinforcement in the natural environment to maintain the behavior, including teaching people involved with the learner how to do it and reinforcing those other people for doing so.*

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