

Different Types of Reinforcement Schedules

Two Main Types of Reinforcement Schedules

Type of Reinforcement Schedule	Description	Advantage	Disadvantage
Continuous	Reinforcement is provided after each correct response.	Highly effective for teaching new skills. Learning occurs quickly.	Difficult to maintain over a long period of time. Constant reinforcement can interrupt the continuation of the behavior. Satiation may occur.
Intermittent	Reinforcement is provided for some but not all correct responses.	Maintains behavior over time. Behavior is more resistant to extinction.	Not effective for teaching new behaviors/skills.

Basic Intermittent Reinforcement Schedules

Intermittent schedules of reinforcement fall into one of two categories:

Ratio Schedules are when reinforcement is provided after a specific **number** of correct responses.

Interval Schedules are when reinforcement is provided after a specific period of **time**.

Type of Intermittent Reinforcement Schedule		Description	Advantage	Disadvantage
Ratio	Fixed Ratio	Reinforcement is delivered after a specified number of correct responses. For example, a learner gets called on every third time that he raises his hand.	Builds a high response rate because faster responding means gaining access to reinforcement faster.	Irregular responding may occur if reinforcement is stopped. Often produces a pause in response after reinforcement (post-reinforcement pause) is delivered.
	Variable Ratio	Reinforcement is delivered after an average number of correct responses. For example, for a variable ratio of 3, a teacher might give the learner a high five after he finishes 2 math problems and then after he finishes 4 math problems.	The strongest basic schedule of intermittent reinforcement. High and steady response rate. Does not produce a post-reinforcement pause.	Can sometimes decrease quality/topography of responses because of fast rate.
Interval	Fixed Interval	Reinforcement is delivered after a specified amount of time. For example, reinforcement is provided for every 5 minutes of working independently.	Easy to implement.	Produces slow but accelerating rate of responding that can be inconsistent. Often produces a post-reinforcement pause.
	Variable Interval	Reinforcement is provided after an average amount of time. For example, a teacher might provide reinforcement when the learner works independently for less than 5 minutes or for more than 5 minutes but maintain reinforcement delivery at an average of 5 minutes.	Easy to implement. Constant and stable rate of responding. Good for maintaining responses/behaviors.	Low to moderate rate of responding.