

How to Select a Reward that Works

Brief Description:

The following are suggestions for educators to use when choosing rewards in the classroom. These suggestions highlight common rewards that are used as well as when using such rewards are considered appropriate and most effective. Using effective and appropriate rewards in the classroom increases the likelihood that desired student behaviors will increase.

Procedures:

1. What is rewarding for one student may not be rewarding for another. Thus, it is helpful to individualize the reward, often referred to as a *reinforcer*, to discern what is effective for students.
 - a. There are multiple ways to determine what students find reinforcing, including utilizing a survey or menu of reward options. Educators can provide several choices and have students rank-order what they find most to least rewarding.
 - b. These options should be something that the educator can provide with relative ease.
 - i. For example, rewards that are free or inexpensive, such as extra computer time or small pieces of candy, can be used.
2. Keep in mind what is age-appropriate.
3. Match the reinforcer to the target behavior. If the goal behavior requires considerable effort from the student, choose a reward that corresponds to the amount of effort the student put into meeting that goal.
 - a. For instance, if the goal is for a student to work for a large percentage of the day on a science project, a reward of 5 minutes of extra computer time will likely not be reinforcing for the student.
4. Rewards often need to vary in order to keep students interested and prevent them from becoming bored with utilizing similar rewards over and over.
5. Monitor whether or not the selected reinforcer is effective by measuring student responses before and after introducing the reward.
6. Rewards must be *contingent*, meaning that students can only receive such rewards strictly after the goal response has occurred. If the teacher provides a reward to a student whether or not they produced the goal behavior, the student may realize that they will receive a reward from the teacher no matter what behaviors they perform.
7. Rewards should be *immediate*. So, if a student engages in the desired goal behavior, the reward should be given immediately after so that the student associates his/her behavior with the reward.
8. Use behavior specific praise with the reward to highlight the desired behavior that occurred to receive the award.
9. Other rewards that can be used include tangible items and activities.
 - a. Tangible items can include: stickers, small toys, playing cards, books and/or magazines, etc.
 - b. Activities may include: computer time, playing with games or toys in the classroom, a pass to excuse the student from a homework assignment or quiz, extra credit points, utilizing art supplies in the classroom, etc.

Critical Assumptions/Problem-Solving Questions to be Asked:

Edible reinforcers, such as food and drink, tend to be more effective with younger children and children who have severe disabilities. (Note: Edible rewards can still be effective for older students and those with milder disabilities, if used infrequently and appropriately).

Other considerations regarding edible reinforcers include mindfulness of students with food allergies and the timing of distribution. (For instance, students will be more likely to want a reward of potato chips prior to eating lunch than soon after lunch time has ended, because they will not be as hungry).

Have alternate reinforcers ready to provide if students do not appear to respond to the current reward.

Vary how often rewards are provided.

Students will realize a variable schedule means that they need to put in consistent effort, as they may not receive a reward every time they complete the correct behavior.

Use different rewards for different behaviors/activities so that students remain engaged.

Materials:

Dependent on reward(s) used. (Can include, but not limited to: small toys, food, drink, coloring books, homework passes, etc.)

References:

- Alberto, P., & Troutman, A. (2009). Arranging consequences that increase behavior. In *Applied Behavior Analysis for Teachers*, 6th edition. (pp. 215-262). Columbus, OH: Pearson.
- Hall, R. V., & Hall, M. C. 1980. *How to select reinforcers*. Lawrence, KS: H&H Enterprises.