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Shaping and Successive Approximation Practice for RBTs

Shaping builds a new behavior by reinforcing successive approximations, each one closer to the target response. It is useful when the learner cannot yet produce the full behavior, and it depends on clear criteria and careful criterion changes. This set asks you to identify the approximation to reinforce at each step, decide when to move the criterion, and spot the common mistake of raising the criterion too quickly. Read each scenario for the current level of the learner before choosing an answer. Pay close attention to the words describing the learner's current performance, since the correct approximation depends on it.

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Practice questions

Answer every question before you look at the key, then check yourself on the next pages.

1. After the criterion advances, Aisha repeatedly fails to produce the next approximation of matching identical pictures. What is the best RBT response?

- **A** Record the difficulty and ask the supervisor about a smaller step
- **B** Restart shaping from the first approximation and inform the supervisor
- **C** Reinforce each attempt, even ones that miss the new criterion
- **D** Raise the criterion again so the learner is challenged to try harder

2. During shaping of matching identical pictures, the RBT keeps reinforcing both the old approximation and the new one equally. What problem may result?

- **A** The learner may jump ahead to the final form too quickly
- **B** The reinforcer may lose value while the form keeps improving
- **C** Responding may stay at the easier, earlier approximation
- **D** The old approximation may extinguish faster than planned

3. Maya consistently meets the current shaping criterion for raising a hand before speaking, and the written plan lists the next approximation. What should the RBT do next?

- **A** Skip ahead to the final form listed in the plan to save teaching time
- **B** Begin reinforcing the next approximation instead of the current one
- **C** Keep reinforcing this approximation until it is performed perfectly
- **D** Hold the criterion until the supervisor's next visit confirms the change

4. A supervisor says to reinforce quieter and quieter voice levels until the learner uses an indoor voice. Which procedure is this?

- **A** Chaining procedure
- **B** Shaping procedure
- **C** Negative punishment
- **D** Latency recording

5. Noah cannot yet read a three-letter word. The plan reinforces responses that meet a criterion raised step by step toward the full skill. Which procedure is this?

- **A** Noncontingent reinforcement
- **B** Shaping
- **C** Chaining
- **D** Extinction

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6. Leo cries and appears distressed after the function-based extinction procedure begins. What should the RBT do?

- **A** Stop the procedure for today and tell the supervisor next session
- **B** Follow the plan and safety steps, record the distress, and report it
- **C** Follow the plan, but leave the crying out of the data to keep it clean
- **D** Deliver the withheld reinforcer so that the crying ends more quickly

7. A technician applicant watched a token-board role-play during assessment prep. The clinic asks her to run that procedure with a learner that afternoon, but she has not performed those steps for the assessor. What should happen first?

- **A** Show the steps in practice
- **B** Review the steps before service
- **C** Have a peer stay nearby
- **D** Run one round and ask later

8. In a discrete trial with Sofia, a peer walks up and waves. The RBT waits for the response and delivers the programmed consequence. What should happen next?

- **A** Repeat the consequence so the learner links it to the response given
- **B** Score the trial, then pause briefly before presenting the next cue
- **C** Ask the learner to describe why the response earned that consequence
- **D** Give a short break away from the table before every new trial

9. A learner selects from six leisure items; after each choice, that item is unavailable for later trials in the same sequence. What procedure is being used?

- **A** Multiple-stimulus without-replacement assessment
- **B** Free-operant preference assessment
- **C** Multiple-stimulus with-replacement assessment
- **D** Paired-stimulus preference assessment

10. Which response is most appropriate when two team members give conflicting instructions?

- **A** Carry on as usual and keep the issue out of the record so that today's data stay consistent.
- **B** Keep running the written plan as trained, document the issue, and consult the supervisor right away.
- **C** Use a reasonable workaround for the time being and tell the supervisor at the next monthly meeting.
- **D** Promptly ask whichever adult is present, such as a teacher or caregiver, to decide how to proceed.

Answer key and explanations

1. Correct answer: A · Record the difficulty and ask the supervisor about a smaller step

If a shaping step is too large, the team may need an intermediate approximation. The RBT documents and follows supervisory direction. When responding stalls, consider whether the approximation step is too large.

Task: C.10

2. Correct answer: C · Responding may stay at the easier, earlier approximation

Shaping requires differential reinforcement: the new approximation contacts reinforcement while the prior criterion no longer does. Differentially reinforce the current approximation, not every earlier form.

Task: C.10

3. Correct answer: B · Begin reinforcing the next approximation instead of the current one

Once stable performance meets the criterion, reinforcement shifts to the next planned approximation. Raise shaping criteria gradually and according to data and the written plan.

Task: C.10

4. Correct answer: B · Shaping procedure

Shaping reinforces successive approximations.

Task: C.10

5. Correct answer: B · Shaping

Shaping reinforces successive approximations toward a target response. Shaping changes one response dimension through successive approximations.

Task: C.10

6. Correct answer: B · Follow the plan and safety steps, record the distress, and report it

Emotional responding can occur as a secondary effect. The RBT maintains dignity, follows the plan, monitors safety, and communicates objective data. Treat secondary emotional responding seriously and compassionately while following the safety plan.

Task: D.6

7. Correct answer: A · Show the steps in practice

RBT Ethics Code 2.0 standard 1.06 says behavior-technician services occur only after supervisor confirmation of demonstrated competence.

Task: F.2

8. Correct answer: B · Score the trial, then pause briefly before presenting the next cue

A discrete trial includes an antecedent, response opportunity, consequence, data entry, and a clear transition before the next trial. Keep discrete trials clear, paced, and data based.

Task: C.3

9. Correct answer: A · Multiple-stimulus without-replacement assessment

In an MSWO assessment, the learner selects from an array and each chosen item is removed before the next trial. Array, select, remove, and rearrange are the core MSWO sequence.

Task: B.1

10. Correct answer: B · Keep running the written plan as trained, document the issue, and consult the supervisor right away.

When training, data, or procedural concerns arise, the RBT seeks and prioritizes timely clinical direction. Safety and the written plan guide what can continue while clarification is obtained. When a task is beyond the RBT's training or competence, the supervisor should hear about it right away, and that conversation should be documented. Uncertainty is a signal to seek timely direction, not to improvise or conceal.

Task: E.2

Study tips

- Define each approximation in observable terms before you start shaping.
- Reinforce the closest approximation the learner currently produces, not the final target yet.

- Move the criterion only after the learner meets the current step reliably.
- Look for stems where the criterion is raised too fast, since that is the most common error.

FAQ

What is shaping?

Shaping is reinforcing successive approximations, each closer to the target behavior, until the full behavior appears.

When should the criterion be raised?

Raise the criterion when the learner meets the current approximation consistently, based on the data and the plan.

Can shaping be used with a learner who already has the skill?

Shaping is used to build new behavior. A learner who already performs the skill generally does not need it, though refining a response may use similar steps.

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