



# High Rates of Positive Responses



## Definition

Positive responses are positive comments or actions to students who demonstrate favorable behavior. A high rate of positive responses is typically defined as 4:1, that is a minimum of 4 positive responses to every 1 negative response.

Instructors create a positive environment by frequently responding positively to students for appropriate and correct responding or performance. Instructors who provide more positive responses to students than negative ones have students who want to remain in the classroom rather than be moved to another environment.

## Things to Do

- ✓ Be specific.
- ✓ Respond positively to appropriate behavior immediately after it occurs.
- ✓ Use a variety of positives.

## Be specific.

By specifically describing the student's behavior, the instructor emphasizes the appropriate behavior and increases the likelihood that the student will repeat the behavior. Do not assume that the student knows what behavior resulted in the positive response.

## Respond immediately.

It is important to acknowledge the student's behavior right after it occurs. Delaying the positive response weakens its effectiveness and the student may be less clear about what behavior resulted in the positive response.

### Establish Eye Contact

Look the student in the eye when giving a positive response. Eye contact suggests that the student is special and that the positive response is meant just for him.

### Respond Positively with Enthusiasm and Sincerity

Positive responses are most effective when they are perceived by the student as sincere. The tone of voice and level of enthusiasm can help increase the variety and effectiveness of positive responses.

### Monitor Students' Performance throughout the Day

Be aware of students' appropriate behavior throughout the day and respond accordingly. Positives can be increased by greeting students as they enter the classroom or walk down the hall. Responding positively, both frequently and consistently, creates a learning environment that is highly rewarding for instructors and students.

When a student is learning a new skill or behavior, it may be necessary to significantly increase positive responses (e.g., 25 or 30 to 1).

## Use a variety.

Many positive responses should be positive verbal statements:

"Hey Billie, I appreciate you waiting quietly." or "Mildred, fantastic problem solving!"

But conversations, greetings, and gestures such as winking, smiling, or thumbs up increase the variety of positive responses and can be effective as well.

For example:

"I appreciate how quietly the class is standing and waiting for the bus," instead of, "You're doing a good job."

Or

"I like the way that Dan and Bill negotiated and solved that problem without arguing," instead of, "Good boys."

### Monitor the Rate of Positive Responses

Monitor staff responses periodically to assure that a high rate of positive responses (i.e., at least 4 positive to 1 negative response) is being maintained in the classroom.

### Make Needed Adjustments

Based on the data, work with staff to make needed adjustments. It may be necessary to increase the number of positives, decrease the number of negatives, or both.

## Examples

### Example 1

In Seth's physics class, Ms. Frisby walks around the room and positively responds to those students who are working quietly and independently by saying, "I really appreciate those students who are completing their assignments on their own." She then notices a student who has a question and says, "Sally, thanks for raising your hand. How can I help you?" As she bends down to work with Sally, two other students raise their hands. Looking in their direction, Ms. Frisby says, "Thanks for waiting. Try the next problem, and I will be there in a minute."

### Example 2

During story time, Mr. Weatherby selects those students who are listening to be his helpers. "John and Ralph, you are listening. Come help me pass out the crackers." As he scans the classroom, he notices that several other students are waiting quietly. Looking in their direction, he says, "I like the way the front row is waiting for us to start. Thanks."

## Variations of the Technique

Differential reinforcement is a related intervention procedure. Differential reinforcement is:

☞ the reinforcement of one class of behaviors and not another, or

☞ the reinforcement of a response under one condition but not another.

See ***Differential Reinforcement—Level 1*** for additional information and steps for implementation.

## Potential Problems and Solutions

### Instructor May Feel Awkward

Initially, it may seem difficult to achieve high rates of positive responses delivered with sincerity and enthusiasm. However, developing and practicing a varied repertoire of positive responses make using the strategy more comfortable and effective over time.

### High Rate of Positive Responses Alone May Not Be Effective

Praise and acknowledgment alone may not be sufficient for those students who do not care what the teacher likes or appreciates. Initially, it may be necessary to pair responses with tangible reinforcement.

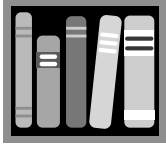
See **Positive Reinforcement—Level 1** intervention checklist for additional explanation.

## Getting Ready

- 👉 Identify student behaviors appropriate for positive responding. Many instructors respond positively to correct academic performance. However, with careful consideration of students' social behaviors, instructors can increase their rate of positive responses to students who exhibit appropriate social skills such as classroom cooperation (e.g., attending to the instructor, raising hand to talk, volunteering to help others) and peer relations (e.g., negotiating, sharing, resolving conflict).
- 👉 Assess the current level of positive and negative responses in the classroom.
- 👉 Record the occurrence of each type of response during several class periods throughout the day.
- 👉 Review the data to determine if the appropriate ratio of at least 4 positive responses to 1 negative response is occurring.
- 👉 Determine a plan of action based on the results.

### Materials and Supplies

No specific resources are required to implement high rates of positive responses, although it may be helpful to post visual reminders in the classroom prompting staff to use frequent positive responses (e.g., key characteristics of effective positive responses, 4 to 1 ratio, etc.). In addition, supervisors might also encourage staff to wear a praise bracelet or band to serve as a visual prompt to positively acknowledge appropriate student behavior.



## References

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