The Shaping Police:

Are you breaking the laws of shaping?

Behavioral Husbandry Committee

Syracuse 2012
Ivan Pavlov

• Around the year 1900

• Famous for experiments with dogs
Ivan Pavlov

• Around the year 1900

• Famous for experiments with dogs

• Classical Conditioning
Edward Thorndike

- 1905
- Observe how animals would escape cages
Edward Thorndike

- 1905

- Observe how animals would escape cages

- “Law of Effect”

- “Responses that produce a satisfying effect in a particular situation become more likely to occur again in that situation, and responses that produce a discomforting effect become less likely to occur again in that situation.”
John Watson

- 1913 published “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It”
- “Little Albert Experiment”
John Watson

• 1913 published “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It”

• “Little Albert Experiment”

• The term “behaviorism” refers to the school of psychology founded by John B. Watson
Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select -- doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.

--John Watson, Behaviorism, 1930
B.F. Skinner

• 1936 published “The behavior of Organisms”

• Father of Operant Conditioning
B.F. Skinner

• 1936 published “The behavior of Organisms”

• Father of Operant Conditioning

• “The consequences of behavior determine the probability that the behavior will occur again”
B.F. Skinner

- 1936 published “The behavior of Organisms”
- Father of Operant Conditioning

“The consequences of behavior determine the probability that the behavior will occur again”

Concept of shaping, or “the method of successive approximations.”
“10 Laws of Shaping”

• Developed by Karen Pryor
• Graduate work in zoology and behavioral biology
• Co-founder of Hawaii’s Sea Life Park
• Served as curator and head dolphin trainer
• Authored 7 books and over 50 articles on learning and behavior
• “Don’t Shoot the Dog” is in it’s 16th printing
• This is we will find the “10 laws of Shaping”
Raise criteria in increments small enough so that the subject always has a realistic chance of reinforcement

Law #1
Law #2
Train one aspect of any particular behavior at a time.
Don't try to shape for two criteria simultaneously.
Law #3
During shaping, put the current level of response on a variable ratio schedule of reinforcement before adding or raising the criteria.
Law #4
When introducing a new criterion, or aspect of the behavioral skill, temporarily relax the old ones.
Law #5

Stay ahead of your subject:
Plan your shaping program completely so that if the subject makes sudden progress, you are aware of what to reinforce next.
Law #6

Don't change trainers in midstream. You can have several trainers per trainee, but stick to one shaper per behavior.
Law #7

If one shaping procedure is not eliciting progress, find another.
There are as many ways to get behavior as there are trainers think them up.
Law #8

Don't interrupt a training session gratuitously; that constitutes a punishment.
Law #9

If behavior deteriorates, "Go back to kindergarten."

Quickly review the whole shaping process with a series of easily earned reinforcers.
Law #10

End each session on a high note, if possible, but in any case quit while you're ahead.