

Driska's Five Principles of Reinforcement for Sport Coaches

Here are five principles of reinforcement for sport coaches. The first column explains the principle. The second column gives ideas to guide your implementation of this feedback ("DO THIS"), while the third column shows some common mistakes you might make in trying to implement the principle ("DON'T DO THIS").

Directions: Grade yourself on each principle of reinforcement. Ask a colleague for a second-opinion. Provide some rationale for your grade.

Principle	Do this...	Don't do this	Grade A - F	Rationale & Notes Give rationale for the grade you chose
Planning <i>By identifying what behaviors need to reinforce, you will appropriately constrain your attention during practice. Requires much attention before practice starts.</i>	Before a training session, plan specifically what athlete behaviors you will "capture" and reinforce during practice.	Begin a training session without a clear idea of what behaviors you will capture and reinforce during practice.		
Contingency <i>Give reinforcement when the desired behavior is performed. Give encouragement or instruction following a mistake.</i>	Reinforce exactly the behavior you are looking for... nothing else. Encouragement after a mistake may be useful.	Say "good job" when it's not a good job.		
Parsimony <i>Keep praise objective, simple, short</i>	Short and simple phrases (e.g., Got it! Bingo!) Use a clap or other short way to signal	Use superlatives (e.g., "that was amazing!") Provide excessive commentary Provide judgment		
Necessity <i>Determine if feedback from coach is necessary, or if feedback could come from the activity itself</i>	Feedback is needed for learning complicated behaviors, when the learning process is long, or when sensory feedback is ambiguous or not possible	When teaching simple behaviors When sensory feedback is easily available, clear, and strong		

Principle	Do this...	Don't do this	Grade A - F	Rationale & Notes Give rationale for the grade you chose
Distribution <i>Reinforcement should be distributed throughout a session and equitably amongst players.</i>	Reinforce behaviors from all players Have a variety of behaviors you could reinforce for different players (e.g., showing initiative or leadership, persistent effort) to make it easier to distribute reinforcement	Give reinforcement and attention exclusively to low-skilled athletes or high-skilled athletes		
Final Grade	What are you doing well?	What do you need to change?		

Reflection. Explain some important realizations you had about the types of reinforcement you use.