



# Behavioral Contract

## Definition

A behavior contract is a written document between an instructor and student which specifies:

- Expected behaviors.
- Positive and negative consequences.
- Time frame of the contract with review dates.

The contract is then signed by the instructor, student, and others who participate in the contract. Behavior contracts are a practical and creative way for instructors to help students of all ages improve various problematic behaviors, such as:

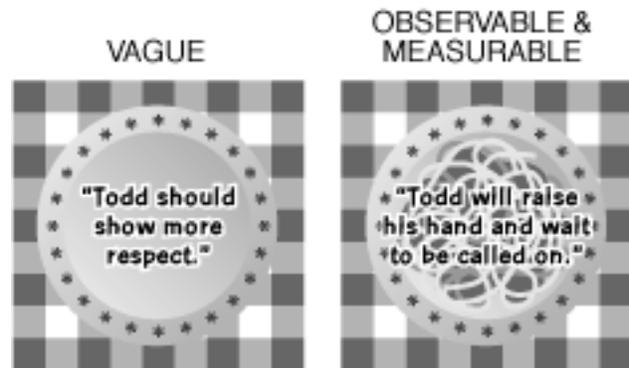
- Classroom and social behavior.
- Substance abuse.
- School attendance.



## ✓ Make preparations.

### Define the Behavior

Identify the behaviors to be increased or decreased. Avoid vague definitions. Instead, select behaviors that are observable and measurable. For example:



It may be necessary to break some behaviors into smaller steps to increase student success rate.

### Select Reinforcers

During negotiations, the student will identify several rewards that he/she would like to earn. However, it's best to be prepared with a menu of items that you think the student might like *and* that you would be willing to offer. The basic rule in choosing reinforcers is that they should be **motivating, inexpensive, and require little time**. Often, the most powerful reinforcers are found in the classroom—rewards such as:



**Define the Criterion**

This is a description of what the student must do in exchange for a reward. The contract criterion includes:

- ☞ The behavior.
- ☞ Amount of reinforcement (or reductive consequence).
- ☞ The time limits.

**Select Bonus/Penalty**

Use a bonus to encourage the student to meet a criterion in the least amount of time. Occasionally, a penalty clause is necessary. If so, keep these consequences small and mild by simply withdrawing a privilege. Some examples of penalties are:

- ☞ Losing part of a recess if an assignment is not finished.
- ☞ Stying after school if disruptive behavior continues.
- ☞ Waiting 3 minutes after the bell rings for talking out in class.

 **Negotiate.**

**Explain Purpose**

Start negotiations by explaining why the contract is necessary.

**Explain Rules**

Lay down the rules for negotiation. Students may negotiate the behavior, the rewards, and the criterion but **not** the need for the contract itself.

May Negotiate

May **NOT** Negotiate

- Behavior
- Rewards
- Criterion



### Open Negotiations

Share your ideas. Describe the behavior you want to work on with the student. Discuss rewards and criterion. Be sure to ask the student for his/her input, but watch out. When setting criteria, students often place unrealistically high expectations for themselves. Explain that it's important to start slowly; then gradually increase the requirement.

### Conclude Negotiations

Let the student know the contract is open to renegotiation at any time.

## Write it.

Write the negotiated terms on a contract form (i.e., behaviors, consequences, time, and any special conditions of the contract). Be specific to avoid later misunderstandings. Written contracts decrease the probability of disagreements after the contract has started. It may be necessary to read the contract to the student.

## Sign it.

Be sure the student, instructor, and other participants sign the contract.

## Post it.

Posting the contract will enhance its effectiveness.

## Examples

### Example 1

Duke is a student that continually has difficulty turning in his homework assignments. His mother indicates that she works on the assignments with Duke. However, he rarely turns them into the teacher. Both the mother, teacher, and Duke have negotiated a contract that stipulates when he turns in 10 assignments

(not in a row), he will get to choose any reward from the classroom reward menu. In addition, his mother will get him a video on that evening and take him to a fast-food restaurant. However, when he misses an assignment, he will stay in at recess and redo that assignment.

## Example 2

Jon is a 10th grade student that has difficulty getting to school on time. He is chronically tardy for the first period and disrupts the class when he enters the room. He and his teacher have decided that when Jon is not tardy

for 5 days, then he gets the parking space next to the principal's for the next 3 days. However, if he is tardy, his dad will be called at work, and he loses his parking privilege for 1 day.

## Variations of the Technique

👉 Goal setting or breaking a behavior into smaller steps can enhance the effectiveness of a contract. If the behavior appears to be too difficult or ambitious, then break it into smaller steps.

👉 Give the contract to the student's parents or periodically review the terms of the agreement to enhance its effectiveness.

## Potential Problems and Solutions

### The Contract is not Motivating

If a student starts out working hard but loses motivation, check that the rewards occur consistently, frequently, and are meaningful to the student. Similarly, if a student starts out excited but becomes frustrated, check the criterion. It may be set too high. Also check to make sure that the behaviors that are required are not too difficult.



### A Consecutive Criterion Has Been Selected Instead of a Cumulative Criterion

This is one of the most frequent mistakes in designing a contract. A consecutive criterion requires the behavior to occur in a consecutive chain or row. For example, the student may be

<u>Consecutive</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
"C" or better 5 days in a row	Five "C"s on 5 assignments
Day 😊😊😊😊😊 1 2 3 4 5	Day 😊😞😞😞😞😞 1 2 - 3 - 4 5
NO REWARD	REWARD

told that he will receive a reward if he gets a passing grade on his arithmetic assignment for 5 days in a row. The student may do well for 4 days, and then get a failing grade on the 5th day. This

punishes the student for his work on the previous 4 days.

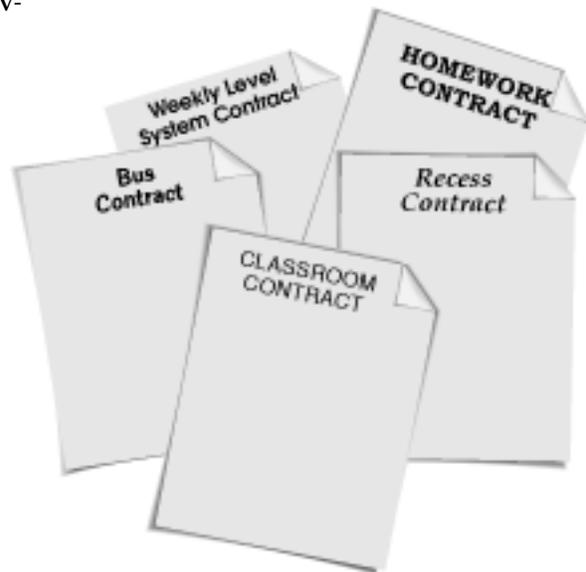
A cumulative criterion adds up success but does not count failures. For example, the criterion may read, "When the student gets 5 days of passing grades on his assignments, then he will get a reward." The student may do well for 4 days, fail the 5th day (which does not count), and pass the 6th day. Then the student could turn the contract in for a reward.

Some privileges may **not** be taken away if a student fails to meet the conditions of the contract. These privileges include:

- 👉 Eating lunch.
- 👉 Going to the bathroom.

## Getting Ready

- 👉 Contact with parents.
- 👉 Wearing reasonable clothing.
- 👉 Define observable and measurable behaviors to change.
- 👉 Generate a menu of reinforcers.
- 👉 Consider a time frame for the contract.



- 👉 Prepare a blank form of the contract.
- 👉 Inform the student and parents that a contract will be negotiated and written.
- 👉 Contract forms.



## References

-  Defined rewards.
-  A pen to sign contract.

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