

## COMPARING INTERSPERSED REQUESTS AND SOCIAL COMMENTS AS ANTECEDENTS FOR INCREASING STUDENT COMPLIANCE

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Two students were alternately presented with interspersed high-compliance requests and social comments as antecedents to low-compliance requests. An initial comparison demonstrated similar positive effects on compliance for interspersed requests and social comments. A second analysis indicated that the effectiveness of social comments for increasing compliance was related to the time interval between social comments and low-compliance requests.

DESCRIPTORS: compliance, interspersed requests, social comments, reinforcement, students with severe disabilities

Making requests with a high probability of compliance has been demonstrated to increase compliance with low-probability requests (e.g., Horner, Day, Sprague, O'Brien, & Heathfield, 1991; see also Mace et al., 1988). The technique requires that a series of high-compliance requests be made in rapid succession prior to the delivery of a low-compliance request. Often the outcome is the completion of an otherwise low-compliance task. However, Carr, Newsom, and Binkoff (1976) used another type of antecedent event (i.e., social comments) to increase student compliance to requests. By making a series of social comments that were unrelated to low-compliance requests, Carr et al. increased student compliance to requests. In this report we compared interspersed requests and social comments as antecedent interventions for increasing compliance. In addition, we analyzed the effect on compliance of the time interval between social comments and low-compliance requests.

**METHOD:** Mitch (18 years old) and Lana (19 years old) were students with severe disabilities who had histories of noncompliance to requests. Sessions occurred in a room (9 m square) with only the student and instructor present. Compliance (performing a requested action within 10 s) and noncompliance (not performing a requested action) served as dependent measures. Behavior was measured by the instructor using event recording. Interobserver agreement measures for compliance and noncompliance were collected on 30% of the sessions. A mean of 99% agreement was obtained, with a range of 80% to 100% (using the formula agreements divided by agreements plus disagreements multiplied by 100%). Each session consisted of five requests to perform a variety of low-compliance tasks (no task was repeated within a session). Sessions were separated by a minimum of 5 min.

**A: Baseline.** The student was seated at a desk with several previously learned low-compliance tasks available (e.g., putting away a jacket, shelving a magazine). On a fixed-time 1-min schedule, an instructor asked the student to perform a low-compliance task. If the student performed the task, he or she was verbally praised (when compliance occurred, tasks were performed with 99% accuracy throughout the study). If the student did not perform the task, after 1 min had elapsed, a request was made to perform another low-compliance task.

**B: Interspersed requests.** Condition B was similar to baseline with the following exception. Prior to a low-compliance task, the instructor asked the student to perform a sequence of four high-compliance tasks separated by 2-s intervals (e.g., "What's your name?") (99% of the high-compliance requests were responded to). Completion of each high-compliance task was verbally praised. Following the high-compliance requests, a low-compliance request was made within 2 s (Horner et al., 1991).

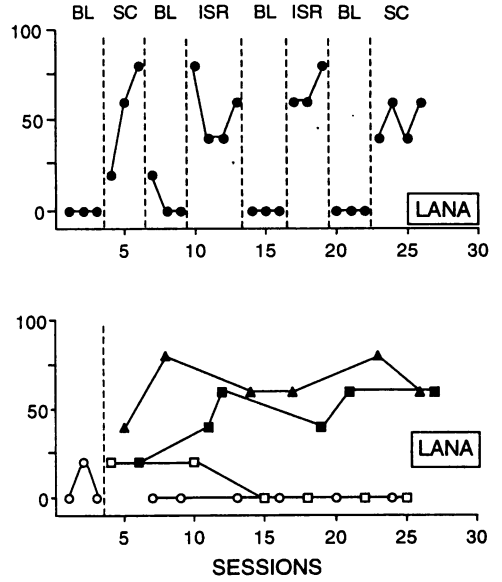
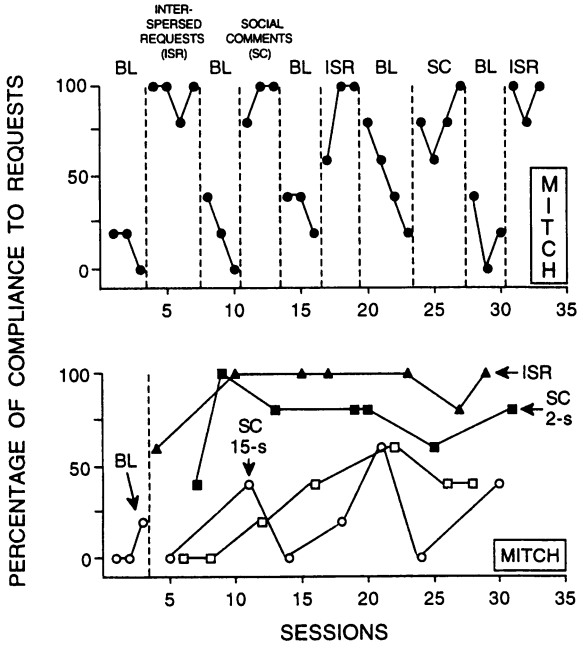
**C: Social comments (2 s).** This condition was similar to Condition B except that (a) four brief social comments (e.g., "It's a beautiful day") were presented prior to a low-compliance request and (b) no response was required of the student in relation to social comments. Following the social comments, a low-compliance request was made within 2 s.

**D: Social comments (15 s).** Condition D was similar to Condition C except that the low-compliance request was not made until 15 s had elapsed following the last social comment.

**Experimental designs.** Each student was exposed to two experimental sequences of independent variables. Mitch first received an ABACABAC sequence, and Lana received an ACABABAC sequence. Both students then received a baseline followed by a multielement design using A, B, C, and D conditions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:** The results from the first experimental sequence are presented in the top half of the figure. For Mitch and Lana, low-compliance requests were followed most frequently during the interspersed requests and social comments conditions. These results were replicated in the multielement design sequence (bottom half of figure). However, for both students compliance was slightly higher in the interspersed requests condition. The data also indicate that the time interval between social comments and low-compliance requests (i.e., 2 s vs. 15 s) influenced compliance.

In general, our findings show that the presentation of social comments prior to the delivery of a low-compliance request can have similar effects to that of interspersed requests. Although the current findings are suggestive, the data should not be interpreted as indicating that social comments can be used in lieu of high-compliance requests because of the preliminary nature of our research. The results will require replication with other students and more stringent controls for the stimulus control and reinforcing functions of the various teacher behaviors. Our findings do suggest, however, a number of future questions that researchers may want to address. (a) Although social comments and high-compliance requests appear to have similar effects when used as antecedents to low-compliance requests, are the mechanism(s) responsible for increased compliance



the same, or are they different? (b) If positive reinforcement is necessary for increased compliance, would other reinforcing stimuli have similar effects if delivered noncontingently prior to low-compliance requests? (c) Finally, what is the role of the time interval between social comments and presentation of low-compliance requests?

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