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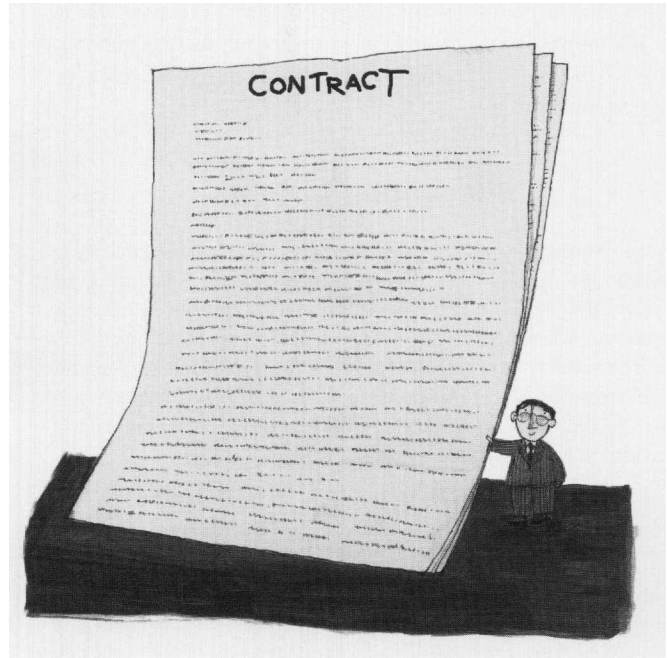
**WHAT WORKS FOR ME**

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*Joyce Anderson Downing, Dept. Editor*

# Individualized Behavior Contracts



As children, many of us learned “Grandma’s Law” before we started school: “When you finish your vegetables, you may have dessert” or “I would love for you to go out and play, just as soon as your toys have been picked up.” Our grandmothers may not have known much about contingency contracting or the principles of reinforcement, but this common sense technique got most of us to eat vegetables and clean our rooms. Behavior contracts are simply formalized, written versions of this reciprocal agreement adapted to deal with common classroom situations.

## Potential Applications of Behavior Contracts

Classroom behavior contracts may be developed for a variety of purposes and are effective with both academic and social behaviors. Potential uses include

- introducing and teaching new behaviors,
- increasing the rate of a desired behavior,
- maintaining and supporting application or generalization of skills,
- decreasing or extinguishing undesirable behaviors,
- monitoring completion of academic tasks or objectives, and
- documenting the results of problem-solving or crisis intervention sessions.

Some teachers regularly use behavior contracts with all students and find them an efficient, flexible tool for managing a highly individualized program. Others prefer to use written contracts on an as-needed basis or for specific types of situations (e.g., as part of a behavior intervention plan or for enrichment activities).

## Selecting a Format for the Contract

A variety of simple contract formats and preprinted forms and certificates are available from educational publishing companies and retailers who sell teaching supplies. With the proliferation of personal computers in school libraries and classrooms, teachers can also design their own very professional-looking contracts using word processing software and clip art. Figure 1 provides an example of a generic behavior contract, Figure 2 is an example of a customized agreement designed as part of an individualized intervention, using daily tokens (the snake’s spots) and both daily and weekly reinforcers selected to match a specific student’s interests.

For teachers wishing to use contracts as a prereferral intervention or as part of a behavior intervention plan, additional documentation may be required. The worksheet in Figure 3 has been designed to assist in the development of such a contract and includes prompts for collecting baseline data, conducting a functional analysis,

writing measurable objectives, and evaluating the success of the intervention. Whenever possible, students and other individuals responsible for monitoring the contract should be involved in determining the specifics. Including students in the planning process strengthens their understanding of cause and effect and increases their ownership of a successful outcome.

## Step-by-Step Strategy for Developing an Individualized Behavior Contract

1. Identify the area of concern. If the situation provides more than one choice, select the behavior that will have the greatest positive impact on the student's ability to be successful in the classroom and other environments.
2. Describe the circumstances under which the target behavior generally occurs. Ask yourself where, when, with whom, and under what conditions the student is most likely to exhibit the behavior.
3. Consider the antecedent events that trigger the behavior or the reinforcers that increase the likelihood that it will occur.
4. Determine whether there are antecedent events or consequences that are effective at decreasing or inhibiting the behavior.
5. Form a reasonable hypothesis that explains why you believe the student is engaging in the behavior. What does he or she gain from this behavior? Could it be attention? Power or revenge? Could the student be avoiding a task that is difficult or frustrating?
6. Collect or summarize information about the current level at which the behavior is being exhibited. Common classroom observation techniques used to collect data include teacher notes, frequency counts

**My Contract**

My job is to:

If I am successful:

If I am not successful:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher signature                      Date

**Figure 1.** Generic contract. This figure may be photocopied for noncommercial use only. Copyright © 2001 by PRO-ED, Inc.

# Bobby's Contingency Contract

## I, Bobby agree to:

- Follow the classroom rules and teacher's directions.
- Handle conflict situations appropriately, using the strategies I have learned rather than running away.
- Express my negative feelings in a calm, quiet voice without making threats and/or refusing to do what I am told.

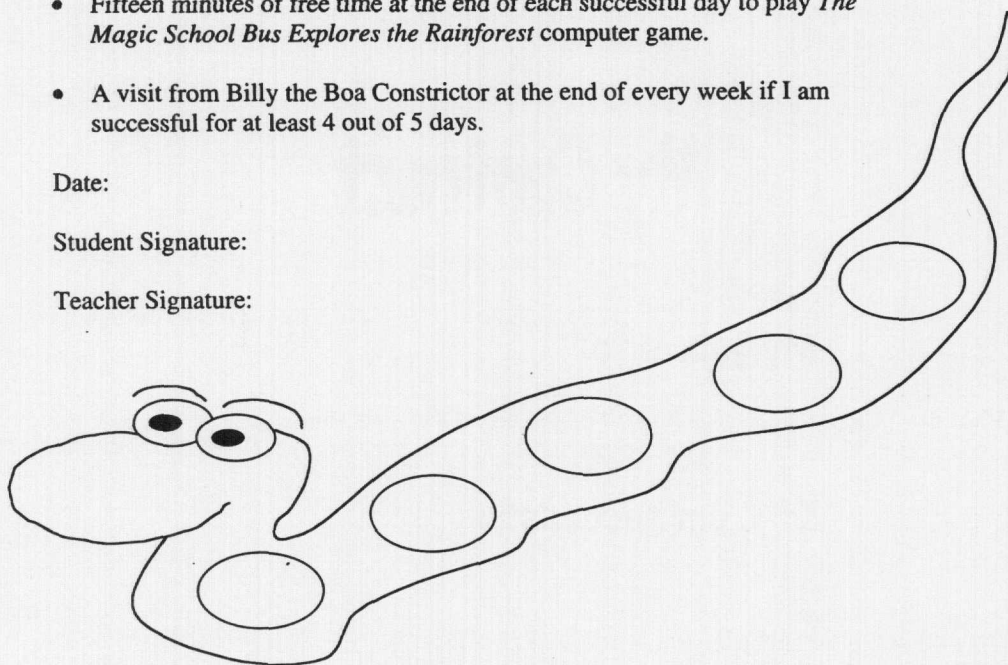
## For this effort, I will earn:

- Fifteen minutes of free time at the end of each successful day to play *The Magic School Bus Explores the Rainforest* computer game.
- A visit from Billy the Boa Constrictor at the end of every week if I am successful for at least 4 out of 5 days.

Date:

Student Signature:

Teacher Signature:



**Figure 2.** Individualized contract.

*Note.* This contract was developed by Susan Gelencher, a student in the teacher education program at Central Missouri State University. Used with permission.

or tallies, and duration recording or timing. Baseline data can be obtained by reviewing existing classroom records. For example, you could determine rate of assignment completion and submission from the grade book or obtain behavioral data from reviewing token economy point sheets.

7. Behavioral objectives must be just as specific, observable, and measurable as academic objectives. Essential components include the setting and task demands, the specific behavior you wish to see, the criteria for determining success within a specific time frame, and

the data collection method to be used. For example, during morning circle time, Janice will stay on her own carpet square for a minimum of 5 minutes on four out of five consecutive days as determined by teacher observation using a kitchen timer.

8. Identify strategies that have been attempted unsuccessfully with this particular behavior in the past. Less intrusive and time-consuming behavioral supports, instructional adaptations, or environmental modifications should be tried before implementing a contract if they are likely to impact the behavior.

<b>Student name:</b>	<b>Teacher:</b>
<b>Priority area of concern:</b>	
<b>Circumstances under which behavior occurs:</b>	
<b>What triggers the behavior or increases the likelihood that it will occur?</b>	
<b>What inhibits the behavior or makes it less likely to occur?</b>	
<b>Hypothesis about the function of the behavior:</b>	
<b>Current level of performance/baseline:</b>	
<b>Expectation/objective:</b>	
<b>What positive behavioral supports, adaptations, or environmental modifications have been tried previously?</b>	
<b>What tangible and social reinforcers are effective with this student?</b>	
<b>Will there be a negative consequence for failure to fulfill the contract? What?</b>	
<b>Who needs to be included in the contract?</b>	
<b>Time frame for contract implementation and evaluation/follow-up conference:</b>	

**Figure 3.** Contract planning worksheet. This figure may be photocopied for noncommercial use only. Copyright © 2001 by PRO-ED, Inc.

9. Develop a list of reinforcers that are effective with the student. What is he or she willing to work for? How often does the student need to be reinforced, and how quickly does he or she become bored with a reinforcer? With younger children and students who

have behavior problems, it may be necessary to start with very frequent reinforcers and gradually fade to a more intermittent schedule as the behavior becomes more consistent. It is often wise to have a menu of reinforcers available or to allow the student

a choice from a box of items. This is especially advisable when the contract is expected to last longer than a week or two.

10. Although failure to fulfill a contract generally is accompanied by a natural consequence, such as receiving a zero for missing homework or not receiving the promised incentive, some situations may require an explicit negative consequence as well. This is particularly true for behaviors that pose a safety risk to self or others, such as physical aggression toward peers and self-damaging or risk-taking behaviors.
11. Determine who will be involved in signing and monitoring the contract. It will always involve at least two people—the teacher and the student—but may involve another student, a staff member, or the child's parent.

12. How will success be determined? Some contracts are designed to be implemented in a week or a month; others are open-ended and remain in force until the defined objective is met. In all cases, a predetermined timeline and plan for evaluation should be in place. For lengthy contracts, provide frequent checkpoints to allow adjustments, if needed. When the student reaches the goal, take time to celebrate; then move on to your next behavioral target and start the process again.

*Persons interested in submitting material for What Works for Me should contact Joyce Anderson Downing, Central Missouri State University, 4132 Lovinger, Warrensburg, MO 64093.*