

# Reciprocity

**Rationale:** The norm of reciprocity underlies many persuasive attempts and social structures.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Describe the norm of reciprocity
- Identify persuasive messages that rely on the norm of reciprocity
- Describe the Door-in-the-Face and the Foot-in-the-Door persuasive message sequences.

{video}

No visual aid was used for this lesson.

## Outline of the Lesson

I. Review of previous session's content

II. Lesson opening:

A. Consider how reciprocity functions in daily life.

1. How many times will you invite someone to a party without them giving you an invitation?
2. How many times will you give a gift without getting one back?
3. How many times will you send a Christmas (or other holiday) card without getting one back?

B. Consider how reciprocity functions in daily life:

1. Do you always reciprocate when someone gives you something?
2. Do you always want to receive what someone wants to give you? Why not?
3. How do you feel if you don't reciprocate?
4. What do you gain if you reciprocate even though you don't really want to?

III. Overview

A. The principles underlying the norm of reciprocity.

B. Describe several types of effective sequential messages for persuading others which all rely on the norm of reciprocity to some extent.

C. How to protect yourself against these strategies.

## Body

I. The principles underlying the norm of reciprocity.

A. The "rules" of reciprocity are:

1. If I give you something, you must give me something back.
2. If I give you a little something, you must then give me a (at least slightly) bigger something.
3. If I make a concession, you must make a concession.

B. Reciprocity is universal.

1. This is one of the few principles of human behavior that is true across

cultures (and even many other primate societies have been observed to adhere to the norm of reciprocity).

2. We are ingrained into webs of indebtedness and a network of obligations.

C. The closer your relationship, the more unequal your exchanges can be and the longer you have to reciprocate.

D. It works even if I don't want or haven't asked for what you give me.

E. It also doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor or how small the initial gift (or deed) is.

II. Delivering certain messages in a particular order can contribute to persuasive effectiveness. These are called "sequential message strategies," and many rely on the norm of reciprocity.

A. Which of Marwell & Schmidt's (1967) compliance-gaining strategies relies on the norm of reciprocity? **Pregiving!**

1. Involves giving you something before I ask for something.

2. This is a very easy way to trigger the norm of reciprocity.

3. You've probably done a version of this without realizing it.

4. We often think of this strategy as "softening someone up" or "buttering them up" by doing or saying something nice or giving them something small that they'll value or appreciate.

B. Reciprocity is the underlying reason for the effectiveness of one powerful sequential persuasion strategy: **Door-in-the-Face**.

1. Based on the metaphor of the Door-to-door sales.

2. The "Door in the Face" strategy involves making a large request (which is not what you actually expect to get) before you make your real request.

3. Examples of this strategy:

a. After being offered a job, asking for a very generous compensation package as a way to negotiate your way to an offer that is fair.

b. Asking your parents for a \$500 loan, then asking them to give you \$20.

c. Charity ball tickets: In contrast to having to go to the ball, giving a \$10 donation seems like a real bargain! (Ex: "Mythical ball")

4. The "Door in the Face" strategy requires that:

a. The size of the initial request is large, but not ridiculous.

b. The initial request is related to the second request.

c. The request is made by the same person.

5. The "Door in the Face" strategy is most effective when:

a. Pro-social requests will be more effective than those that benefit yourself.

b. The time that elapses between the requests has to be brief, not lengthy.

c. The receiver as an "exchange-oriented person."

6. The "Door in the Face" strategy works because of...

a. **The Norm of Reciprocity:** If you make a concession by lowering your request, then the other person feels obligated to make a concession.

b. **The Contrast Effect:** Perceptual contrast makes second request look reasonable.

- c. **Self-presentation Theory:** People are worried about seeming unreasonable when they refuse a request-- so they become more likely comply with second request.

C. Reciprocity is also one of the contributors to another common sequential persuasion strategy: **Foot-in-the-Door**

1. Also based on the door-to-door sales metaphor
2. The "Foot in the Door" strategy is a highly effective persuasive strategy that involves making a small initial request that doesn't really matter to you, then following it up with your real request.
3. Examples of this strategy:
  - a. Telephone sales. "Hi, how are you doing this evening?"
  - b. Signing petitions. (Can be followed by requests for donations or political action.)
  - c. Doing an internship. (More likely to be offered a job at the end.)
  - d. Small, "innocent" requests. "Just come in for a cup of coffee..."
4. The "Foot in the Door" strategy requires that:
  - a. The initial request is not so large that it is rejected but also not so small that it seems trivial.
  - b. The receiver gets no compensation in exchange for complying with the first request. (That's Pregiving!)
  - c. The same person does not have to make both requests.
5. The "Foot in the Door" strategy is most effective when:
  - a. The cause is pro-social.
  - b. There should be a brief time lag between the first and second requests (usually at least a day, but not as long as a month).
  - c. You label the receiver of the first request in some pro-social way after they comply.
6. The "Foot in the Door" strategy works because of...
  - a. **Self-Perception Theory:**
    - When we haven't formed a concrete attitude, we take the role of an outside observer. We infer our attitudes from our behaviors.
    - We create an identity around the small behavior. "I'm the kind of person who cares about ..."
  - b. **The principle of commitment:** If you agree to do something small, then you feel pressure to remain consistent when you get the next request.
  - c. Reciprocity plays a smaller role in this strategy, but it is involved.

D. Bonus: Bait-and-Switch/Lowballing

1. Both of these strategies involve changing a perceived offer to something less attractive.
  - a. The idea is to get the person in the door with a promise for a great deal or something they really want.
  - b. Once a person shows up, they have demonstrated a commitment to buying or doing something.
  - c. The perceived offer is then changed to one that is not as attractive.
2. Lowballing: the true cost for what they want goes up
3. Bait-and-switch: the thing a person thought they were getting changes

to something less attractive and/or the price goes up.

4. These strategies work because of...

- a. **The principle of commitment:** You have already taken action to buy something, and you feel pressure to follow-through on that plan.

III. How to protect yourself against these strategies

- A. Don't feel bad about resisting an attempt to get you to comply after being given something.
- B. If you feel the need to reciprocate anyway, redefine what you were given and evaluate its true worth.
- C. The rule of reciprocity is that favors should have favors returned – not that tricks or deception should have favors returned.

## Conclusion

I. Review

- A. The principles underlying the norm of reciprocity.
- B. Describe several types of effective sequential messages for persuading others which all rely on the norm of reciprocity to some extent.
- C. How to protect yourself against these strategies.

II. Learning activity

III. Lesson closing

## References

- Gass, R. H., & Seiter, J. S. (2014). *Persuasion: Social influence and compliance gaining* (5th ed.) Pearson.
- Marwell, G., & Schmitt, D. (1967). Dimensions of compliance-gaining behavior: An empirical analysis. *Sociometry*, 30(4), 350-364. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786181>

## Learning Activity

Complete one of these two class activity options.

## **In the Classroom**

1. Divide into small groups
2. Discuss the times you have been the "victim" of the:
  - Door-in-the-Face sequence
  - Foot-in-the-Door sequence
  - Bait & Switch *OR* Lowballing sequences
3. Share the results of your discussion with the class

## **Remote**

1. Download this document: [L07-reciprocity-activity.docx](#)
2. Answer the questions in the document
3. Upload the completed activity document here

## **Variations and Accommodations**

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities. Please contact your instructor if any accommodations are necessary