Interaction between rules and contingencies in the control of human fixed-interval performance.

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AB investigated the interaction between instructions and contingencies in the control of human performance on a simple FI schedule of reinforcement through manipulation of the accuracy of the instructions received by 16 undergraduates. An FI 30-sec schedule was in effect for all Ss and the instructions referred to a 30-sec interreinforcement interval (IRI), to a 15-sec IRI, or to a 60-sec IRI. Analyses of response rate and postreinforcement pause duration indicated that, while instructional control was most pronounced in the initial session, it was not maximal at the session’s outset. In addition, inaccurate instructions exerted control over behavior so long as contact with near-optimal rates of reinforcement was forestalled. A suggestion is made to describe such performances as "contingency-sustained rule-governed" behavior, since human schedule performance is considered a product of the interaction between rules and contingencies.