The Premack Principle

By Dearly Ebony

The Premack Principle is named after psychologist David Premack. In the 1960s Premack conducted research on how behavior could be used to reinforce other behaviors.

What is the Premack Principle?	
The Premack Principle is a theory of reinforcement. It states that a less desirable behavior can be achieved/reinforced by the opportunity to participate in a more desirable behavior. The Premack Principle is also called the **Relative Theory of Reinforcement**.	
Contingent upon two behaviors:	
Low Probability Behavior	**High Probability Behavior**
The LPB is the behavior that is undesirable. *Completing homework, exercising, reading, budgeting etc.*	The HPB is the behavior that is desirable. *Watching TV, Playing Video Games, Shopping, etc.*
What does the Premack Principle look like?	
The high probability behavior is used to achieve the low probability behavior.	

Examples		
Example I	**Example II**	**Example III**
Student will not turn in homework. **Student loves to draw.** Student earns drawing time each time they turn in their homework.	Student will not complete the activity in class. **Student likes to play games on Chromebook.** Student is allowed to play a game on the CB when they complete the activity.	Student will not practice reading. **Student likes a particular fast-food restaurant.** Student earns points for so many new words they learn to obtain a gift card to the restaurant.

Sounds Familiar?
Everyone implements the Premack Principle; however, they do not know that it has a name or was researched. The Premack Principle is a researched based practice. 😊 I have implemented the PP with students and teachers. I also use it on myself. For example, I get a reward if I complete my to-do list. Yes, I reward myself, and yes, I need a tangible motivation at times. LOL! Don't Judge Me.
Key Information for Success
1. **Know the student's behaviors.**   Responses will depend on context. The HPB must be something that student enjoys and responds to. As an education professional, "jean day" has never motivated me to do anything. I do not wear them to work; it is not a preference for me. However, "jean day" has motivated many of my colleagues. The point I am making is while "jean day" was a high probability for my colleagues, it was a hard no for me. The same applies to your students.

2. **State the high probability behavior first.**
    The focus should be on what the student is getting, not what you want them to do. State the reward before the demand increases the chances of the student complying. You want to remove their focus from the undesirable behavior. 😊

3. **Avoid using the words First/Then and If/Then.**
    So, what do you say? I have found saying, "Let me know when you have done (the undesirable behavior) so that I can make sure you get (the desirable behavior)" or "I am just checking in to see where you are with (undesirable behavior) so I can make sure you get (desirable behavior).

    Statement three can be controversial as throughout my career I have seen the Premack Principle implemented by using those words with success and failure. As the professional use your professional judgement.

I use this document in trainings. When we get to number three of our keys to success our task it to rephrase statements by stating the high probability behavior first, then low probability behavior.

> Example: I want to make sure you receive your points (student's desirable behavior), make sure you let me know when you have completed to assignment (student's undesirable behavior)."