

## The Basketball Chicken

The Basketball Chicken pecks at a ping-pong ball suspended in a column of air which comes out of a vertical tube. The ping-pong ball, propelled by the chicken, sometimes goes into a basket about 18 inches away from the tube. Points are scored for each basket. The chicken must make two baskets to finish the game. A grillwork keeps the bird from actually chasing down the ball. Scoring two baskets operates the electric feeder to give the chicken the YES signal and some food.

The initial training for this behavior is given in the testing device described on page 10. When the chicken starts the actual training in the basketball equipment, the ball is floating in the column of air at the top of the tube as in the final situation. However, the basketball goal is now in place very close to the bird -- only about six inches from the top of the tube. So the chicken needs

only to hit the ball hard enough to knock it into the basket at very close range, and at first only once for each reward, a FIXED RATIO of one, or what the psychologist would call CONTINUOUS REINFORCEMENT.

Now we start moving the goal farther away from the ball's starting position, about two inches at a time. The chicken gets enough sessions at each goal distance to make sure it has learned to knock the ball reliably into the goal at this distance. The bird is still being rewarded for each basket. Step by step the goal is moved farther away until it reaches the final distance.

When the chicken can readily knock the ball into the basket at this final distance, we now ask the bird to make two baskets in a row before the reward is given. This usually takes a number of training sessions before the bird has learned it must not stop after it makes the first basket, but keep trying for that second one. As a special YES signal, when the second basket is made, a bell rings, and then the feeder sound follows, giving the bird a double YES for its performance.

It takes about two months to teach a chicken to peck the ball into the basket well enough to be a graduate basketball chicken.