



Skinner's Operant Conditioning: Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>Operant conditioning is a process of learning that encourages some behaviors and discourages others depending on whether rewards or punishments are given for that behavior. Here are the four main ways in which operant conditioning is used: 1) <i>positive reinforcement</i>, in which something pleasant is given to encourage a certain behavior, 2) <i>negative reinforcement</i>, in which something unpleasant is removed to encourage a certain behavior, 3) <i>positive punishment</i>, in which something unpleasant is given to discourage a certain behavior, and 4) <i>negative punishment</i>, in which something pleasant is taken away to discourage a certain behavior.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Psychology, Marketing / Business, Childcare / Early Education	30-45 minutes
Video link	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/skinners-operant-conditioning-the-carrot-or-the-stick/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note differences between the various types of reinforcements and punishments. • Explain how the Skinner Box works and how it was important to discoveries about operant conditioning. • Identify places in the real world where operant conditioning is being used. 	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Reinforcement, punishment, conditioning	
Materials Needed	



Worksheet

Before you watch

Think-Pair-Share: If your room was messy and your parents wanted you to clean, which of the following scenarios is most likely to motivate you to clean?

1. 'If you clean your room by the time I come home from work, I'll give you twenty dollars.'
2. 'If you clean your room by the time I come home from work, you won't have to do the dishes after dinner.'
3. 'If you keep leaving your dirty clothes on the floor of your room, we are going to have a very long talk, and I guarantee it won't be pleasant!'
4. 'If you keep leaving your dirty clothes on the floor of your room, I'll take your phone for a week.'

Give students a minute to decide which scenario they find most motivational. Ask them to share with the person next to them. Then poll the class to see which was the most popular scenario.

While you watch

Define each term: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment.

After you watch: discussion questions

1. What do you think is more effective in getting someone to do what you want: giving them a reward, or giving them a punishment? Explain your reasoning.
2. If you could use any method in the world, how would you approach the problem of getting a poorly behaved kid to start being polite and respectful?
3. Give an example of *negative reinforcement* that you've either witnessed or personally experienced recently.

Activity Ideas

- Pose the following scenario to the class: your little brother never does his homework and your parents don't know how to motivate him to do it. Split

the class into four groups and assign each group a type of reinforcement/punishment (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment). Have them create the best argument for why the parents should try that method and an example of how they could implement it.

- Show students one or two examples of [operant conditioning being used in advertisements](#). Ask them to pick out which type of reinforcement or punishment is being used, why they think the advertiser chose it, and whether they think it's an effective way to get people to buy their product. Then, in groups, have them design their own advertisement for a fictional product (or an item that they have in their desk or bag) and share or act it out for the class.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Blackman, Derek E. *Operant Conditioning: An Experimental Analysis of Behaviour*. Routledge, 2017.
2. Burdon, William M., et al. "Developing and Implementing a Positive Behavioral Reinforcement Intervention in Prison-Based Drug Treatment: Project BRITE." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. Suppl 7, Sept. 2011, pp. 40–50.
3. Physician, A. Board-Certified. "What Is Operant Conditioning and How Does It Work?" *Verywell Mind*, <https://www.verywellmind.com/operant-conditioning-a2-2794863>. Accessed 6 Sept. 2019.
4. *THE APPLICATION OF OPERANT CONDITIONING TECHNIQUES IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM1 - McAllister - 1969 - Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis - Wiley Online Library*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1901/jaba.1969.2-277>. Accessed 6 Sept. 2019.
5. Wolf, Montrose, et al. "Application of Operant Conditioning Procedures to the Behaviour Problems of an Autistic Child." *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, vol. 1, no. 2, Jan. 1963, pp. 305–12. *ScienceDirect*, doi:[10.1016/0005-7967\(63\)90045-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(63)90045-7).