



Behaviorism – Skinner’s Education Learning Theory (27 Facts)

By Chris Drew (PhD) / December 6, 2022



Behaviorist theory uses rewards and punishments to control students’ behaviors and teach them new skills.

The theory was popular in the early 20th Century but is now less respected than theories like [sociocultural theory](#) and [humanism](#).

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What Is Behaviorism In Education?



1. The Definition Of Behaviorism Is...

Behaviorism is a theory of learning that believes learning occurs through teachers' rewards and punishments that lead to changes in behavior (Duchesne et al., 2014; Blaise, 2011; Pritchard, 2013).

Behaviorism is defined in the following ways by scholarly sources:

- [Duchesne et al. \(2014, p. 160\)](#) state that behaviorism is a theory that “views learning as a ‘cause and effect’ mechanism, in which external factors lead to a response, and over time, this response becomes a learnt behavior.”
- [Blaise \(2011, p. 112\)](#) states that the core feature of behaviorism is that “learning is conditioned by external events or factors.”
- [Pritchard \(2013, p. 7\)](#) states that behaviorism “is a theory of learning focusing on observable behaviors and discounting any mental activity. Learning is defined simply as the acquisition of new behavior.”

[How to Reference](#) these Sources in APA Style:

- Blaise, M. (2011). Teachers theory making. In G. Latham, M. Blaise, S. Dole, J. Faulkner & K. Malone (Eds.), *Learning to teach: New times, new practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 105-157). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Duchesne, S., McMaugh, A., Bochner, S., & Krause, K. L. (2013). *Educational psychology: For learning and teaching* (4th ed.).

South Melbourne, VIC: Cengage Learning.



- Pritchard, A. (2013). *Ways of Learning: Learning Theories and Learning Styles in the Classroom*. London: Routledge.

2. Behaviorists Believe Learning Must Be Observable

For Behaviorists, learning is only considered to occur when we can observe it.

Behaviorists want to see a change in behavior. That's the whole goal of the behaviorist theory!

What does this mean about, say, if you watch a YouTube video and learn a new way to tie a knot? Well, behaviorists don't care ... yet. They don't really believe you've learned anything yet.

They only really believe that you have learnt to tie a knot once you show them a knot that you tied!

So, in order to *prove* learning has occurred, behaviorists want to *see it*.

3. Behaviorists Believe In The 'Cause And Effect' Or 'Stimulus And Response' Rule

Behaviorists believe that we can be 'trained' into changing our behaviors.

Yep, just like a dog.

If we provide a 'stimulus', we expect a certain response.

If someone comes up behind you and pinches your back, you bet you will respond angrily! The pinch was the 'stimulus' and the angry response was the 'response'.



Let's look at a few examples of cause and effect in action:

- I get yelled at for making a mess (stimulus), so I don't make a mess next time (response).
- I get a treat for cleaning my room (stimulus), so I clean my room more often (response).

4. Rewards And Punishments Produce Desirable Outcomes

Rewards and punishments can be used to change behavior. This is really simple and relates to my point above:

- If you praise someone for a certain behavior, they're more likely to repeat that behavior;
- If you yell at someone for a certain behavior, they're less likely to repeat that behavior.

This is why behaviorist theorists in schools are very likely to come up with clear rules and rewards. A behaviorist might encourage behaviors by:

- Giving a treat;
- Giving praise;
- Giving an early mark to lunch;
- Letting a student choose where to sit;

- Letting a student choose the next activity



But, behaviorists are also likely to have rules that punish some behaviors to discourage them for being repeated. These are things like:

- Giving a detention;
- Using the cane (back in the day!);
- Taking away play time;
- Making you sit in the corner for 5 minutes;
- Sending you to the principal's office

5. Behaviorists Believe You're Born A Blank Slate, Or 'Tabula Rasa'

Behaviorists think anyone can learn anything. All they need is the right rewards and punishments.

Therefore, Behaviorists think a lot like Aristotle and John Locke. They think children are born blank slates: no knowledge in their minds!

The way people learn, then, is through their experiences. The experiences people have (the rewards and punishments they get through life) will shape how they behave.

Related Motivation Theories:

- [Motivation Theories List](#)
- [Expectancy-Value Theory](#)
- [Self-Determination Theory](#)

6. There Are Two Main Types Of Behaviorism: They Are Classical Conditioning And Operant Conditioning



[Classical conditioning](#) is associated with the theorists Pavlov and Watson. They are discussed lower down in this article.

Classical conditioning is a type of behaviorism that is concerned with involuntary responses to stimuli. It's also known as [associative learning](#).

For example, we often have involuntary fears and phobias.

I'm *really* scared of bears. When I see a bear when hiking my heart begins to race really, really fast and I get anxiety. I can't help it!

Many children are scared of the dark. They can't help it. It's a phobia they have.

When we're focussing on increasing or decreasing involuntary reactions to stimuli, we're talking about classical conditioning.

Operant conditioning is associated with the theorists Thorndike and Skinner. They are discussed lower down in this article.

Operant conditioning is a type of behaviorism that is concerned with voluntary response to stimuli.

For example, my dog *voluntarily* chases the stick when I throw it because he knows he'll get a reward for doing it. He made the choice to chase the stick, so it's operant conditioning.



Another [example of operant conditioning](#) is when we punish a child with 5 minutes in the time out corner. We are trying to teach the child to *voluntarily* change their behavior by making better choices in the future to avoid a punishment.

Other Education Theories:

- [Post-Structuralism in Education](#)
- [Existentialism in Education](#)
- [The Banking Model of Education](#)

Classical Conditioning In Education

Classical conditioning is the behaviorist idea that animals and people can learn to react to a stimulus by reflex based upon prior experiences.

It's a difficult concept to understand, so I'll introduce it slowly over the next few steps before giving you some pretty detailed scholarly definitions in Fact 11.

7. Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) Is The Most Famous Classical Conditioning Behaviorist

Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) is a Russian psychologist who is a very important behaviorist theorist you need to know about.

Pavlov is the father of classical conditioning.

Pavlov observed a dog's learning to show how learning happens. Pavlov was observing that a dog salivates when it is being fed food.

However, his big breakthrough came when he noticed that the dog would salivate simply when the assistant who regularly fed the dog entered the room.



So, what did he deduce from this? He found that:

- The assistant (stimulus) caused salivation (response).

The dog had *learned to do something* based upon a stimulus (the assistant entering the room). There was cause and effect!

Pavlov didn't stop there. Next, he rung a bell every time the dog was about to eat to see whether the bell would also cause the dog to salivate.

Soon enough, Pavlov could ring the bell any time he wanted and the dog would salivate immediately. Pavlov didn't even need to have food to give to the dog. The bell alone started causing the salivation!

Now, let's zoom in a little on some of Pavlov's important terms in the next few points!

8. 'Neutral Stimulus' Means...

Pavlov invented the term 'neutral stimulus' to explain something that doesn't cause a response.

When Ivan Pavlov (see above) first rang the bell to train his dog to react to the bell, nothing happened. The dog didn't know what the bell meant!

When a learner does not associate the stimulus (the bell) with anything, it's not really going to achieve anything!



Do you salivate whenever a bell rings? No – of course not! You haven't learnt that 'trick' yet. And neither did the dog.

At this stage, the bell is considered a *neutral stimulus* because it doesn't cause an effect.

9. 'Unconditioned Stimulus And Response' Means...

'[Unconditioned Stimulus](#)' and '[Unconditioned Response](#)' are two more key words in behaviorism invented by Ivan Pavlov (see Point 4).

When a dog eats food (stimulus), it naturally salivates (response).

Because this is cause-and-effect relationship is just something that happens without us having to *teach* it, we say it's 'unconditioned'.

The food is the 'unconditioned stimulus' and the salivating is the 'unconditioned response'.

Another example of an unconditioned stimulus and response is a tickly throat: we cough (unconditioned response) when we have a tickle in our throat (unconditioned stimulus). *It's just natural!*

10. 'Conditioned Stimulus And Response' Means...

[‘Conditioned Stimulus’](#) and [‘Conditioned Response’](#) are two more key words in behaviorism invented by Ivan Pavlov (see Point 4).



Pavlov would ring a bell just before he fed his dog food.

After a while, the dog began to associate the bell with food. Soon, the dog would start salivating *even if he didn't eat the food!*

Because the dog learnt that the bell meant ‘food’ (and didn’t naturally just know it already), we call the bell a ‘conditioned stimulus’ and the food to be a ‘conditioned response’.

A clear parallel examples is that school children associate a bell with break time. The bell doesn’t naturally mean ‘break time’, we’ve just come to teach people that that’s what it’s for! So, the bell is again a *conditioned stimulus* and packing up our books is a *conditioned response*.

Easy, right?

11. A Scholarly Definition Of Classical Conditioning Is...

Okay, there were a few important terms I needed to introduce before sharing some scholarly definitions of classical conditioning for you.

If you read steps 7 to 10, you should be able to understand these definitions now (although I agree, they’re a little hard to grasp!):

- **Punjabi (2018, p. 160)** argues that classical conditioning taps into “the range of relatively permanent and unlearned reflexes that nearly all



members of a species possess.” Then, she goes on to state that “where the learning, or conditioning, comes in is when another neutral stimulus is introduced in just the right way” so that our natural reflexes now kick-in when the new neutral stimulus is shown to the learner.

- **Levine and Munsch (2014, p. 34)** explain that classical conditioning is “the process by which a stimulus (the unconditioned stimulus) that naturally evokes a certain response (the unconditioned response) is paired repeatedly with the neutral stimulus. Eventually the neutral stimulus becomes the conditioned stimulus and evokes the same response.”

That was a tough one to define!

Here’s the APA style citations for those two sources:

Levine, L. & Munsch, J. (2014). *Child Development: An Active Learning Approach*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Punjabi, S. (2018). *Child Development & Pedagogy*. New Delhi: Disha Publications.

12. ‘Contiguity’ Means...

This is an important term and I really like when I see my students using it in their assignments.

That’s because students usually don’t use the term ‘contiguity’! I’m impressed when I see a student use this term because I know they’ve done some deep

research.



What I'm saying is: if you're a university student writing a paper about behaviorism in education, *use this term in your assessment to [impress your professor](#).*

So, what is contiguity?

1. 'Contiguity' is the term we use to explain the associations we develop between two things.

When an association has developed between a bell and food, we have achieved contiguity. You could also say it like: 'contiguity has occurred!'

2. 'Contiguity' also assumes that only one of those two things have to occur in the future for the others to be remembered.

In Pavlov's example, the dog now salivates when the bell rings even if the food hasn't been served!

Some other examples of contiguity include:

- When we memorize the alphabet, we say 'a-b-c' and we automatically expect people to respond 'd-e-f'
- When we memorize the times tables, we automatically know the answer to "2 x 2" or "8 x 8" without actually doing the sums. We've practiced enough to have been *conditioned* into responding with the right answer. Contiguity has occurred!

13. 'Discrimination' Means...



Pavlov used the term 'discrimination' to explain how he can teach his dog even more tricks!

We already know Pavlov taught his dog to associate the sound of a bell (actually, it was a tuning fork) with food.

But next, Pavlov changed the pitch of the bell.

Guess what's crazy? He could teach the dog to only associate *one pitch* with food!

When we can learn to associate one version of a stimulus (in this case, the pitch of the bell) with a response, but not other versions of the stimulus (like a different pitch), we have achieved discrimination!

Clearly, this is a very clever dog!

I remember at school three bells meant 'lunch time' but a constantly ringing bell meant 'fire evacuation!'

Here, my classmates and I learnt to discriminate between different bells and knew that different bells required a different response.

14. 'Generalization' Means...

Generalization is the exact opposite of discrimination.

Discrimination means we can differentiate between different types of the same stimulus and respond differently for each type.



Generalization means that we simply respond the same way to all types of the same stimulus.

So, generalization would have happened if the dog associated any pitch of the bell with food, no matter what.

Here's some other examples in real life:

- Once I got bitten by a British Shorthair cat (stimulus). I then got scared of the cat (response). But, I also generalized my fear of cats so now I'm scared of all breeds of cats, not just British Shorthair cats!
- Once an old lady robbed me on the subway. Now, I'm scared of all old ladies!

15. 'Extinction' Means...

When we forget the relationship between a stimulus and a response, we call it 'extinction'.

Extinction would have occurred with Pavlov's dog if he trained the dog to no longer associate the bell with food.

He could do this by ringing the bell and not giving the dog food. If he did this over and over again the dog would eventually no longer salivate because he would stop expecting food.

16. John Watson Was The Guy Who Invented The Term 'Behaviorism'



Even though Pavlov was the forefather of behaviorism, it was actually John Watson (1879-1958) who invented the term.

While Pavlov came up with some of the concepts of behaviorism in animals, John Watson was the one to apply these same ideas to humans.

Remember, Pavlov was interested in 'classical conditioning' which is concerned with increasing and decreasing involuntary behaviors like salivating.

Watson was also interested in classical conditioning. He was interested in increasing and decreasing phobias like fear of animals in children.

Watson's experiments on children's phobias were quite unethical.

Watson did two major experiments that you need to know about. We call these experiments the 'Little Albert' experiment and the 'Little Peter' experiment.

17. Watson's 'Little Albert Experiment' Showed Pavlov's Concept Of Contiguity Works On Humans

Watson taught a child named [Little Albert](#) to become afraid of a white rabbit. He induced fear in a child – how mean!

Initially, the 11-month-old boy was not afraid of the rabbit.

But Watson would place the rabbit in front of the child then sneak up behind the child and bang a hammer against a steel bar to scare Albert! He did this over

and over and over again until Albert associated the rabbit with the loud scary noise.



I'm sure you know what happened next. Albert became scared of the rabbit even when Watson didn't hit the bar.

I'm sure you remember what that's called: Contiguity!

Something else happened, too.

Albert suddenly became scared of cotton wool, Santa's beard and even Watson's white hair!

Do you remember what this was called?

Generalization!

Watson had shown Pavlov's theory worked not only with animals, but humans, too!

18. Watson's 'Little Peter' Experiment Introduced The Concept Of 'Systematic Desensitization'

Little Peter was the opposite of Little Albert.

Little Peter was already afraid of a rat, so Watson decided he'd get rid of Little Peter's fear.

Watson decided that he would place a rabbit in a cage near Little Peter whenever he ate lunch. First, the rabbit was placed at the opposite end of the room to Little Peter.



Each lunch time, the rabbit was placed closer and closer to Little Peter until one day, Little Peter was able to eat lunch with the rabbit sitting on his lap!

When a phobia like this is slowly but surely reduced and finally removed from a person's mind, we call it 'systematic desensitization'.

Operant Conditioning In Education

19. The Definition Of 'Operant Conditioning' Is...

If you're a student reading this post, you might be looking for a scholarly definition of operant conditioning for your essay.

Here's a few good ones:

- **Gray and McBlain (2012, p. 36)** state that operant conditioning theory believes "learning occurs when behavior is either rewarded or punished."
- **Klein and Mowrer (2014, p. 34)** state that "in operant conditioning, an animal or human actively interacts with its environment to obtain reward. [...] In anticipation of the consequences of the behavior, an animal or person voluntarily performs a specific behavior if that behavior has previously produced reinforcement."
- **Nagel (2013, p. 80)** notes that operant conditioning involves "the use of positive and negative consequences to strengthen or weaken voluntary behaviors."

Remember, operant conditioning is concerned with *voluntary* behaviors while classical conditioning is concerned with *involuntary* behaviors.



Referencing Tip

Here are the APA style citations for the above sources if you want to use them in your essay. I recommend reading each source if you have access to it:

Klein, S., & Mowrer, R. (2014). *Contemporary Learning Theories: Volume II: Instrumental Conditioning Theory and the Impact of Biological Constraints on Learning*. New York: Psychology Press.

Nagel, M. (2013). Student learning. In R. Churchill, P. Ferguson, S. Godinho, N. Johnson, A. Keddie, Letts, W., & Vickers, M. (Eds.), *Teaching making a difference* (Vol. 2, pp. 74-88). Milton, QLD: Wiley Publishing.

Gray, C., & Macblain, S. (2012). *Learning theories in childhood*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

20. Thorndike's 'Law Of Effect'

Edward Thorndike (1874-1949) was an operant conditioning theorist.

Thorndike would put cats into a box. The cats could see food outside their box but couldn't access the food unless they pressed a lever to open their box door.

At first, the cats would scratch around to find a way out. Finally, and by accident, they would hit the lever and be released.



After several repeated attempts at this trick, the cats learned that hitting the lever was their way out of the box. Before long, the cats would go straight to the lever, hit it, and get their food.

So, what's different between Thorndike's experiment and Pavlov or Watson's?

For Thorndike's experiment, the cats had to actively do something: they had to hit the lever themselves!

Therefore, it's operant conditioning.

To explain the need for a voluntary action to occur here, Thorndike created the '**Law of Effect**'. This law argues that any action that leads to a positive 'effect' (or outcome) will increase the likelihood of that action to re-occur.

Easy!

This law also shows us that **trial and error leads to learning**.

Making mistakes isn't a bad thing, because you're eliminating the actions that don't lead to a positive outcome! Thanks, Edward Thorndike.

21. B.F. Skinner Is The Most Famous Operant Conditioning Theorist

B.F. Skinner believed that learners were not just [passive learners](#) but also active learners.

So, unlike classical conditioning theorists, Skinner was interested in changing voluntary behaviors through reward and punishment.



Skinner extended Thorndike's experiments (see above) to show how he can train animals like rats and pigeons, and even children, to do just about anything if he gave the right rewards and punishments.

Skinner taught rats to escape boxes that are famously now called 'Skinner Boxes' and even trained pigeons how to play the piano!

The reason Skinner is so famous is that he really reinforced the fact that '**reinforcements**' in the form of rewards and punishments lead to the outcomes that he desires.

Here's how Duchesne et al. (2013, p. 167) describe Skinner's achievements:

"Skinner had successfully shown that a pattern of action very quickly emerges in response to the feedback – or reinforcement – received."

22. B.F. Skinner Taught Us That Intermittent Reinforcement Schedules Are Most Effective

Woah, that's a mouthful! "Intermittent Reinforcement Schedules." Say it five times fast.

I am always really impressed when my students use this term in their essays. It shows they've dug deep into the theory and found out some great information.

"Intermittent Reinforcement Schedules" is a really great term to use in your essay on Behaviorism to grow your marks.

So, what are Intermittent Reinforcement Schedules?

Skinner realized that if you provide a [positive reinforcement](#) every single time a person (or animal) does the right thing, the power of the positive reinforcement will decrease.



If you praise a child for saying “Thank you” every single time you give them something, the child is less likely to repeat it than if you randomly praise them.

However, if you rarely or never praise the child at all, they’ll never learn!

So, what’s the best way to give praise to achieve the desired effect?

Skinner experimented with constant praise, rare praise, praise at a fixed ratio (say, every 5th time the child says thank you), and random praise.

Below is a table of the results. This table is adapted from Gray and McBlain (2012, p. 37):

Reinforcement Schedule	Likelihood of Repetition
Continuous: Praise is given every time the behavior occurs	Low to Moderate
Fixed Ratio : Praise is given in a regular pattern (e.g. every 4 th time)	Low to Moderate
Intermittent: Praise is given at random intervals	Moderate to High

23. The 'Premack Principle' Explains...



The Premack Principle was invented by David Premack (1925-2015).

Premack extended operant conditioning by proposing that desirable activities should be used as a reward for completing undesirable activities.

Here, activities themselves act as rewards.

The clearest example of this is eating your vegetables before having your desert.

Parents will often tell their children that they aren't allowed to have their desert (the reward) until they have eaten their vegetables (the undesirable activity).

Simply put, the Premack Principle is a powerful method of cueing activities in a way that creates incentives for completing undesirable activities.

Pros And Cons Behaviorism In Education

There are countless pros and cons of behaviorism. Below are the major ones:

24. Pro: Behaviorism Can Be A Very Effective Teaching Strategy

Behaviorism is effective for teachers because it gives very clear, unambiguous rules and can help teachers set [high expectations](#).

Students are shown exactly what [the rules](#) are and know exactly what is expected of them.

They are also usually really aware of the rewards and punishments that flow from their behaviors.



This is why behaviorism is still used in school these days. You can identify behaviorism on [classroom rules](#) charts everywhere: do do this, don't do that!

The simplicity of behaviorist theory makes it very useful for teaching children manners and rules.

25. Pro: Behaviorism Has Been A Very Effective Method Of Psychotherapy

Similarly, behaviorism remains a common method used for psychotherapy.

Psychotherapists use the concepts of Pavlov and Watson to teach people to manage anxieties, fears and phobias.

For example, systematic desensitization was progressed by the South African psychotherapist Joseph Wolpe (1915-1997).

Wolpe developed relaxation strategies for people who are exposed to their phobias. He would encourage people to follow meditation and muscle relaxant techniques. Through controlled exposure to phobias, people can learn to overcome their fears.

26. Con: Some Aspects Of Behaviorism Can Be Considered Immoral

The most extreme elements of behaviorism are widely condemned these days.



In fact, schools in the 1920s and 30s would have had very strong behaviorist orientations. Teachers would provide praise and punishment for children who were expected to repeat tasks day in, day out.

Nowadays, we recognize that people need to be treated with great care. We believe using corporal punishment in schools is a violation of [children's rights](#). We also believe children need to be able to get up, let off steam, learn through experimentation, and [learn through play](#).

Related Articles:

- [What is the Hidden Curriculum in Education?](#)
- [Pros and Cons of Play-Based Learning](#)

27. Con: Behaviorism Often Doesn't Get To The Core Of A Behavioral Issues

If you punish someone for misbehavior, you might be teaching them the behavior is wrong.

But, you might not be getting to the core of the issue.

For example, if a child is misbehaving in class, you can punish them but you might not be recognizing that their misbehavior is because they're hungry or tired or sick. Or, often, a child misbehaves because they don't understand what you're teaching them.

Therefore, we really do need to dig deep to the bottom of behavioral issues before issuing punishments. Sometimes it's more effective to ensure students'

emotional and [cognitive needs](#) are met than to just give out punishments like candy.



28. Con: Behaviorism Doesn't Consider Learning That Isn't Observable

Right at the start of this post I told you that behaviorists only believe learning has occurred if they see changes in behavior.

But what happens when you learn something and you don't change your behavior. For example:

- **A person learns something that reinforces their beliefs.** Therefore, they don't change their behavior. Rather, the stimulus encourages them to just keep doing what they were doing. Nonetheless, they learnt something new;
- **A person learns something but doesn't tell you.** What if you learnt something from, say, watching a YouTube video, but keep that knowledge to yourself? Behaviorists wouldn't believe anything was learnt. Nonetheless, you know you learnt something!

29. Con: Behaviorism Doesn't Take Into Account Emotions

Behaviorism doesn't say anything about [emotions in education](#).

Here's some examples of how emotions may be causing misbehavior:

- A child's parents are getting divorced. The child is sad, playing up at school and often yells at other children. Do you still punish them the



same as normal, or do you go easy on them because they're going through a tough time?

- You're using behaviorist rewards and punishments to help yourself study. You usually don't let yourself have dinner until you've finished your daily flashcards. One day, you're having a terrible day. Do you give yourself a break and still have dinner even though you decided not to study?
- Comfortable, happy, well adjusted children learn best. Should you punish still children even if you know the reason they're having a bad day is that they've missed breakfast this morning?

Behaviorism fails to acknowledge the complex role of emotions in learning. This critique of behaviorism was advanced by Abraham Maslow who was once a behaviorist until he made a turn and became a 'humanist'. Humanists talk a lot about emotions in learning.

30. Con: Behaviorism Doesn't Have A Complex Understanding Of Cognition

In constructivist theory, we understand that learning happens through observation, reflection, organization of ideas in your mind, and developing a deep understanding of the workings of the world.

For example, constructivists believe you need to have an understanding of why $5 \times 5 = 25$. Behaviorists tend to be happy as long as you give the right answer. Who cares how you got there?

Therefore, people who are very good at memorizing information tend to do well in behaviorist situations. People who are very good at deeply understanding

concepts tend to do well in constructivist classrooms.



Knowing *why* an answer is correct is better than just knowing the answer.

31. Con: Behaviorism Doesn't Clearly Explain How We Learn Through Social Interaction

You will find that the behaviorists don't say much about the role of social interaction for learning.

Social learning theorists tend to believe that social interaction is great for learning. By talking things through with others you get to learn their perspectives which broadens your horizons.

Social interactions can also lead you to change your own opinions based on the information others give you.

Behaviorists seem to have a blind spot when it comes to social interactions: they don't really talk about it much! This critique was advanced by Albert Bandura, who you might want to do more research on if you're interested!

32. Con: Critical Thinking Is Not Encouraged

Critical thinking is a necessary skill for contemporary life.

For creating critical thinkers, we need to get people to think about, develop and analyze rules. Behaviorism doesn't

Students need to be able to *create* their own beliefs based upon their observations, conversations and independent thought.

By contrast, behaviorism lays out very clear rules. It's rare for behaviorists to accept critique of the rules that are laid out by teachers.



The focus of behaviorism is not on critical thinking and individuality. Instead, the focus is on conformity. And that's not great!

Related Articles:

- [Critical Thinking for University Students](#)
- [Teaching using the I Do, We Do, You Do Method](#)

33. Con: Behaviorism Focuses Too Much On Extrinsic Rewards

Behaviorism is focused on providing rewards and punishments for learning. This is considered an 'extrinsic' motivator.

Extrinsic motivators are not as good as intrinsic motivators.

The difference between Extrinsic and Intrinsic motivation is this:

- **Extrinsic Motivation:** When someone relies on 'external' factors to motivate them, it's called extrinsic motivation.
- **Intrinsic Motivation:** When someone does a task because they really want to do it for their own reasons we call it intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation includes: doing something because you just enjoy it; the activity makes you feel good without the need for reward and punishment.

I have a whole article on [Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation in Education](#) that you can [check out here](#).



Examples Of Behaviorism In The Classroom

You won't see a teacher walking around hitting students on the wrist with a ruler anymore. The worst punishments of behaviorism are mostly gone. However, behaviorism is still common in schools in the following ways:

34. Behaviorism Isn't As Common An Explanation Of Learning As It Used To Be

Think back to the past when teacher-centered learning was common:

- Teachers would stand up the front and get you to recite your times tables;
- Teachers would give you the cane if you misbehaved;
- Teachers didn't pay much attention to your emotions or making learning enjoyable

Nowadays we have increasingly moved towards theories of learning that understand learning occurs through much more complex mechanisms such as:

- Cognitive [Constructivism](#): Knowledge is 'constructed' in our minds;
- Social Theories: Knowledge is developed through social interactions;
- Affective Theories: Our emotional states impact our learning.

35. Applied Behavior Analysis And The A-B-C Method Are Used In Schools Frequently

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a type of focused, intensive behaviorism used to change children's behaviors.



ABA involves an educator intensively observing a child's behavior and setting goals for creating visible changes in that child's behavior.

Part of ABA is the use of a method called the A-B-C method that we use in schools regularly to solve behavioral issues.

A-B-C stands for Antecedent, Behavior and Consequence. Teachers usually try to write down some details about all three steps. Here's how it works:

- **Antecedent:** Identify what happened before the child misbehaved. What were the conditions that led to the misbehavior?
- **Behavior:** Describe the behavior. What is it that the child is doing that we want to prevent them from doing in the future?
- **Consequences:** What happens after the behavior has ended? Is the child receiving any unwanted positive reinforcements for their bad behavior like pats on the back from friends?

Once you have identified the antecedent, behavior and consequence, you can more effectively change up the learning environment to solve the problem.

For example, you could:

- **Antecedent:** Remove the environmental factors that are leading to the behavior in the first place.



- **Behavior:** Identify behaviors that you would like the child to be exhibiting instead of the bad behavior.
- **Consequences:** Provide positive reinforcements for the desirable behavior and negative reinforcements for the undesirable behavior.

36. ABA Seems To Be Great For Students With Autism

Applied Behavior Analysis is very useful for [students with autism](#) and ADHD.

This is because ABA is very clear and focused. Children with learning difficulties often need clear instructions in order to follow the steps exactly.

Therefore, we find that children with Autism and ADHD experience significant behavioral improvement through the use of ABA.

37. Token Economies Are Very Popular With Students

I'm sure you'd recognize a [token economy](#) when you see one.

A token economy is a behavior management system teachers put in place [where students get rewards](#) in the forms of tokens for good behavior. These can include:

- **Star charts.** We often use this for toilet training. If the child remembers to go to the bathroom, they get a sticker. Easy!
- **House Points.** Think about Harry Potter here. "30 Points for Gryffindor!"

Students can really get excited about this system – give it a go in your classroom!

38. Behaviorism Is Used Regularly In Learning Apps



B F Skinner used computers towards the end of his career using a concept called Computer Assisted Learning (CAL).

CAL is basically a token reward system for computers. If you get the answer right, the computer gives you points. If you get the answer wrong, the computer might subtract points.

It's that easy!

Today, many apps and computers use behaviorism theory. Here's two examples:

- **DuoLingo:** On DuoLingo, you get to go up levels in 'fluency' and gain stars for completing language learning tasks;
- **Khan Academy:** Khan Academy also provides tokens for succeeding and progressing through a task.

Reference These Sources In Your Essay

There you go! 38 great facts about Behaviorism. I hope they were helpful for you and gave you either:

- Ideas for applying behaviorism in your job; or
- Ideas for writing about behaviorism in your essay

For students, here's a list of great scholarly sources to look at and cite for your essay. Remember, cite textbooks and journal articles, not websites!



All these sources are in APA style:

Blaise, M. (2011). Teachers theory making. In G. Latham, M. Blaise, S. Dole, J. Faulkner & K. Malone (Eds.), *Learning to teach: New times, new practices* (Vol. 2, pp. 105-157). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

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PhD

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