

# Personality theory

[Psychology](#), [Personality](#)



Learning is defined as Any relatively permanent change in behavior that can be attributed to experience (Coon). It is not, however, a temporary change caused by outside forces. Therefore, things such as motivation, disease and injury cannot be considered to be a form of learning. This is because once the disease, injury, etc. has been removed, behavior will return to its state before the influence.

There are 2 main keys to every learning process: the reinforcement, which is anything that increases the chances that the desired response will take place, and the response, which is the behavior that takes place as a reaction to the reinforcement. An antecedent is the event which takes place before a response, and is the basis for Classical Conditioning. A consequence is something that follows a response, and is the foundation for what psychologists call Operant Conditioning. Classical Conditioning is based on what takes place before a response. It begins with some action that will inevitably produce a response.

That action is then associated with another that does not induce a response, or a Neutral Stimulus. After enough repetition, the neutral stimulus which did not previously produce a response will now, on its own, produce the response of the action it was coupled with. It is now what is called a Conditioned Stimulus, or a stimulus that produces a response because it has been paired with another. A good example of Classical Conditioning is presented by Ivan Pavlov, a Russian Physiologist. Pavlov noticed that his dogs would drool when he put food in their mouths.

After some time passed, he noticed that the dogs would begin to drool upon seeing the food. Then, the dogs began drooling at the sight of Pavlov. It was then that Pavlov noticed that learning had taken place. The dogs had associated the food with the appearance of Pavlov. The dog's drooling did not have to be learned: it was what is called a reflex, or an automatic response. The reflex is a type of Unconditioned Response, a response that happens on its own. That reflex to drool was finally paired with seeing Pavlov and expecting to be fed. Eventually, the sight of Pavlov was enough to make the dog drool, without ever presenting food.

The dog's drooling had then become a Conditioned Response, or a response that has been conditioned by stimuli. This is a prime example of Classical Conditioning. Operant Conditioning focuses on consequences, or what follows a response. In this type of conditioning, a response is followed by some type of reinforcement. This reinforcement can be something good, something bad, or nothing at all. If an action results in a punishment, the action is less likely to take place. However, if the action is followed by reinforcement, such as praise, food, or other rewards, the action is more likely to be repeated.

An example of Operant Conditioning is found in the works of B. F. Skinner. Although he rejected the ideas of theories of learning, (Skinner), he is well known for one of his creations, dubbed the Skinner Box. A skinner box is a small, barren chamber into which a hungry rat is placed. The box is featureless, except for a lever on one wall. As the rat explores, it accidentally presses this lever, and a pellet of food or a drop of water is released.

Eventually, the rat will learn to correspond the lever to receiving a food pellet. He will then move the lever when he is hungry.

This is called the Law of Effect: responses that have desirable effects are repeated, while negative effects will lessen the tendency for the response to take place. What has happened is a good example of Operant Conditioning. The rat is hungry. The rat, then, has had reinforcement (the food pellet) to perform a response (the lever press). In this situation, the food pellet acts as an Operant Reinforcer, or something that encourages the event which it follows. In both of these instances, Acquisition has occurred. Acquisition is the training in which learning occurs. Once it has taken place, Expectancy comes into view.

Expectancy is the anticipation that the learned conditioning will continue to produce the same response. However, if the reinforcement is taken away from conditioning, we can expect that the conditioned response will begin to fade. This is called Extinction. This occurs when a response is weakened by the removal of its reinforcement. However, occasionally, a response may resurface after it is believed to be extinct. This is known as Spontaneous Recovery. Once a response has been conditioned, the response will continue to take place unless the reinforcement is removed.

In many cases, however, a reinforcement that is similar to the original will still bring about the desired response. This is called Stimulus Generalization. An example of this would be if someone who looked like Pavlov walked into the view of the dogs. They may begin drooling because of their conditioning to do so at the appearance of Pavlov. After some time, though, the dogs will

learn to distinguish between Pavlov and the imposter. After that point, the dogs would respond differently to the 2 men. This learning is known as Stimulus Discrimination.

Conditioning has been very useful to psychologists and social workers who want to effect behavior. However, these laws of conditioning can have negative repercussions. For instance, phobias stem from conditioning, usually in early childhood. For instance, a child could have a negative experience with a kitten, or other house pet. This negative experience, previously a Neutral Stimulus, has now been linked with fear, anxiety, and other negative emotional responses. This process is called Conditioned emotional response. This creates a phobia, or an unrealistic fear of a thing or situation. There are different ways to treat and cure phobias.

The first is called Desensitization. This would be used, for example, with a person with a fear of heights. The person would gradually be taken higher off the ground, perhaps over days, weeks, or longer. This would gradually introduce them to the fear and eventually allow them to be free of the phobia. In more extreme cases, a conditioning called Vicarious Classical Conditioning is used. If someone had an extreme phobia of snakes, the person might be exposed to a video tape of someone holding a snake. Through small steps such as these, the person could eventually recover from the phobia.