

Principles of Learning

PSYC 304; Section 001

Fall, 1999

Instructor: Dr. Merry Sleight

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Office Hours: Mon 9:20 – 10:20 a.m.

Wed 2:45 – 3:45 p.m.

Thu 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

...and by appointment

Text: Domjan, M. (1998) The principles of learning and behavior. (4th ed.) Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole
Additional reading materials will be distributed throughout the semester during class.

Course Objectives: This course is designed to be an overview of learning principles that guide animal behavior, particularly that of humans. Students will be expected to think critically about recent research findings and theoretical perspectives in the area. Emphasis will be placed on the application of learning principles to everyday life.

Grading: Final grades will be based on a 400 point scale: 280 points will be available in the lecture section of the course, while the remaining 120 points will be earned through participation in lab activities. You must be enrolled in the laboratory section to receive credit for the class.

Lecture section grading:

- 1) There will be two exams and a final exam, each worth 80 points. Exams will include material covered in class as well as material from the assigned readings. The format will be true/false, multiple-choice, and short answer. The final exam will be cumulative, but heavy emphasis will be placed on the most current material.
- 2) Students will be required to write two 20 point thought papers. The papers should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced and typed. These papers will require an understanding and application of learning principles. Paper topics and grading guidelines are discussed on pages 3 and 4 of the syllabus.

Note: NO makeup exams will be provided without a legitimate, documented excuse (e.g., grave illness requiring medical attention, court date). Students who know that they will miss an exam must notify the instructor at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled exam. Make-up exams will consist of essay questions. All papers are due at the start of the class on the scheduled date. Late work will be penalized two points for each day beyond the deadline.

Expectations: Class participation and discussion are essential for a complete educational experience. Students should be prepared to discuss topical issues related to textbook and readings. Oral defense of ideas is as important a skill as written presentation.

Extra Credit: Extra credit opportunities will be given throughout the semester during class lecture.

Honor System: The Honor Code of George Mason University will be strictly enforced in this course. It is a student's responsibility to be familiar with the Honor Code and to abide by it at all times.

Special Needs: If any students have special needs, please see instructor.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

<u>Day</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Chapter(s)</u>
8/30 – 9/3	Introduction & Research Methods	1, 2
9/6	<i>No Class – Labor Day</i>	
9/8 – 9/10	Reflexes & Simple Learning Processes	2
9/13	Paper #1 Due	
9/13 – 9/29	Classical Conditioning	3, 4
10/1	EXAM 1 (Chaps. 1 – 4 and additional readings)	
10/4 – 10/15	Instrumental Conditioning	5
10/11	<i>No Class – Columbus Day</i>	
10/18 – 10/27	Schedules & Theories of Reinforcement	6, 7
10/27	Paper #2 Due	
10/29 – 11/1	Reinforcement & Punishment Compared	8, 9
11/3 – 11/8	Observational/ Social Learning	no chapters
11/10	EXAM 2 (Chaps. 5 – 9 and additional readings)	
11/12 – 11/22	Physiology and Learning: The Interaction Between Nervous System and Environment	hand-outs
11/24 – 11/29	Function of Sleep	no chapters
11/26	<i>No Class – Thanksgiving</i>	
12/1 – 12/10	Language & Culture: The Uniqueness of the Human Experience	10, 11, 12

FINAL EXAM: Wed., December 15, 10:30 am – 1:15 pm (Chapters 1 – 12 and additional readings)

Learning Paper Requirements: 40 points

2 required, worth 20 points each

For this assignment, you will be required to write two 2-3 page papers, double-spaced and typed. Please use normal sized font and margins. The papers must be a minimum of two pages in length to receive full credit.

Papers will be graded based on the following: thoughtfulness, organization, support for main ideas, creativity and spelling/grammar. Late papers will be penalized two points for each day beyond the deadline. A paper submitted after the start of class on the assigned date will be considered one day late. Late papers should be placed in my mailbox (Sleigh) in King Hall or submitted during class time. Please do not e-mail papers or slide them under my office door.

The following criteria are intended to give you a framework around which to write your papers. Please use your creativity to turn these criteria into thoughtful, coherent papers. Make clear, logical arguments to support your opinions. The main requirement here is to think about how principles of learning apply to your own experiences. There are no wrong answers, only poorly written papers. Please feel free to contact me if any additional clarification or assistance is needed.

PAPER #1: Due September 13

- Think about three major lessons that you have learned in your lifetime. *These life lessons may include skills (such as learning to play an instrument), personal values (such as the importance of education), or guiding philosophies (such as adherence to religious beliefs). The key is that these lessons must have value to you and your life.*
- How did you learn about these lessons? What were the emotions, thoughts, and persons involved in the lesson?
- Why were these particular lessons powerful to you? Was it the method of learning or the lesson itself? Why are some methods of learning more powerful than others? In other words, did the emotions and/or persons involved influence how powerful the lesson was for your life?

The point of the paper is to think about different methods of learning and why they are effective or ineffective. The more time you spend choosing your particular lessons, the more meaningful this paper will be to you as we discuss individual learning styles over the course of the class. You do not have to know anything about the principles of learning to write this particular paper. Base your answer on your personal experience. As the class continues, we will explore how your answers match (or don't match) research findings.

PAPER #2: Due October 27

The objective of this paper is to take a critical look at your own childhood experiences with observational learning. To this end, think about your interactions with significant persons in your early environment. Think about both their obvious *and* subtle actions. You may want to ponder some of the following examples that were or were not provided to you:

- level of truthfulness
- interactions with significant others, friends, or extended family
- money management
- coping strategies & emotion management (disappointment, anger, etc.)
- manner in which motivation, initiative, perseverance, cooperation, priorities were modeled
- eating habits/ exercise habits (health & nutrition)
- time management
- gender roles

Everything that an adult does is a potential lesson to a watching child. And, children do not have the ability to justify, rationalize, or comprehend the world the way an adult is able to do. Children are very different organisms than adults in this way. With these thoughts in mind, incorporate the answers to the following question into your paper:

- What did you learn from the adults in your world as a watching child?
- How have the lessons that were modeled for you impacted your own behavior as an adult?
- Did the person modeling the lesson influence how well you learned it?
- Many times adults carefully monitor their obvious actions around children (such as cursing or watching violence), but they forget the impact of the more subtle actions (such as how they handle disappointment or how they respond to friends). How do you feel about the *subtle* actions that were modeled? Have these subtle learning experiences impacted your adult behavior?

Optional: Service Learning Credit

The Psychology Department offers 1 hour of service learning credit (PSYC 328) that can be earned in conjunction with a 3 credit, upper-level course. The credit is open to declared Psychology majors who have already taken at least 6 hours in Psychology. In order to earn the service learning credit through this course, students must do volunteer work during the semester in a community placement having some association with learning. To ensure that the service learning is appropriate for the course content, all placements must be agreed upon between both the student and the instructor of the course.

All students, across various classes, who participate in this process meet regularly throughout the semester to discuss their experiences (beginning immediately). Any Learning student who chooses this option will also be expected to give informal feedback to the instructor and the class. If you are interested in this option, you need to pick up an interest form as soon as possible from Laura Gaither in the Center for Service and Leadership (Johnson Center 240H, 993-2900). The interest form will provide additional details about individual requirements.

Note: No more than 6 hours of credit can be earned in PSYC 327, 328, 421, 422, 548, and 549.