

Operant conditioning

General

Operant conditioning, sometimes also known as Skinnerian conditioning is an [behaviorist](#) learning approach similar to [classical conditioning](#), mostly influenced by early theoretical and experimental works of American psychologist [Burrhus Frederic Skinner](#) from the second half of the 20th century. Main difference between those two theories is that **classical conditioning does only modify reflex reactions** and **operant conditioning shapes new behavior**.

What is operant conditioning?

The most famous experiment considering operant learning is [Skinner box](#), also known as *operant conditioning chamber*. In this experiment Skinner demonstrated the ideas of operant conditioning and shaping behavior of a rat using reinforcement in terms of food. Unlike Pavlov's classical conditioning, where an existing behavior (salivating for food) is shaped by associating it with a new stimulus (sound of a bell), operant conditioning is the **rewarding of an act that approaches a new desired behavior**, but can also be the opposite: **punishing undesirable behavior**.

What is the practical meaning of operant conditioning?

There are many examples of operant conditioning in everyday use. The act of **completing homework in order to earn a reward from a parent or teacher**, or **finishing projects to receive praise or promotions** is a form of operant conditioning. In these examples, the **promise or possibility of rewards causes an increase in probability of certain behavior**.

Operant conditioning can also be used to **decrease probability of certain behavior by use of punishment**. For example, a child may be told they will lose recess privileges if they talk out of turn in class. This potential for punishment may lead to a decrease in disruptive behaviors.

Keywords and most important names

- **Operant conditioning, Skinnerian conditioning, Skinner box, operant conditioning chamber**
- [Burrhus Frederic Skinner](#)

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Read more

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