

Psychology of Learning — Fall 2008

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Contact Information

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Books

- Bouton, M. E. (2007). *Learning and behavior: A contemporary synthesis*. Sinauer: Sunderland, MA.
- Journal articles (to be determined).
- **Recommended:** American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: Author.

Table 1
Topics & Reading List

Topic	Reading	Week
History of Learning	1	1
Adaptive Value	2, 3	1–2
Pavlovian: Mechanisms	3	3
	Exam 1	
Pavlovian: Theories	4	4–5
Pavlovian: Back to Behavior	5	6
Pavlovian: Generalizability	6	7
	Exam 2	
Instrumental: Mechanisms	7	8–9
Instrumental: Stimulus Control	8	10–11
	Exam 3	
Role of Motivation	9	12
Synthetic Perspective	10	13–14
	Exam 4	

Overview

This course will introduce you to the psychology of learning, the process of changing behavior as a result of experience. The course will *not* address how students learn in the classroom (although our material is certainly relevant to that); instead we will focus on basic research in learning, often involving nonhuman animals. Because experience can affect behavior in many ways, the field of learning is a diverse one; we will examine many of its topics. Learning researchers must take great care to ensure that they understand

exactly how an experience has affected a behavior; therefore learning studies often involve complicated controls in order to determine the exact nature of the learning that has occurred. By the end of the semester you will be better scientists (or at least better designers of well-controlled experiments) as a result of what you learn in this course.

My own interests lie squarely in the realm of Pavlovian conditioning, and it might seem that much of the semester is devoted to this topic. Instrumental learning is so heavily influenced by Pavlovian conditioning that the two are hardly separable, and in fact time spent considering Pavlovian matters directly benefits one's understanding of instrumental learning.

An important component of the course will be an examination of scientific articles. Papers will be selected that highlight both what we know about learning and how we know it. If you leave this class understanding how to read scientific articles then this course will have succeeded on at least one front.

Grading

Exams

There will be four exams, consisting for the most part of short-answer essay questions. Each exam will cover explicitly the material presented in class and in the readings since the previous exam. There is no cumulative final exam; however, you should not assume simply because you have been tested on something that it is no longer important. An understanding of material presented later in the semester will require a knowledge of material presented earlier.

Reaction Paper

A reaction paper is required in this course. It should be about 5 or 6 pages long (excluding title page, abstract and references) and must address your thoughts about an empirical article that you read. You may choose the article, but I will have to approve the choice before you write the paper. Your paper should briefly describe the main focus of the original article, indicate whether the study examined classical or instrumental learning (or some other form) and your basis for this decision, and then discuss the context of the study (what other research led up to this particular study; what interesting study followed this one?). More information about the paper will be forthcoming. The paper must be written according to APA style. The due date for the paper appears below; your paper **MUST** be turned in by noon on the specified day. Late

papers will be penalized at a rate of 10% of their potential value per day.

Class Participation

Learning can be a complex and difficult topic. I hope to make it understandable by fostering an atmosphere of shared inquiry and discussion. It is not possible to benefit fully from class discussions without being present.

Course Grade

Your grade will be based on a weighted average of your grades on the exams plus the paper. The exams will count for 90% of your grade (lowest test score: 15%; others 25%) and the paper 10%. Then your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

90 - 100:	4.0	70 - 72.9:	2.0
87 - 89.9:	3.7	67 - 69.9:	1.7
83 - 86.9:	3.3	63 - 66.9:	1.3
80 - 82.9:	3.0	60 - 62.9:	1.0
77 - 79.9:	2.7	< 60:	0
73 - 76.9:	2.3		

Attendance

Attendance and participation in class is expected. If you miss one exam, for a sufficiently serious reason, and inform

me of this within 24 hours of the exam, you may take a make-up test. If you miss more than one exam, you will receive a grade of ZERO for each additional missed exam.

My Absences

In the event that I am absent from class you should still plan to meet unless I tell you otherwise ahead of time. There are two times during the semester when I will be out of town to attend scientific meetings. Class will meet in my absence.

Paper Due Dates

Your proposed term paper topic is due on Wednesday, Oct 1. Note: you must provide me with at least two references that you expect to cite in the term paper.

The term paper is due on **Friday, November 14**.

I will review printed drafts of the paper if I receive them by Monday, Nov 3.

A Final Note

If you find that you need assistance with the material presented in this course, or if you just want to talk about it, please see me. My office hours are listed above, but if you cannot meet with me at those times please make an appointment with me. I am on campus every day, often including weekends, and will find time to meet with you.