

Behaviorism

About behaviorism

Behaviorism is a learning paradigm with roots dating back to the second half of 19th century and works of [Ivan Sechenov](#) (1829 - 1905) and [Vladimir Bekhterev](#) (1857 - 1927) and gaining significant attention in the **first decades of the 20th century**. The most central premise of behaviorism is that, in order to make psychology a real science, it must be orientated on what is observable and measurable.



Behaviorists saw the mind as a “black box” and did not attempt to analyze its processes like thoughts and feelings. Instead, they saw learning as a visible change in one's behavior which, unlike mind processes, can be measured. From behaviorist perspective, a learner starts off as a clear state and simply responds to environmental stimuli. Those responses can be shaped through positive and negative **reinforcement** (usually a reward for desired and a punishment for undesired behavior), increasing or decreasing the probability of repeating the same behavior. Forming **stimulus-response** (S-R) associations which result in **observable behavior** are the key aspect of behaviorist learning.

This learning paradigm can roughly be divided in two phases:

- **behaviorism** (1910 - 1930), and
- **neobehaviorism** (1930 - 1955).

Neobehaviorism outgrew classical behaviorism by attempts to formalize the laws of behavior (sometimes in forms of mathematical equations) and beliefs that learning can also occur indirectly through observing. Neobehaviorists are sometimes considered a transitional group that shifted dominant learning perspective toward [cognitivism](#).

Behaviorist learning theories:

Among below listed learning theories within behaviorist framework, connectionism presents an introduction to behaviorist learning and setting its frames followed by true behaviorist learning perspectives of classical and operant conditioning.

Sign learning appeared as first neobehaviorist theory, followed by drive reduction theory, which also incorporated idea of describing learning with intervening variables.

- [Connectionism](#) - [Edward Thorndike](#) (1874 - 1949)

- [Classical Conditioning - Ivan Pavlov \(1849 - 1936\)](#)
- [Contiguity Theory and One Trial Learning Edwin Guthrie \(1886 - 1959\)](#)
- [Sign Learning - Edward Tolman \(1886 - 1959\)](#)
- [Drive Reduction Theory - Clark Hull \(1884 - 1952\)](#)
- [Operant Conditioning - Burrhus Skinner \(1904 - 1990\)](#)
- [Stimulus Sampling Theory William Estes \(1919 - \)](#)

Basic ideas and approximate historical introduction time for each of these theories can be found in this [chronological overview](#).

Criticisms

Behaviorism today mostly **lost its influence** and let cognitivism take its place as the dominant learning paradigm. Critics of behaviorist learning usually argue that behaviorism:

- **does not explain all kinds of learning** since it ignores inner mind activities,
- offers a very limited view on learning since it **ignores internal factors** such as emotions or motivation,
- ignores fact that learning depends on learner's inner subjective representation of environment and learning history.

Bibliography

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