



Classical or Operant?

In each of the following descriptions of learning situations, you are asked to identify whether *classical* or *operant* conditioning best applies. Further, you are asked to determine what learning principle(s) seem relevant.

- I. If you decide the situation seems to be an example of classical conditioning, you should label the UCS, UCR, CS, and CR.

- II. If you decide the situation seems to be an example of operant conditioning, you should decide which of the following principles best fits:
 - A. positive reinforcement
 - B. negative reinforcement
 - C. positive punishment
 - D. negative punishment

SCENE ONE

A very bright (mildly painful) light is turned on a rat. The rat has learned that he can turn off the light by pressing a lever on the other side of his cage. As soon as the light comes on, the rat runs across the room and presses the lever.

- a. Can the behavior of *pressing the lever* be explained best through classical conditioning or operant conditioning? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.

SCENE TWO

When a mother strokes her infant's skin, the stroking creates pleasure responses in the baby. After this goes on for many days, the baby begins to show pleasure responses simply at the sight of the mother (before even being touched).

- a. Does classical conditioning or operant conditioning best apply? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.

SCENE THREE

A patient in a mental hospital is very disruptive at mealtimes. She grabs food from the plates of those sitting near her and tries to cram the food in her mouth. Because this behavior of stealing food is very undesirable, a plan is developed whereby every time the patient steals food from other plates, she is immediately taken to a room without food.

- a. Is the mental health staff attempting to change the behavior of *stealing* through classical or operant conditioning? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.

SCENE FOUR

Johnny has gotten into a habit of yelling “Bye, Mom” and then slamming the door very loudly in his hurry to leave for school in the morning. The door slam causes his mother to flinch. After several days of the procedure, Johnny’s mother begins to flinch at the sound of her son’s words, “Bye, Mom.”

- a. Can the behavior of *flinching* be explained best through classical or operant conditioning? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.

SCENE FIVE

Imagine you have a friend who keeps the temperature in her home so high that each occasion on which you visit her you find yourself perspiring. The last time you visited her, you noticed that you began to perspire and became uncomfortable as soon as you saw her house (before you even got inside).

- a. Can the behavior of *perspiring* be explained best through classical or operant conditioning? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.

SCENE SIX

Fred leaves his clothes and toys all over his room. Sometimes he can't find clean clothes when he needs them. Often his toys get broken by being stepped on. He discovers that parts are missing for his games. He picks up his clothes and puts away his toys. Now he has clean clothes and the toys don't get broken.

- a. Can the behavior of Fred *picking up his clothes and putting away toys* be explained best through classical or operant conditioning? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.

SCENE SEVEN

Mr. and Mrs. Jones are having a heated argument that both are finding very unpleasant. Mr. Jones gets up and leaves the room, closing the door behind him. This has the effect of terminating the argument. From then on, every time Mrs. Jones raises her voice, Mr. Jones leaves the room.

- a. Does the behavior *Mr. Jones leaving the room* seem more likely to have been conditioned through classical or operant conditioning? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.



SCENE EIGHT

A husband who usually ignores his wife still likes to think of himself as an understanding man. So, whenever his wife complains that her heart condition (which has no medical cause) is giving her pain, he becomes attentive and tries to comfort her. This responsiveness doesn't seem to help much; her *reports of heart trouble* just increase.

- a. Does classical or operant conditioning best explain why the wife reports having more heart trouble than ever? Explain.

- b. If you chose classical, follow part I of the instructions; if you chose operant, follow part II.