



### CONCEPT CHART 5.2 Key Concepts in Operant Conditioning

| Concept  | Description  | Example  |
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| Nature of operant conditioning   | A form of learning in which responses are strengthened by the effects they have in the environment                                     | If students receive answers to their questions only when they raise their hands before asking them, hand-raising behavior is strengthened. |
| Discriminative stimulus  | A stimulus that indicates that reinforcement will be available if the correct response is made   | A child learns to answer the phone when it rings and to wait for a dial tone before dialing.   |
| Positive reinforcer  | A stimulus or event that makes the response it follows more likely to occur again  | Praising children for picking up their clothes increases the likelihood that they will repeat the behavior.                                |
| Negative reinforcer  | An aversive stimulus whose removal strengthens the preceding behavior and increases the probability that the behavior will be repeated | The annoying sound of a buzzer on an alarm clock increases the likelihood that we will get out of bed to turn it off.                      |
| Primary reinforcer   | A stimulus that is innately reinforcing because it satisfies basic biological needs or drives  | Food, water, and sexual stimulation are primary reinforcers.   |
| Secondary reinforcer   | A stimulus whose reinforcement value derives from its association with primary reinforcers   | Money, which can be exchanged for food and clothing, is a secondary reinforcer.  |
| Shaping  | A process of learning that involves the reinforcement of increasingly closer approximations to the desired response                    | A boy learns to dress himself when the parent reinforces him for accomplishing each small step in the process.                             |
| Extinction   | The gradual weakening and elimination of an operant response when it is not reinforced   | A girl stops calling out in class without first raising her hand when the teacher fails to respond to her.                                 |
| Schedule of continuous reinforcement   | A schedule for delivering reinforcement every time a correct response is produced  | A girl receives praise each time she puts her clothes away.  |
| Schedule of partial reinforcement (fixed-ratio, variable-ratio, fixed-interval, or variable-interval schedule) | A schedule of delivering reinforcement in which only a portion of responses is reinforced  | A boy receives praise for putting his clothes away every third time he does it (fixed-ratio schedule).                                     |
| Escape learning  | Learning responses that result in escape from an aversive stimulus   | A motorist learns detours that provide an escape from congested traffic.   |
| Avoidance learning   | Learning responses that result in avoidance of an aversive stimulus  | A person leaves for work an hour early to avoid heavy traffic.   |