

Psychology 328: Self-control

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Text: D. Watson & R. Tharp Self-Directed Behavior 9th edition

**Supplemental text: T. Brigham Self-management for Adolescents
328 homepage www.wsu.edu/~brigham/selfcontrol/index.html**

It is often argued that the vast majority of physical and psychological problems that we experience are directly related to our behavior. There may be some hyperbole in this assertion, but it is clear that many problems are the result of our behavior. For example, there is now an epidemic of adult onset diabetes that is caused by our over consumption of sugar contained in candy, pastries, breakfast cereals, soft drinks, and the like. In addition, over consumption of sugar leads to obesity, heart problems, and many related ailments. Psychologically, many people report being anxious and stressed much of the time. Often the stress and anxiety are caused by things we are doing or conversely not doing. Overall, the increasing frequency of social, psychological, and health problems suggests that the ability to deal with the stresses and anxieties of daily living is critical to our happiness and wellbeing. This course is designed to provide you with some basic principles and concepts for analyzing and understanding our own behavior and a related set of procedures for changing problem behavior.

The ideas and techniques presented in the course are based on extensive research in applied psychology, clinical psychology, and behavioral medicine. In order for you to correctly use a procedure or set of procedures to solve a problem, you must understand enough of the psychological theory behind it to know when or when not to use a particular technique. For instance, electricians do not have to be theoretical physicists to wire a house, but they must have a basic understanding of the principles of electricity or their efforts may produce shocking results. As a consequence, brief theoretical and conceptual rationales will be provided for each technique or set of techniques taught in the course. Self-management and self-control problems are analyzed within the framework of Behavior Analysis or operant learning theory, and the specific problem solving procedures are described in behavioral terms as well. Although cognitive-behavioral theories are more popular in academic circles, behavior analytic concepts provide an effective, systematic, and logically consistent framework for analyzing and correcting self-control problems in everyday life. The selection of this particular theoretical framework reflects my own position, but you are free to interpret the phenomena described in the course according to your own perspective or theoretical orientation. (The main text is actually written from a cognitive-behavioral perspective.) Irrespective, the objective of the course is not to convince anyone of the correctness of a particular theory, but to present some information that may be intellectually stimulating and practically valuable.

Consistent with those objectives a major portion of the course work will focus on teaching you how to design, conduct, and evaluate your own self-change project. It is also the case research shows that behavior change is easier in a group. To facilitate such support, the class will be randomly divided into six person groups. There will then be two group assignments. In addition, you will consult with one another on the design of your projects. Grading is based on your performance on the self-change project, the group projects, course examinations, and the course tutorial.

Course Tutorial:

The course tutorial is an individual 15 to 30 minute meeting with me to discuss the class, your progress, and your self-change project. To facilitate the discussion, please fill-out the 328 student profile and turn it in Wednesday January 18. You will also need to bring your course notes and preliminary proposal. **The tutorials can only be scheduled during the weeks of February 5-9 and 12-16. 10pts.**

Group Activities:

There are two specific group activities, the behavioral definition exercise and the self-monitoring exercise. In addition, I will ask you to spend some class time as groups discussing one another's self-change projects.

Behavioral definition exercise (January 23rd). With your group, develop a behavioral definition of some observable activity e.g. talking, smiling, yelling, walking, running, etc. Then split into pairs of observers, find a setting where the behavior is likely to occur and observe for 15 minutes. You and your partner will then calculate the reliability of your observations. Finally, use the behavior observation form to individually report your results. **Due January 30th 5pts.**

Self-monitoring exercise (February 6th). In your group, each individual identifies a response he/she wishes to determine how often she/he emits the response (A stilted but grammatically correct sentence.). As with the first exercise, develop a behavioral definition for the response. Observe your own behavior for three days recording antecedents and consequences. Then use the self-monitoring report form to report your data. **Due February 13th 5pts.**

Self-change project (proposal, intervention, data collection, and report):

Design and conduct and report on a project to change one or more of your own behaviors. There is a link on the course homepage describing the process in greater detail. **A short three page proposal is due March 8th. (10pts.) You must submit a proposal in order to do a project. The project report is due April 26th. 40pts.**

Course Examinations:

There will be three examinations in the course: February 15th, March 22nd, and Friday May 4th at 10:10. Each examination is worth 30 points and will consist of short answer essay and fill-in-the-blank questions. The specific reading assignments and study guides will be posted on the homepage.

Bonus Points:

Over the semester, there will be opportunities to earn bonus points for in class essays and activities. There will be a maximum of 10 points available. If you miss a bonus activity, you cannot make it up.

Grade Schedule: 160 points possible not including bonus points.

A	145 and above	C	95-109
A-	138-144	C-	90-94
B+	131-137	D+	85-89
B	122-130	D	75-84
B-	115-121	F	74 and below
C+	110-114		

Other stuff:

Academic Integrity

I expect that all of the work you submit in this course will be your own. I do not use computer programs to detect plagiarism, however, because you will be writing for me every week I will recognize work that is not yours.

Civility

This course relies heavily on discussion to master the ideas, concepts and findings. It is appropriate to question a person's interpretation of a study but not the person's integrity or intelligence. Courtesy and respect make it possible for us to debate issues without yelling at one another. Civility also extends to being in class and ready to work when the bell goes and notifying the class in advance should you need to leave early on occasion.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Appropriate accommodations can be made for students with documented disabilities. If you qualify for such services, please contact the Disabilities Resource Center (509-335-1566) so that we can make arrangements to provide those services.

Accommodations for Religious Holidays

I respect the religious beliefs of my students and will try to accommodate your needs when the class interferes with the observance of a significant religious event. Please contact me two weeks in advance so we can arrange for an alternative assignment or method for fulfilling the assignment.